



Bangladesh Parliament

## 63<sup>rd</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference Conference Concluding Statement

20 November 2017

**COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARIANS attending the 63<sup>rd</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference** and associated meetings recognised the Commonwealth's commitment to democracy and met under the conference theme of '**Continuing to enhance high standards of performance of Parliamentarians**'.

The conference, hosted by the CPA Bangladesh Branch and Parliament of Bangladesh from 1 to 8 November 2017 in Dhaka, Bangladesh was attended by over 500 Parliamentarians and Parliamentary Clerks representing Parliaments and Legislatures from across the Commonwealth.

The conference was hosted by the CPA President and outgoing Chairperson of the CPA International Executive Committee, Hon. Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury MP, Speaker of the Parliament of Bangladesh. The conference also included the 36<sup>th</sup> Small Branches Conference and meetings of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP).

This concluding statement contains

- the main outcomes of the conference,
- a summary of the workshop discussions, and
- the recommendations that were either endorsed or noted by the Members in attendance.

Alongside the substantive conference workshops and the CPA governance meetings (63<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly and Executive Committee meetings), the 63<sup>rd</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference also included a number of additional events.

The unique conference brings together Speakers, Members of Parliament and Parliamentary staff representing the nine regions of the CPA – Africa; Asia; Australia; British Islands and Mediterranean; Canada; Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic; India; Pacific; and South East Asia. The CPA reaches all 52 countries of the Commonwealth as well as national, state, provincial and territorial Parliaments and Legislatures bringing together over 180 CPA Branches of the Association.

### **63<sup>rd</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference - Opening Addresses:**

The Chief Guest at the opening of the 63<sup>rd</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference was Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina, MP, Hon. Prime Minister of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and Vice-Patron of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association who declared the conference open.

The Prime Minister of Bangladesh urged Commonwealth Parliamentarians to uphold democratic principles as she opened the 63<sup>rd</sup> CPC and said: "*We, Parliamentarians, being the people's representatives have the first and foremost obligations to preserve and maintain the faith of the people in democracy and Parliamentary institutions.*"

The CPA President and Chairperson of the CPA International Executive Committee, Hon. Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury MP, Speaker of the Parliament of Bangladesh said: "*The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) provides a forum for change-makers from around the world to come together to discuss solutions to the global challenges that we face. The diverse nature of the membership provides the*

---

### **Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Statement of Purpose**

*The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association connects, develops, promotes and supports Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff to identify benchmarks of good governance and the implementation of the enduring values of the Commonwealth.*

*Commonwealth Parliamentary Association with a unique position within the parliamentary community to offer a comprehensive perspective on how to strengthen parliamentary democracy Commonwealth-wide and discuss new and innovative approaches on how to do so.”* The CPA President read to delegates the goodwill message for the 63<sup>rd</sup> CPC from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Patron of the CPA and Head of the Commonwealth.

The Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Mr Akbar Khan welcomed Commonwealth Parliamentarians and delegates to the conference and said: *“The Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference strengthens our networks and nurtures our shared Commonwealth democratic values. The fact that the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association embodies diversity yet shares values of democracy, rule of law and human rights, only serves to strengthen and deepen our unity. The need for the CPA to continue to strengthen its core programmatic work and to translate the practical benefits of democratic governance to the peoples of the Commonwealth has never been greater.”*

The Commonwealth Secretary-General, Rt Hon. Patricia Scotland QC in a video message to delegates said: *“Shared understanding of democratic values, with honest and accountable administration, and respect for the separation of powers, are fundamental to our Commonwealth approaches to development. The CPA conference and the work of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association are fine examples of how forums and mechanisms for exchange of ideas and expertise enable us to leverage the advantages our shared inheritances offer.”*

The vote of thanks on behalf of Members of Parliament was given by Hon. Vicki Dunne, MLA, CPA Treasurer and Deputy Speaker of the Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly.

