



64th CPC News

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CPA Secretary-General's message to 64th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference

The Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Mr Akbar Khan has encouraged Commonwealth Parliaments to work together to strengthen democracy in the Commonwealth as he sent a message to delegates at the 64th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Uganda today.

64th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference

'Adaption, engagement, and evolution of Parliaments in a rapidly changing Commonwealth'

'I extend to you all a very warm welcome to the 64th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Kampala, Uganda. I wish to start by recognising our gratitude to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, the Patron of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, for her message of support for a successful conference. She has been, and remains, the unifying thread throughout the Commonwealth and an inspiring and devoted Patron to the CPA.

On behalf of myself and all conference participants I wish to extend our sincere thanks to His Excellency Yoweri Museveni, President of the Republic of Uganda; Rt Hon. Rebecca Kadaga, CPA President Designate and Speaker of the Parliament of Uganda; to Hon. Jalia Bintu, MP, the Chair of the Uganda Branch CPA Executive Committee; and to the CPA Uganda Branch Secretary and Clerk of the Uganda Parliament, Jane Kibirige, and to all the Parliamentarians and staff for their warm welcome and hard work in preparing for what previews to be a very successful conference in the Pearl of Africa.

The theme of this year's Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference is *'Adaption, engagement and evolution of Parliaments in a rapidly changing Commonwealth'*. The modern Commonwealth has most certainly evolved and changed and continues to change since it was founded in 1949 by the London Declaration.

I will highlight some of these changes; the growth of the Commonwealth from 8 nations in 1949 to 53 nations in 2019 with a population of 2.4 billion people, a third of the planet's population, and where over 60% of our 2.4 billion citizens are under the age of 30 years. However, whilst people under the age of 30 account for over half of the world's population, they only make up 2% of the world's Members of Parliament. According to a study conducted by the United Nations, the most likely recruit for extremism is *"a frustrated individual, marginalised and neglected over the course of his life, starting in childhood"*. The link between political participation and the prevention of extremism is therefore clear and the challenge to engage youth in politics is both pressing and necessary.

We have a Commonwealth with some of the fastest growing economies in the globe, where the opportunities for trade and investment are enormous and expectations from citizens for better education and life chances are growing, but at the same time there is significant poverty and social inequality especially in relation to outcomes for women and girls.

Many countries are now subject to the effects of climate change and natural disasters loom large, especially for small island nations. We recently witnessed the terrible loss of life and destruction of property in the Bahamas. I would like to convey our solidarity at this conference with the Bahamas nation and its people as they seek to rebuild their lives and their country.



On the political front, there are also immense changes and challenges facing democracy and the international rules-based order that underpins our Commonwealth values.

Many citizens are frustrated by corruption, parliaments that are dysfunctional due to 'Executive overreach' or severe partisanship, a globalised economy and policies that have benefitted the rich and ultimately widened social inequality. And lest we forget the technological revolution and in particular the internet, which is shaping the public space and our lives. In sum, our Commonwealth landscape is rapidly changing, impacting on our societies, values and institutions.

Today, Commonwealth citizens can identify people with the same values and fears, exchange ideas and build relationships faster than ever before, but our leaders and institutions are simply not part of that conversation because we have 19th century institutions with 20th century mindsets, attempting to communicate with 21st century citizens. Our institutions and our mindsets need to modernise, adapt and innovate. And our leaders and institutions need to embrace a greater use of technology.

Notwithstanding the serious challenges ahead, the good news is that history and experience informs us that in today's constantly changing world, adaption, engagement and evolution all play extremely important roles in building the resilience of any institution seeking to survive. As the old adage goes 'adapt or die'. And so will our institutions of state and representative democracy, unless we address the challenges both within and externally facing our changing Commonwealth.

In the course of my tenure, I have had the honour of visiting several of your CPA Branches and Regions. I wish to especially thank those Branches and Regions present that have extended to me the courtesy of an invitation to visit as Secretary-General.

It is always a tremendous learning opportunity on many of my visits where I have first hand, seen the efforts of Parliamentarians and Parliaments not only adapting, innovating and evolving to meet the needs of a changing Commonwealth but also reaching out to other Branches to provide support, mentoring and knowledge transfer. For example, through establishing long term partnerships such as twinning relationships that we see between Australia and the Pacific and also between Canada and the Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region.

