

67th COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE NEW SOUTH WALES 3 to 8 NOVEMBER 2024

CONFERENCE CONCLUDING STATEMENT



CONFERENCE THEME: ‘ENGAGE, EMPOWER,
SUSTAIN: CHARTING THE COURSE FOR
RESILIENT DEMOCRACY’



This document contains the **Conference Concluding Statement** for the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) which took place in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia from 3 to 8 November 2024, hosted by the Parliament of New South Wales and CPA New South Wales Branch. The statement is also available at the CPA website: www.cpahq.org.

To catch up on all of the news from the 67th CPC – please visit the CPA website and social media hashtag #67CPC.

Images from the events of the 67th CPC are available at the CPA's Flickr page. Image credits: CPA Headquarters/Parliament of New South Wales/CPA Branches.

A full round up of all of the conference news and workshop reports from the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) in New South Wales will appear in *The Parliamentarian: Conference Issue* out in December 2024. *The Parliamentarian, the Journal of Commonwealth Parliaments* is available to Members of Parliament and parliamentary staff through their CPA Branch Secretaries (print and digital editions) or to individuals and organisations by subscription. Email editor@cpahq.org for details about *The Parliamentarian*.

67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference Conference Concluding Statement

9 November 2024

COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARIANS attending the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) and associated meetings recognised the Commonwealth's commitment to democracy and met under the conference theme of '**Engage, Empower, Sustain: Charting the Course for Resilient Democracy**'.

The conference, hosted by the Parliament of New South Wales and CPA New South Wales Branch from 3 to 8 November 2024 in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia was attended by over 700 Parliamentarians and parliamentary officials representing Parliaments and Legislatures from across the Commonwealth.

The conference was hosted by the **CPA President (2023-2024), Hon. Ben Franklin, MLC, President of the New South Wales Legislative Council**. This was the first time that the CPA New South Wales Branch and the Parliament of New South Wales has hosted the CPA's annual conference. It was also the first time that an Australian State or Territory has hosted the CPA's annual conference. The CPA Australia Region has hosted the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference four times previously (6th CPC in 1959; 16th CPC in 1970; 34th CPC in 1988; and 47th CPC in 2001).

During the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, there were also a number of additional conferences and meetings including: **40th CPA Small Branches Conference**; **8th Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Conference**; meetings of the **Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) network**; the **2024 CPA General Assembly**; governance meetings of the **CPA Executive Committee**; and the **58th Society of Clerks-at-the-Table (SoCATT) meeting**.

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, the 67th 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 the countries of the Commonwealth as well as national, state, provincial and territorial Parliaments and Legislatures bringing together almost 180 CPA Branches of the Association.

Issued by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Headquarters Secretariat on 9 November 2024 following the conclusion of the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC).



67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference - Opening Ceremony

The Vice-Patron of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley, AC KC, the Governor of New South Wales, urged Commonwealth Parliamentarians to work together to uphold the values of the Commonwealth as she opened the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Sydney, New South Wales. A message to conference delegates from HM King Charles III, Head of the Commonwealth and Patron of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association was also read out by the CPA Vice-Patron.



Delegates to the 67th CPC were welcomed by the CPA President (2023-2024), Hon. Ben Franklin, MLC, President of the New South Wales Legislative Council who said at the opening ceremony: *“As we mark the bicentenary of the New South Wales Legislative Council this year, one of our biggest celebrations will, of course, be the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) and CPA General Assembly, which the CPA New South Wales Branch is honoured to host. The conference will enable us all to imagine the future of democracy and ensure its resilience in the face of current and future threats.”* Delegates were also welcomed by the Speaker of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly, Hon. Greg Piper, MP and the Premier of New South Wales, Hon. Chris Minns, MP.

The CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg said: *“On behalf of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, it is my great pleasure to welcome delegates to the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in New South Wales and to thank the Parliament of New South Wales for their generosity in hosting this year’s conference as they mark the bicentenary of the New South Wales Legislative Council. This conference offers an invaluable opportunity to come together and share best practice in addressing common issues and strengthening Commonwealth values.*

As we come together, it provides us with an opportunity to review progress of the Commonwealth and its values and principles. Commitments to democracy, human rights and good governance are cornerstones of the CPA’s work and we will have the opportunity to discuss these commitments as we meet this week.”





On behalf of the Commonwealth Secretary-General, **Professor Luis Franceschi, Assistant Secretary-General** said: *“Parliamentarians have a crucial role in deepening the Commonwealth Charter’s values in their jurisdictions. They are guarantors of accountability, and loudspeakers for the voice of the people. Their work should go beyond party loyalty, be rooted in integrity, allowing them to stand for what is right, just and fair for the people in our Commonwealth.”*

The Vote of Thanks was given by **Hon. Penny Sharpe MLC, Leader of the Government in the New South Wales Legislative Council** and the opening ceremony was conducted by **Hon. Courtney Houssos, MLC, New South Wales Minister for Finance and Natural Resources**.

A ‘Welcome to Country’ and digeridoo performance was given by Matthew Doyle and subsequent performances were given by the Sydney Children’s Choirs, the Sydney Conservatorium, the Bangarra Dance Company and musician James Johnston.



67th CPC Presentations

At the conclusion of the 67th CPC, the CPA President (2023-2024), **Hon. Ben Franklin, MLC, President of the Legislative Council of New South Wales** was presented with a commemorative silver salver to thank the CPA New South Wales Branch for their hosting of the conference. In addition, outgoing CPA Executive Committee Members were presented with commemorative plaques, traditionally donated by the CPA Malaysia Branch, to thank them for their service to the CPA.