### **63<sup>rd</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference: CPA statement on the Rohingya**

Commonwealth Parliamentarians attending the 63<sup>rd</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference were given a briefing by His Excellency Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali, MP, Foreign Minister of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh on the Rohingya humanitarian crisis in Bangladesh. Following the briefing, Commonwealth Parliamentarians called for urgent action from the international community to resolve the ongoing humanitarian crisis facing the Rohingya community in Bangladesh. The adoption of a statement on the crisis was proposed by the CPA Malta Branch and a CPA statement on the Rohingya crisis was adopted by consensus by the Commonwealth Parliamentarians attending the 63<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) held in Dhaka, Bangladesh on Tuesday 7 November 2017. The CPA statement on the Rohingya crisis *“affirms the collective will of the membership of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association to call for urgent action from the international community to resolve the ongoing humanitarian crisis facing the Rohingyas ethnic minority.”*

The full CPA statement on the Rohingya is available at: [www.cpahq.org/cpahq/rohingya](http://www.cpahq.org/cpahq/rohingya).

### **63<sup>rd</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference: Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Chairperson elected at the 63<sup>rd</sup> CPA General Assembly**

Hon. Emilia Monjowa Lifaka, MP, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Cameroon was elected as the new Chairperson of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) International Executive Committee at the 63<sup>rd</sup> CPA General Assembly. The new Chairperson of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) International Executive Committee was elected for a three-year term at the General Assembly that took place in Dhaka, Bangladesh as part of the wider 63<sup>rd</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference. The new Chairperson succeeds the outgoing CPA President and Chairperson of the CPA International Executive Committee, Hon. Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury MP, Speaker of the Parliament of Bangladesh.

### **63<sup>rd</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference: CPA Australia Federal Branch**

The 63<sup>rd</sup> CPA General Assembly approved the application from the Federal Parliament of Australia to reconstitute the Commonwealth of Australia Branch of the CPA from 1 January 2018. The Federal Parliament of Australia submitted a valid application together with a resolution to the CPA Headquarters Secretariat to re-join the CPA Membership.

### **63<sup>rd</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference: Commonwealth CPA Lecture**

The first Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Lecture for the CPA Asia Region was held at the 63<sup>rd</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference with Professor Dr Gowher Rizvi, International Affairs Advisor to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh who spoke of the Commonwealth's enduring political values that bring challenges and opportunities for Commonwealth Parliamentarians.

Professor Dr Gowher Rizvi highlighted the significant role that the Commonwealth has played in international affairs and how the development of the Commonwealth had played a significant role in the history of the nations. He also spoke about how the Commonwealth functions as a self-serving organization for the benefit of all its members and the key role of the CPA in promoting unity and diversity amongst Parliamentarians.

### **63<sup>rd</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference: Youth Roundtable**

A youth roundtable event was hosted by the CPA Bangladesh Branch with discussions between Commonwealth Parliamentarians and young people from a range of youth groups in Bangladesh. The inaugural youth roundtable was chaired by the CPA President and Chairperson of the CPA International Executive Committee, Hon. Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury MP, Speaker of the Parliament of Bangladesh and the topic for the discussions was '*The importance of participatory governance to peaceful, democratic societies*'.

Eighteen Law Faculty students from Dhaka University and two of the young people who had attended the 8<sup>th</sup> CPA Commonwealth Youth Parliament in British Columbia, Canada exchanged views with Commonwealth Parliamentarians representing all nine CPA Regions. Following a lively session debating the democratic importance of parliaments engaging with young people to ensure that the views of the youth contributed to policy making decisions by governments, the workshop divided into two groups to agree a series of recommendations to be presented to conference delegates attending the 63<sup>rd</sup> CPC Workshop G - *Giving voice to the youth: mechanisms for ensuring effective participation of youth in the governance process*.

Group one put forward the following recommendations:

- **Introduce compulsory classes in schools to educate students about politics and the parliamentary process.**
- **Establish apprenticeship or internship schemes within parliamentary organisations in order to provide training for those with an interest in joining the world of politics.**
- **Invite youth representatives to participate on policy making bodies/establish youth advisory boards to ensure inclusivity.**
- **Allow candidates to stand for election at the same age as they can vote.**

Group two suggested the following recommendations:

- **Encourage greater use of social media by Parliamentarians, whilst ensuring traditional forms of communication continue for those without internet access.**
- **Introduce quotas for youth representation within parliaments.**
- **Establish special training courses in parliamentary processes for graduates.**
- **Consult with youth representatives when drafting legislation, particularly when there is a direct impact on young people (for example in relation to education, sport and culture).**
- **Ensure that every CPA conference includes a proportionate number of young delegates, especially when youth issues are under discussion.**
- **Expand access to student politics by electing rather than selecting candidates.**

