Address by the Hon. Speaker at the Opening Ceremony on 11th September, 2012.

Your Excellency, Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Vice Patron of Commonwealth Parliamentary Association,

His Excellency Commonwealth Secretary General,

Vice President CPA,

Chair Person Executive Committee,

Vice Chair Person Executive Committee,

CPA Treasurer,

Chairperson CWP,

President CWP,

Members of the Executive Committee,

Secretary General, CPA

Parliament Speakers,

Distinguished Delegates,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Sri Lanka Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, I am honoured and privileged to welcome you all to the opening ceremony of the 58th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference...

This is the third time we are hosting this meeting in Sri Lanka and that is a reflection of the strong commitment Sri Lanka and our people have towards the values of the Commonwealth and our dedication for Parliamentary democracy which form core values of this association...
Members of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association are bonded by a shared history: the history of British colonialism...

This shared history runs as a thread that binds us together and undoubtedly it has enabled us to create this association and to promote Parliamentary democracy and good governance among our member states...

We, Sri Lankans received universal franchise in 1931, over eighty years ago, when we were still a colony...

Since receiving independence in 1948 the country has had an unbroken tradition of multi-party democracy with regularly held elections and political power alternating between different political parties...

We are intensely proud of the democratic tradition we have nurtured over these 64 years since gaining independence and will continue to ensure that Parliamentary democracy remains vibrant and robust in this part of the world...

It is because of this commitment to Parliamentary democracy that the Commonwealth has bestowed on Sri Lanka, the honour of hosting the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 2013...

The Sri Lanka branch has been an active member of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association for many years...

It has played a positive role in the main forum and within the Asia Regional group...

Currently, our Branch functions as the Regional Secretariat for the Asia Region and hosted the CPA Regional Conference in 2011...
Our Branch also sits as the representative of the Asia region in the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Steering Committee...

These are all testimony to our unreserved commitment to the Commonwealth and to its future progress...

Let me say how proud we are, to be hosting this meeting at a time when peace in all parts of our country is irreversibly established...

For thirty years Sri Lanka had to fight the worst of terrorism...

It simply destroyed the social fabric and almost divided the Sri Lankan nation into pieces...

I admire the resilience, courage and patience of all our people who had to endure tremendous hardship during the long period of the conflict...

It is our firm intention to strengthen the bonds of friendship among all communities that inhabit this island and ensure that their children will grow up in a culture of peace and co-existence...

All our actions today are directed towards building a harmonious nation where discrimination will not be tolerated...

As a people we are thankful to the Commonwealth for the continuous support member nations extended to us and for the understanding you showed at a time of need...

My country is proud of its history, its people and its tradition of constitutional democracy...
Dear Friends,

While in Sri Lanka, may I humbly invite you to savour the natural beauty and the splendor of our motherland and to engage with her people, among the most hospitable people you will find anywhere in the world...

**Ensuring a Relevant Commonwealth for the Future** is the theme of this meeting...

During these few days you will discuss topics relating to health and education, democracy, rule of law and human rights, the role of parliaments, conflict resolution and peace building, gender responsive governance, terrorism, youth unemployment and the role of social media...

All these topics are of great relevance to democracies around the world and no doubt your deliberations will strengthen constitutional democracy and good governance in the CPA’s member states...

The CPA is currently engaged in a study to look at how the Association could provide better support to Parliaments from member states...

Our Branch has expressed its views through our Regional Representative and we are concerned to ensure that the CPA remains vibrant and relevant in the years to come...

Before I conclude, I would like to express my profound gratitude to His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of Sri Lanka for the support, guidance and encouragement extended to us in organizing this event and your presence this morning has encouraged all of us...
I must also acknowledge the support we have received from the Rt. Honourable Sir Allen Haselhurst, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the CPA, Dr. William F. Shija Secretary – General of the CPA, and from the staff of the CPA Headquarters...

May you have a rewarding meeting, may you forge stronger bonds among your fellow Parliamentarians, and may your deliberations contribute to strengthening democracy in all parts of the Commonwealth...

I do hope that you will carry warm memories of Sri Lanka to your home country...

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is my privilege and great pleasure now to call upon His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, to formally declare open the 58th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference...

May the Noble Triple Gem Bless you.