Your Excellency, President Mahinda Rajapaksa – Vice Patron of the CPA, Hon. Chamal Rajapaksa, Speaker of the Sri Lankan Parliament and President of the CPA, Commonwealth Secretary-General, Hon. Kamlesh Sharma, Vice President of the CPA, Hon. Mninwa Johannes Mahlangu, Officers of the Association, Members of the Executive Committee, Secretary-General CPA Dr Shija, Parliamentarians, Clerks, Members of the Diplomatic Corp and other distinguished guests.

Ladies and Gentleman, I hope it is a comprehensive and correct introduction.

It is a very great honour and privilege for me as the elected Chairperson of the Executive Committee to stand here today on behalf of the entire CPA to thank first of all you, Mr. Speaker for introducing the proceedings, to you Mr. President for declaring formally open our 58th Conference and indeed for being here gracing us with your presence on this occasion. I wish to say to you and your colleagues how grateful we are for your country's willingness to host the 58th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Colombo.

Isthinti (thank you).

2012 has been quite a year, distinguished perhaps in the minds of many by the Olympic Games and the Paralympic Games. Who could not recall the achievements of Usain Bolt and the Jamaican trio, Stephen Kiprotich who won astonishingly the marathon, Oscar Pestorias and the news that Sri Lanka got their first Bronze medal in the Paralympic Games. The spell of success was terrific and we hope that it is a legacy for young people throughout the Commonwealth.

Then there is another major event here in Sri Lanka. Before the T20 Cricket World Cup takes place, we have this important gathering. I do not know whether the visitors are confused by the signs advertising both the CPA Conference and the T20 World up, but I suspect it gives a hint of the hearts and minds of your citizens who may be more captured by the Cricket than by the proceedings of our Conference. I must say that, I am astonished by the amount of coverage we have had in the press. I do not think I have ever had such front page attention in the newspapers, certainly more than I have ever achieved in the thirty five years as a parliamentarian.

Those who are able to see most clearly with the aid of iPads may notice that I am wearing a tie which was given to me at the Scottish Parliament. I wear that today because I welcome Andy Murray winning his first ever Grand-Slam title.

However, what I really hope is that the hearts and minds of the delegates here at this Conference will be captured first by the warmth of the greetings we have received by our Sri Lankan host and the challenges facing all of us in democratic politics.

Serendipity is a rather beautiful word. Interestingly, it has a connection with Sri Lanka. Its origin derives from the word ‘Serendip’, the name Arab merchants gave to this splendid Island. I am sure that you will agree with me that having the 58th CPC here and now in Sri Lanka is indeed
serendipitous. Serendipitous because we have the opportunity to witness the rejuvenation, reinvigoration and rebirth of a country that has risen phoenix-like from the ashes of violence and turmoil. Serendipitous because we in the CPA must also renew and progress in the first year of our second century. Sri Lanka finds itself in the spotlight in a happier way than for many years. Sri Lanka could be seen as inspirational. It is one of the most literate countries in the emerging world and an economy that has grown at an average of eight percent over the last few years, low unemployment, expanding industries in IT, nanotechnology and banking, tourism is booming and exports are strong.

Sri Lanka has a lot to be proud of, but surely its greatest pride should come from peace. It is peace which has driven this momentum of change and it is peace which must continue not as an unusual novelty but as a way of life. Hopefully, the momentum that is driving Sri Lanka forward under the Government of President Rajapaksa should inspire us because we too in the CPA must move ahead in renewal and reinvigoration.

This week, we as Parliamentarians, Clerks and Observers will come together as equals in various fora such as workshops and regional meetings. We will talk about issues on topics covering health, education, youth unemployment, foreign policy, gender issues and of particular interest for me is the role of Parliamentarians in Conflict Resolution and Peace Building.

If you are in this magnificent hall today it is because you like me will wish to engage, network, learn and listen to the diversity of experience, knowledge and expertise that is around us. The true purpose of CPA comes out when one see representatives from all over the Commonwealth, stretching over five continents, coming together, respecting each other and learning from one another.

Let us resolve that in this week in the delightful setting that have been given in Sri Lanka, let us give it full meaning here and the years ahead and remember always that what we have in common is what binds us together.

Thank you