## **63<sup>rd</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference – Workshops:**

**Main conference theme: ‘*Continuing to enhance high standards of performance of Parliamentarians*’.**

**The eight main conference workshops and their recommendations were as follows:**

### **Workshop A: Democracy must Deliver: Role of Parliament in addressing the Challenges (Host Branch Topic)**

The first workshop for the 63<sup>rd</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference was on the Host Branch topic of ‘*Democracy and how it must deliver: role of Parliament in addressing the Challenges*’. Discussion leaders presented the importance of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically Goal 16 which refers to Parliaments and good governance. It was highlighted that Parliaments should ensure that their functions are properly implemented, especially with transparency, oversight and independence. The importance of the media, civil society and international standards must also be considered to ensure the best performance of Parliamentarians across the Commonwealth.

Parliamentarians from the Host Branch shared their experiences and different facets of democracy, especially in relation to climate change and how to achieve some of the SDGs by 2020. Delegates asked many questions and the decisive comment was how individual jurisdictions are playing their part to improve the situation and make full use of their democratic powers. Members spoke of how their parliaments are addressing major challenges such as fighting corruption and the separation of powers.

The discussion leaders put forward four recommendations, which after much discussion, were all **endorsed** by the workshop:

- **Parliaments should ensure that Parliamentarians are equipped and enabled to make informed decisions on law-making, budgeting, oversight and public outreach in effectively implementing the SDGs.**
- **Parliamentarians to proactively play a role in translating the 17 Sustainable Development Goals into legislation and policies for country-specific goals.**
- **For Parliament to promote democracy and good governance, thereby enhancing people’s participation, it should be more transparent and have a separation of power, making it easily accessible to the public.**
- **A democratic Parliament should reflect the social diversity of the population in terms of gender, geography, language religion, race, ethnicity and any other politically-significant characteristics.**

### **Workshop B: The role of Parliamentarians in building stronger ties within the Commonwealth: including new trade issues, visa issues, travel restrictions, non-tariff restrictions.**

With the many complications of global trade, Commonwealth members fully recognize the value of international trade as a powerful means of achieving economic and social progress including the targets of the SDGs. By affirming the core values and principles of the Commonwealth’s Charter, the Commonwealth builds strong networks which provide collective regional efforts to accelerate economic and trade growth, social progress, cultural development and tourism. Member countries have the possibility to negotiate disputes on trade and other social-economic issues through negotiations. In addition, by ratifying trade agreements and implementing their provisions through domestic legislation and appropriate budgetary allocation, international trade could be enhanced.

To build stronger ties within the Commonwealth on trade, travel and tariff issues, it is important to identify the common best practices which strengthen the capacity of parliamentary instruments, especially by improving

trade facilities and logistics at the national and regional level which can significantly reduce trade costs and boost the output of trade. Consequently, simplifying customs procedures and tariff systems, upgrading systems to expedite the movement, release and clearance of goods and performing as logistic hubs are important factors for the increase in free trade.

For Parliamentarians to do their job effectively on trade relation matters, they need the opportunities and means to obtain a thorough understanding of the workings of the WTO system, the multilateral negotiating process and Regional Trade Agreements. It is equally important to have a national process of trade policy development. While acknowledging economic cooperation, Members can influence the direction of international trade and hold their governments to account on trade issues when dealing with international institutions.

The first recommendation was **noted** and the second and third recommendations were **endorsed** at the end of the workshop:

- **Free movement is key to building stronger ties within the Commonwealth. National Parliaments should therefore champion visa free regimes for Commonwealth citizens.**
- **To set up a committee charged with arranging a seminar with outside experts to examine the reasons for the decline in momentum in removing obstacles to international trade and to recommend appropriate remedies.**
- **In the Commonwealth, visa issues and travel restrictions operate against free movement of citizens to promote trade. Parliaments must ensure that immigration reform is enacted.**

### **Workshop C: The Climate Change Debate: A challenge for the Commonwealth?**

This workshop focused on discussions that Commonwealth countries who have signed the COP 21 Paris Agreement should address and deal with climate change. The Commonwealth as a body encourages jurisdictions to address climate change and to look at the implementation of climate change rules. However the financing of these measures result in 'bottlenecks' in terms of how much is to be paid and how the results are to be monitored.