These strong partnerships built on collaboration and understanding that put people first, are truly in the spirit of friendship, mutuality of learning and deepening shared democratic values. Further examples on the theme of our conference include the use of lay members (non-elected members) on parliamentary committees, (especially Public Accounts and Standards Committees) in some small branches who can make up numbers to ensure a functioning committee system, while at the same time bringing innovative 'engagement' and potentially valuable expertise to the scrutiny function.

Linked to developments in Parliamentary Select Committees is also the innovation of electing chairs of select committees by secret ballot of all MPs rather than just chosen by each committee. This development can add greater weight to the scrutiny role of these committees and enhanced legitimacy to those backbenchers elected to chair them.

There are also efforts to deepen 'inclusion and diversity' and an excellent example in two of our branches is the inclusion of 'Social Partners' representing the churches, Commerce and trade unions and civil society within the membership of an upper chamber.



Technology has the potential to ensure people are better represented. All sorts of democratic processes can be enhanced with technology: voting online, e-petitions and surveys via smartphones are just three examples embraced by some Parliaments.¹

Over the course of coming days, you will no doubt hear many more examples shared and exchanged on the theme of this conference.

As the recognised parliamentary arm of the Commonwealth since 1911, the CPA's statement of purpose is to *"connect, develop, promote and support Parliamentarians and their staff to identify benchmarks of good governance and the implementation of the enduring values of the Commonwealth."*

We implement our CPA mandate through a wide variety of programming to upskill our membership and to strengthen the institution of Parliament and democratic governance. One of the jewels in the CPA's programming is our updated *Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures*.

Reinforcing the belief that effective parliaments are one of the principal institutions of any functioning democracy, the Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures were initially developed in 2006 to provide a minimum standard and a guide on how a parliament should be constituted and how it should function.

The benchmarks are therefore fundamental to the wider values and principles of the Commonwealth Charter which expresses a commitment of member states to the development of free and democratic societies.

Reflecting the evolution and adaption of parliamentary developments and international developments such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the benchmarks have been revised in 2018 to reflect best practice. And I wish to thank our international partners: Westminster Foundation for Democracy, the World Bank, UNDP, OECD and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs who have helped in this important collective effort.

The CPA has commenced assessments of a number of our member Parliaments against the updated Benchmarks. These assessments have helped to catalyse positive changes in legislatures.

Other key CPA programmes you may be familiar with include our ever-popular Post-Election Seminars; our Technical Assistance Programmes; and our innovative Fundamentals courses at Witwatersrand University and McGill University developed over the past four years of my tenure.

I am pleased to say that the CPA Headquarters Secretariat continues to pioneer and innovate exciting, relevant and highly accessible upskilling programmes for its members and parliamentary staff.

Earlier this year, the CPA Headquarters Secretariat convened a high-level Working Group Chaired by the CPA Vice-Chairperson, Hon. Alexandra Mendes, MP (Canada Federal) to look at our Programming to ensure that we remain relevant, co-ordinated and cost-effective in our offering to meet membership needs. The Working Group unanimously recommended that our limited budget must be focused on upskilling our membership and parliamentary staff consistent with our mandate and financial resources.

In this context, and mindful of the important role that parliamentary staff occupy in promoting democratic governance across our Commonwealth, serving often on the front line as the first responders to inducting new members and providing the continuity between elections, I am pleased to announce that the CPA will be launching at this 64th CPC two new highly accessible and innovative online upskilling programmes for

¹ 'The Changing nature of representative democracy' - Global Public Square blogs.cnn.com 2014



parliamentary staff accredited by the International School for Government at King's College, London University and the School of Continuing Studies at McGill University, Canada.

This means that all CPA Headquarters Secretariat Fundamental programmes for Members and their staff are now accredited directly to distinguished Commonwealth universities.

No other parliamentary organisation to my knowledge has a university accredited high-quality offering for its membership. The CPA continues to innovate to ensure that you, as our Members, get the most out of your subscriptions to the CPA.

None of this would be possible without the good financial stewardship led by our CPA Treasurer, Mrs Vicki Dunne, MLA, Deputy Speaker of the Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly, ACT Branch working with the CPA Headquarters Secretariat Finance team.

I also wish to thank the CPA Vice-Chairperson, Hon. Alexandra Mendes and the other CPA Chairpersons, from CPA Small Branches and the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP), and the other Members of the Working Group from New Zealand, Pakistan and South Africa for the time they devoted to this important task for the CPA.

Before closing, kindly permit me to say a few words about what makes this particular 64th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Uganda special.

This conference will oversee four sets of elections: one for the Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP); one for the CPA Small Branches Chairperson; one for CPA Treasurer; and one for the Vice-Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee.