The Commonwealth should reinforce the COP 21 Agreement especially as climate change adversely affects vulnerable, smaller Commonwealth countries. Most Commonwealth countries have not done much in terms of implementation. Estimates suggest that one third of the action has been undertaken; clearly there is much to be done. In 2020, all nations will revise their action plans on climate change and there was a call for new laws on climate change to provide predictability, legitimacy and autonomy.

Another discussion leader from the Caribbean Region spoke about the effects of Hurricanes Harvey and Irma which moved across the Atlantic Ocean and made landfall in a number of CPA Branches in the Region. Delegates were told that they need to deal with the realities of climate change that jurisdictions are being faced with whether they are man-made or natural. The economic impact of climate change also needs to be addressed and nations need to adapt to meet the challenges that climate change will bring.

The two recommendations at the workshop were **endorsed** as follows:

- **Legal reform can make a low carbon and climate resilient development pathway possible by reinforcing policy, strengthening institutions and mobilizing resources towards climate change activities.**
- **Parliaments within the Commonwealth should ensure a framework for combatting climate change is developed and implemented within each Region and updated at Regional Conferences.**

**Workshop D: Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's): How can CPA Members work with their own governments in ensuring that the SDG goals have a proper gender lens to ensure success in the areas of alleviating poverty and women's empowerment? (*Gender-related Topic*)**

Delegates noted that in September 2015, the United Nations adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which would inform the development agenda for states up to 2030. The delegates further noted that SDG 5 specifically related to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Noting the role of women in society, delegates felt that achieving SDG 5 would contribute to the achievement of the other SDGs, particularly SDG 1, pertaining to poverty alleviation. Delegates, in this regard, considered how Parliamentarians could work with their respective governments to ensure that the implementation of the SDGs had a proper gender lens.

Delegates also noted that most states had ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), effected policies and enacted legislation to enhance gender equality and the empowerment of women. However, the enforcement of these measures had remained a challenge for some states due to various factors including lack of political will, traditional practices and the stereotyping of gender roles.

Delegates acknowledged that, as Parliamentarians, they were best placed to ensure a proper gender lens was used in implementing the SDGs because they were responsible for adopting the budget, enacting legislation and scrutinizing public expenditure.

The workshop delegates **endorsed** the following recommendations:

- **CPA members should ensure that, as their parliament works toward the SDGs, it meaningfully consults and incorporates perspectives from women across a variety of demographics.**
- **Empower the Committees of Parliament to champion gender consideration of all budgets and Bills and promote gender sensitive Annual Reports that are tabled in Parliament.**
- **Parliaments vested with powers to make laws, allocate resources and represent the people are best placed to ensure promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women, and women's representation in the parliament is central to ensuring that no women or girls are left behind as we set ourselves new targets to achieve the SDG goals critical to human development and indeed human survival.**

**Workshop E: Critical Mass: Small jurisdictions and big problems - Logistics and infrastructure challenges (*Small Branches Topic*)**

The delegates noted that there was a large variety between jurisdictions within the CPA, both in size and the level of development. There were problems in some jurisdictions in coping with a high demand for infrastructure but with a low national income. There were limited options to deal with these issues including: raising taxes; seeking private funding; seeking partnerships with private enterprise; selling off assets; using economic development; lowering expectations and spending less. These solutions all had their problems, but the last one was probably the trickiest.

The size of a jurisdiction was not an indicator of service level delivery. Some small jurisdictions had a very high level of development. On the other hand, there were some large jurisdictions with lower levels of service delivery.

The United Nations had a twelve year aim to eliminate poverty via development and the UNDP. The workshop delegates noted that Parliamentarians had to consider ways of creating solutions to development challenges and the following possible actions were suggested:

- Recognizing that Overseas Development Assistance was very badly coordinated. Doubling up was common and the selection of aid recipient was often irrational. Silo programming was an issue: if

interventions were limited in subject then results were less good, so for example general sexual health aid was better for outcomes than focusing on HIV or other single issues.

- Recognizing that the Commonwealth and similar organizations could better coordinate aid. They could act as knowledge clearing houses for donors.
- Promoting knowledge using IT to enable better collaboration.
- Encouraging better developed jurisdictions to share benefits at the margins to people from less developed jurisdictions.

The four recommendations at the workshop were **endorsed** as follows:

- **Parliaments must ensure that governments enhance the policy and regulatory framework for market-led growth, whilst strengthening the financial sector to expand and better manage infrastructure.**
- **Small jurisdictions with limited funding and resources must be strategic, creative and competitive in addressing their unique logistic and infrastructure challenges.**
- **Knowledge and good practice sharing by Commonwealth parliaments at national and sub-national levels should wherever practicable be facilitated to help overcome resource gaps.**
- **The CPA should facilitate better knowledge sharing between Branches and be an advocate for better coordination of assistance from development partners to its Members.**

#### **Workshop F: CPA Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures: Progress in the past 10 years**

The CPA Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures were first developed in 2006 with the assistance of all nine regions of the CPA and support from international organisations like the World Bank. These CPA Benchmarks have provided a minimum standard to be met by all Commonwealth Parliaments and a description of how a Parliament should act, behave and function.

This workshop discussed the CPA Benchmarks and their implementation today. It was noted that regular updates are important to ensure that the CPA Benchmarks are relevant to each jurisdiction. Many CPA Branches have undertaken self-assessment of their Parliaments and Legislatures utilising the CPA Benchmarks. It was noted that the use of self-assessments by Parliaments to demonstrate their performance and to highlight areas in which the organisation can improve was useful and that these assessments would allow for comparison between Legislatures.

It was noted that the CPA Benchmarks are not about 'shaming' Parliaments as there is no grading system but that the CPA Benchmarks allow Parliaments to take into account their own culture and history in development and can utilise the results to point to improvement in their own processes.

One jurisdiction gave the following examples of the tangible outcomes from their self-assessment against the CPA Benchmarks including:

- A shortened duration for the notice of submitted questions from 14 days to 10 days.
- The establishment of a Special Chamber for dealing with urgent public matters.
- Introducing the permission for questions to be submitted with a day's notice for Ministerial Questions.

The workshop delegates heard of the significant value in utilising external parties, including academic and independent organisations, to conduct and assist in assessments against the CPA Benchmarks as it is difficult for an individual to be truly objective in regards to their own jurisdiction. The inclusion of external groups in the assessment also adds to the confidence and validity of the process.

The four recommendations at the workshop were **endorsed** as follows:

- **Branch President/Clerks to assess their legislatures against the CPA Benchmarks to identify improvements and enhancements and to report on progress at future conferences.**

- **Where relevant, citizens, civil society and academia should be consulted when Parliaments conduct self-assessments with the CPA Benchmarks to promote transparency and accountability.**
- **Parliaments should use the updated CPA Benchmarks on Democratic Legislatures as a tool to ensure their contribution to SDG 16 (on inclusive and accountable governance).**
- **To conduct a regular meeting to review and enhance the CPA Benchmarks to suit the current developments.**

### **Workshop G: Giving voice to the youth: Mechanisms for ensuring effective participation of youth in the governance process.**

Delegates gathered for this workshop in which stimulating presentations and a vibrant discussion focussed on the importance of giving a voice to the youth and the mechanisms for ensuring the effective participation of youth in the governance process. The discussion leaders began the session with formal presentations outlining the current situation in relation to engaging young people in the democratic process in their respective jurisdictions of Tasmania, India and Bangladesh.

The discussion leaders also highlighted:

- The importance of young people being considered as the leaders of today and not just as the future leaders of tomorrow.
- The need for youth engagement and participation in the governance process to occur in an organic manner and to facilitate practices which will lead to the natural outcome of developing young people into capable Parliamentarians.
- The emergence of positive role models in Parliament for young people with young leaders recently elected in a number of jurisdictions including Canada, New Zealand and France.