We already have the results of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Chairperson and CPA Small Branches Chairperson elections and I am delighted to congratulate Hon. Shandana Gulzar Khan, MNA (Pakistan) and Hon. Niki Rattle, Speaker of the Parliament of the Cook Islands on their respective elections. The CPA Headquarters Secretariat looks forward to working with you both to deliver your mandates and to develop effective strategies for the next three years.

For the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians network, this is a truly special year as the network celebrates its 30th anniversary. CWP remains a strong cornerstone of the CPA, with the hugely valuable work it undertakes in promoting the political participation of women all around the Commonwealth.

As the distinguished UK Member of Parliament, Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods stated earlier this year on Commonwealth Day in the British House of Commons on 7th March 2019, some of the best practice in securing greater parliamentary representation for women is found in the Commonwealth, with Rwanda topping the global league table for women's representation at 61.3% ... but there is also zero representation in some other countries, which shows that much more still needs to be done to improve the representation of women in Parliament. I believe her observations truly reflect the picture across our Commonwealth.

Dr Blackman-Woods also noted that the CPA Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures I earlier referenced, in their mainstreaming of gender and highlighting issues of equality and the importance of equality impact assessments in the development of budgets, legislation and policies is a good step forward and coupled with the work of the CWP will be a formidable partnership.



I look forward to your participation in the workshops that CPA HQ staff have organised at this Conference. These workshops form a truly unique opportunity for all of us to share good practice – and for us to exchange views in a spirit of mutuality of learning and knowledge transfer.

I also wish to express my appreciation to the outgoing Vice-Chairperson of the Executive Committee, Hon. Alexandra Mendès, Member of the House of Commons of Canada; the outgoing CPA Treasurer, Hon. Vicki Dunne, Member of the Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly; the outgoing CWP Chair, Hon. Dr Dato' Noraini Ahmad, Member of the Parliament of Malaysia; and to the outgoing Small Branches Chairperson, Hon. Angelo Farrugia, Speaker of the Parliament of Malta; and to all other members of the CPA Coordinating Committee for their guidance, and to the Executive Committee for their dedication and commitment to creating a positive trajectory for the CPA.

The work of the outgoing members of the Co-ordinating Committee and Executive Committee has been invaluable. The visibility, profile, programming and governance of the Association has been strengthened through their individual and collective work. Their commitment has ensured that in changing times the CPA HQ has itself evolved and adapted to bring added value to its membership by remaining relevant and responsive to membership needs based on our values.

As a Commonwealth organisation our values serve as the glue that unite and continue to bind us and are the source of our unity in diversity; we should not as an Association take them for granted. We must nurture and respect our core values and model the good governance that we were established to promote. If we do not we forfeit the privilege in my respectful view to promote the values that underpin democratic governance - to others looking to us for guidance and inspiration.

It is only through adherence to our rules and values and modelling the highest quality of governance that the CPA will succeed in its mission and endure into the future. To summarise the late distinguished UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan; *'To live well is to choose, but to choose well, you must know what you stand for and, where you want to go...'*

At a time of rapid change in the Commonwealth, the CPA family is a unique international platform to learn and exchange from each other and to be a model network for making a difference to people's lives – but to do so we need to be very clear about what values we stand for as an Association and to defend and reaffirm them at every CPA gathering.

Finally, Honourable members, I wish to record my sincere gratitude for the tireless work of the CPA Regional Secretaries and dedication of the CPA Secretariat staff, for their valuable contribution to making this CPC a success.

It has been a privilege to serve you over the last four years. I wish everyone a very successful and productive 64th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

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Information about the 64th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) can be found at the official conference website www.cpc2019.org and for further updates please visit the CPA website www.cpahq.org/cpahq/cpc2019.

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Notes to Editors:

64th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, 22-29 September 2019, Kampala, Uganda #64CPC2019

The **Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference** is the annual conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA). The **64th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference** will take place in Kampala, Uganda hosted by the CPA Uganda Branch and the Parliament of Uganda. For further information visit www.cpahq.org/cpahq/cpc2019.

The **Commonwealth Parliamentary Association** (CPA) exists to develop, promote and support Parliamentarians and their staff to identify benchmarks of good governance and to implement the enduring values of the Commonwealth. The CPA is an international community of around 180 Commonwealth Parliaments and Legislatures working together to deepen the Commonwealth's commitment to the highest standards of democratic governance. Visit www.cpahq.org.

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