Workshop delegates also heard from two young people from Bangladesh who had participated in the Youth Roundtable during the conference and spoke passionately about the need to engage and encourage young people's participation through numerous measures including:

- quotas of young people both on a party basis and at a legislature level.
- encouraging the participation of young people not to be restricted to 'youth issues' but to full engagement on all global issues.
- analysis of data to identify the best international practices of youth engagement throughout the Commonwealth to share with different jurisdictions.
- to consider and address barriers preventing political and parliamentary participation by young people, such as offering training to develop the necessary skills through apprenticeships and civic education in schools.
- ensuring youth representation on all statutory bodies.
- promoting youth participation through digital democracy and social media.

The following five recommendations were **endorsed** by the workshop delegates. Recommendations four and five were presented by two young people from Bangladesh as an outcome of the Youth Roundtable event at the conference:

- **Parliaments must ensure that the youth Parliamentarians are given a voice in all parliamentary, national, regional and international representative bodies.**
- **Parliament needs to give a voice to the youth by making sure the policies close to their hearts are actively considered.**
- **Parliaments and Parliamentarians should ceaselessly endeavour to ensure the mainstreaming of the youth in governance and nation building so as to equip and empower them to shape the destinies of democracies the world over.**

- **Introduction of youth quotas in Parliament and youth quotas at the party level in the case of choosing candidates.**
- **Youth must be mentored through internships and apprenticeships in statutory bodies and parliamentary functions should be taught within mainstream education.**

### **Workshop H: What factors fuel the rise of different kinds of nationalism?**

In discussing this topic, the workshop delegates described nationalism as something that stems from internal or external forces pressuring unity and cohesion among native individuals of societies. Further, the delegates noted that nationalism has the capacity to bring about varying effects that can either ameliorate the livelihood of the citizens of a society or it can cause its detriment. Furthermore, the delegates noted that at global level, a number of changes appear to be taking place which are causing countries to retreat into their own corners.

In some jurisdictions, openness is succumbing to hostility, curiosity to suspicion and cooperation to protectionism. The reason behind all these changes was given as nationalism. Firstly, delegates at the workshop noted that nationalism could arise at personal, ethnic or national levels. Secondly, delegates stated that there were two types of nationalism; civic and ethnic. They also observed that nationalism could have the positive effect of igniting economic, political and social emancipation. To this end, the delegates noted that when unity is embraced, nationalism can be a tool that can be used to promote national growth and good neighbourliness, thereby strengthening the international community.

The workshop **endorsed** the following recommendation unanimously:

- **This CPC workshop recognizes that different factors, history, political systems and geography can influence different types of nationalism across different countries of the world.**

## **Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Session**

**Workshop topic: If we want genuine positive change in the world, we need more women leaders. How can we persuade the world that the future is dependent on gender equality?**

This workshop for the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) network discussed how a society with greater equality of opportunity is a more economically dynamic society. It was noted that this needs to be more widely known, with more data collection and sharing. Societies benefit from equality of opportunity and the focus should be on 'preaching to the convertible'. Some delegates referred to young males as those who might most benefit from engagement on this topic.

It was highlighted that girls and young women usually most need mentors. Successful female legislators have a responsibility to be visible and to make themselves available to those who would benefit from their experiences. Equality of opportunity is not equality of outcome. Some delegates referred to 'gender equity' as the goal. In terms of parliamentary representation, there should be as much attention to women being in leadership positions and positions of influence where they can help determine the policy agenda as on the actual numbers of women Members. The cultural context is fundamental but in many jurisdictions with high levels of female representation in public and parliamentary life, it is often legislation that has given the crucial 'nudge' towards gender equality.

The following three recommendations were **endorsed** by the workshop delegates:

- **Using data driven strategies to increase women's political participation, allow women Parliamentarians to serve as role models, and better support policies that promote gender equality.**
- **Women are born equal and, to strive and achieve equity and equality, the playing field should be made even to enable and provide equal opportunities for all. Parliaments have a key role in how we make this happen.**
- **We ask world leaders to create a conducive environment in their countries for women to enter politics and positions of leadership to achieve the goal of gender equality.**

### **CWP workshop discussion on gender equality and the role of male Parliamentarians**

In a first for CWP, a discussion was held at the 63<sup>rd</sup> CPC on the role of male Parliamentarians in championing gender equality. The discussion leaders noted that self-sustaining patriarchal power relations have held back women from making progress in parliamentary representation. The problem is not just getting women into Parliament, but ensuring that they stay there. Male Parliamentarians have often been part of the problem.

In different parts of the Commonwealth, there are encouraging signs of change. As the workshop discussion leaders illustrated, male Parliamentarians are now adding their voice and political weight to what were seen as more typically 'female' campaigns, such as the eradication of male domestic abuse of women, or in taking concrete steps in male dominated legislatures to increase the participation and visibility of women in political and public life, through both legislative reform and practical measures. Nonetheless, it was noted that there are still huge challenges. In particular, female Parliamentarians may face scorn and disapproval in the mass media to an extent not experienced by their male counterparts. This is not an issue restricted only to a few parts of the Commonwealth - it is practically universal - and the rise in social media use has in some respects exacerbated these issues. The delegates noted that jurisdictions must consider practical examples of how this has been addressed and to see how they can be applied in different cultures and contexts.

The following two recommendations were **endorsed** by the workshop delegates:

- **For too long, Parliaments have been male dominated. For real change, male Parliamentarians must work in equal partnership with women in championing gender equality.**
- **The male-dominated mind-set and personnel of the media must change and the reportage should promote gender equality objectives and sensitivities.**

## **36<sup>th</sup> CPA Small Branches Conference**

### **1<sup>st</sup> Plenary: Critical Mass: Small Jurisdictions and big problems – Logistics and Infrastructure challenges to meet small jurisdiction expectations to achieve the same service levels as larger ones.**

Discussion leaders briefed delegates on the challenges of becoming self-sufficient for the Small Branches in terms of funding and legislating for infrastructure growth. The discussion leaders also spoke about the necessity to identify and focus upon niche areas for engaging others in development regardless of the size of the jurisdiction.

The session heard a diverse range of views on how individual jurisdictions could engage citizens and partners in infrastructure development as well as creating a legislative framework for good governance and transparency. It was commonly accepted by the majority of delegates that although each Branch has differing challenges, there were common areas of focus and opportunities to maximize on their own localities. There are unique issues in the Small Branches in terms of infrastructure and many innovations in the manner in how they could meet the challenges of big problems in small jurisdictions were discussed.

The Small Branches Conference delegates **endorsed** the following recommendations:

- **Small Branches should collaborate in sharing best practices, expertise and success stories in order to learn and assist one another. This forum should unite us in becoming more effective.**
- **Small jurisdictions, while not having the resources available to developed countries, must enact and enforce legislation establishing accountability and transparency in their governance systems.**
- **Small jurisdictions with limited funding and resources must be strategic, creative and competitive in addressing their unique logistic and infrastructure challenges.**
- **Whilst Small Branches may not necessarily always face disproportionately different service delivery challenges to larger branches, cooperation between jurisdictions can assist in improving service delivery.**

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Plenary: Parliamentary innovations in small jurisdictions in the face of financial and human resource challenges.**

The discussion leaders covered aspects of their own Branch experiences and how these have evolved over time to include more collaboration and partnerships, some of which have moved outside of their regions. The first discussion leader focused on looking beyond your immediate neighbours and outside of regional networks, citing examples of working through brokers to reach overseas jurisdictions providing beneficial outcomes.

For example, one jurisdiction had benefitted from a recent visit to Sierra Leone to provide Hansard editing expertise, training and skills to assist Parliamentary staff. As a consequence of these arrangements, the Parliament of Sierra Leone had sent staff to the host legislature and so parliaments had started a cycle of continued assistance. The second discussion leader gave a perspective from the Pacific Region expressing that more sharing will lead to the development of greater expertise and will enhance the high standards of Members in line with the overall conference theme.

The third discussion leader provided a perspective which included an interesting analysis of increased female participation through a mandated 10% minimum of woman Members. The outside expert from the UNDP provided examples of the assistance being made available in the Pacific Region for the analysis of budgets so that Members and the public can benefit from an understanding of the finances and the expenditure of governments. A floating Budget Office has been provided to Fiji and will next move to the Solomon Islands to allow the critical mass of expertise to move around and meet need as it arises.

The Small Branches delegates **endorsed** the following recommendations:

- **CPA should encourage greater cooperation between Small Branches within and outside their Regions by way of internships and exchanges of technical assistance.**
- **To overcome capacity and resource challenges, Commonwealth Parliaments in small jurisdictions should, wherever practicable, share knowledge and resources in order to function more effectively.**
- **Continued support of the CPA to all Small Branches and larger jurisdictions to collaborate with aid agencies and foreign affairs ministries in assisting small jurisdictions.**
- **Strongly encourage other small parliaments to follow Samoa's example of considering twinning arrangements as an initiative to create benefits for both.**

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Plenary: The role of Parliament in Combating Corruption.**

With regard to the first recommendation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> plenary session, delegates felt that anti-corruption models had to deal with systemic corruption and misconduct and that bodies had to be established to deal with these corrupt practices. One such body given as an example by one of the discussion leaders was the Integrity Commission of Tasmania: an independent arbiter which would receive complaints of corruption, ascertain the merits of those complaints and determine the appropriate place for such complaints to be dealt with.

The process involved sought to root out corruption as it were but to educate and engender standards and a culture of change. The commission adopted a four pronged approach:

- 1) compulsory participation in misconduct workshops
- 2) mandatory reporting of corruption
- 3) authority to monitor the progress of all reports and to bring inaction to Parliament's attention
- 4) the reporting of any suspected criminality to the Director of Public Prosecution or the police.

In regard to the second recommendation, a three-limbed approach was canvassed: personal conduct; across government; law and policy making. It was argued that because of the very close connections in small societies, the systems of transparency and accountability in relation to personal conduct and the embracing of corporate governance. There should be diversity of membership in Parliament and effective procurement systems be established across government. There should be effective law and policy making underpinned by effective rule of law, the practice of free and fair elections and that the assumption of office is done fairly. Importantly, a culture of learning, transparency and education are key to tackling corruption.

The third recommendation was discussed and it was suggested that Parliament was a critical determinant of corruption with the need for resources to be made available and the adoption of oversight tools. Internally the setting up of committee systems was fundamental as well as administrative and financial autonomy. Externally it was noted that the gain of public trust was important and should be achieved through effective communication, declaration of assets and the adoption of a code of conduct. The contribution of the free press was also noted and the advantages and threats of investigative journalism. The session stood for a moment's silence as a mark of respect to the investigative journalist killed recently in Malta.

The Small Branches delegates **endorsed** the following recommendations:

- **Parliament must provide legislation, resources and institutional tools to enable the removal of any tolerance for corruption in the community, government and politics.**
- **To agree that Parliamentarians should role-model high standards of integrity in personal conduct; maximise transparency across government; and recognise how policy-making can counter cultures of corruption.**
- **The Legislature should set the legal framework for the establishment and functioning of anti-corruption institutions, including the provision of adequate resources and proper follow-up.**

#### **4<sup>th</sup> Plenary: The role of Parliament in meeting the challenges of protecting territorial waters.**

The 4<sup>th</sup> plenary session, which also concluded the 36<sup>th</sup> Small Branches Conference, dealt with the role of Parliament in meeting the challenges of protecting territorial waters. Both discussion leaders briefed the delegates with regards to the importance of safeguarding the marine environment, especially by reducing overfishing, poor fisheries management, poaching, the destruction of marine habitat and offshore development. The discussion leaders also spoke about territorial waters and the best possible approach to make the best use out of it.

The overwhelming response from delegates to the Small Branches Conference was how the individual jurisdictions are playing their part in improving the situation and increasing their commitments, both as citizens and as Parliamentarians. A very common practice among the Small Branches is the reduction of plastic items such as bags and straws and it was suggested that they may be taxed in order to reduce the numbers ending up in the sea. Delegates pledged to commit to go back to their legislatures and improve legislation in order to safeguard their seas and their territorial waters. Both recommendations were endorsed with more than half of the delegates voting in favour respectively.

The Small Branches delegates **endorsed** the following recommendations:

- **Parliament must ensure that resources are made available to safeguard territorial waters against threats such as overfishing, poaching, habitat destruction, pollution and climate change.**
- **To recognise the potential within territorial waters to provide a secure form of renewable energy whilst at all times respecting the natural environment.**

**-Ends-**

*Issued by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Headquarters Secretariat on 20 November 2017 following the conclusion of the 63<sup>rd</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) in Dhaka, Bangladesh from 1-8 November 2017. [www.cpahq.org](http://www.cpahq.org)*