67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference: CPA Officer Elections

Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee:

During the 2024 CPA General Assembly, CPA Members elected **Hon. Dr Christopher Kalila, MP (Zambia)** as the Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee for a new three-year term. The CPA Chairperson works with the CPA Secretary-General and the CPA Headquarters Secretariat to lead the Association and to chair the CPA Executive Committee. Under CPA election rules only delegates attending the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference could take part in the

vote to elect a new CPA Chairperson. The two other candidates were: Hon. Dr Zainab Gimba, MP (Nigeria) and Hon. Arthur E. Holder, MP, SC, Speaker of the House of Assembly of Barbados.



CPA Vice-Chairperson: The 2024 CPA General Assembly was followed by a meeting of the new CPA Executive Committee during which **Hon. Carmel Sepuloni, MP, Member of the Parliament of New Zealand and Regional Representative for the CPA Pacific Region** was elected to the position of Vice-Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee. The position of Vice-Chairperson is for a term of one year and the holder is also a Member of the CPA Co-ordinating Committee.

CPA Small Branches Chairperson: Members of the CPA attending the 40th CPA Small Branches Conference elected **Hon. Valerie Woods, MNA, Speaker of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of Belize** as the new CPA Small Branches Chairperson.

The role of Chairperson of the CPA Small Branches is an Officer role within the CPA's governance structure and the new incumbent will sit on the CPA International Executive Committee to bring a voice for the CPA Small Branches to the governing body of the Association. Under CPA election rules only delegates from CPA Small Branches to the conference could take part in the vote.





CPA Executive Committee address key governance issues

The CPA Executive Committee met ahead of the 67th CPC in Sydney, New South Wales. The CPA Executive Committee represents the nine regions of the CPA - Africa; Asia; Australia; British Islands and Mediterranean; Canada; Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic; India; Pacific; South East Asia. Members discussed the CPA Status Bill, the financial statements for the Association and key governance issues. The Acting CPA Chairperson at the meeting was Hon. Arthur Holder, SC, MP, Speaker of the House of Assembly of Barbados.



The CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg said: *“The CPA provides a unique platform for inter-parliamentary dialogue to take place and the CPA’s membership comprises the national, state, provincial and territorial Parliaments of the Commonwealth. The diverse nature of the membership provides the CPA with a unique position within the parliamentary community to offer a comprehensive perspective on how to strengthen parliamentary democracy across the Commonwealth and to discuss new and innovative approaches on how to do so.”*

New CPA Executive Committee meeting in New South Wales following CPA General Assembly

Following his election, the new CPA Chairperson from Zambia, Hon. Dr Christopher Kalila, MP chaired a meeting of the new CPA Executive Committee at the conclusion of the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in New South Wales at which Members elected a new CPA Vice-Chairperson and appointed new Trustees.



2024 CPA General Assembly: Key Decisions

During the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) in New South Wales, Commonwealth Parliamentarians attended the 2024 CPA General Assembly. The CPA General Assembly was presided over by the **CPA President (2023-2024), Hon. Ben Franklin, MLC, President of the New South Wales Legislative Council** and was attended by **Members from 128 CPA Branches**. The CPA General Assembly, the Association's supreme authority, is constituted by delegates to the annual Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

The CPA General Assembly also included a topical debate '*Votes vs Likes – the Role of Parliament in Strengthening Democratic Resilience in an Age of Fake News and Synthetic Media*', with presenters from CPA Branches including Australia Federal, Punjab (Pakistan), The Maldives, Wales, Canada Federal, New Zealand, Trinidad and Tobago, and Northern Ireland.

Some of the key decisions and outcomes from the 2024 CPA General Assembly were:

- Delegates welcomed the work undertaken to enable the CPA to create a new non-charitable organisation and the passage of the CPA Status Bill in the UK Parliament to legislate to recognise the CPA as 'akin to an international, interparliamentary organisation'.
- Delegates approved the 2023 CPA Annual Report (including the audited Financial Statements), the CPA Membership Report, the CPA Budgets and Financial Management Reports.
- Delegates endorsed reports from the three CPA networks - the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP), the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) and the CPA Small Branches.

During the 2024 CPA General Assembly, CPA Members elected **Hon. Dr Christopher Kalila, MP (Zambia)** as the Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee for a three-year term.

Delegates also looked ahead to the next Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference – the **68th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC)** - to be hosted by the CPA Barbados Branch and Parliament of Barbados in October 2025.





Second Lifaka Lecture highlights role for Commonwealth Parliamentarians in promoting and protecting human rights

The 2nd CPA Emilia Monjowa Lifaka Lecture highlighted the key role of Commonwealth Parliamentarians in protecting and promoting human rights. The Lifaka Lecture took place in the margins of the 67th CPC and was attended by delegates and the diplomatic community in Sydney. This year's keynote address was given by renowned guest speaker, **Hon. Michael Kirby, AC CMG**, an international jurist, educator and former judge from Australia.



The Lecture examined the key human rights issues affecting Commonwealth jurisdictions and the unique position of Parliamentarians as both legislators and representatives of the people, giving them the power to shape policies, pass laws and hold governments accountable for human rights violations. The reply to this year's Lifaka Lecture was given by **Hon. Nontembeko Boyce, MPL**, the Speaker of the KwaZulu-Natal Legislature and the Q&A was chaired by **Hon. John Ajaka**, a former President of the New South Wales Legislative Council and CPA Vice-Chairperson.



The CPA Lifaka Lecture was established in 2023 in memory of Hon. Emilia Monjowa Lifaka, the late Chairperson of the CPA International Executive Committee and Deputy Speaker of Cameroon. Hon. Monjowa Lifaka was a passionate champion of the CPA and served as CPA Chairperson from November 2017 until her untimely death in April 2021. The CPA Lifaka Lecture is intended to provide a fitting tribute to her work.

CPA Regional Secretaries meet at 67th CPC to discuss future CPA activities

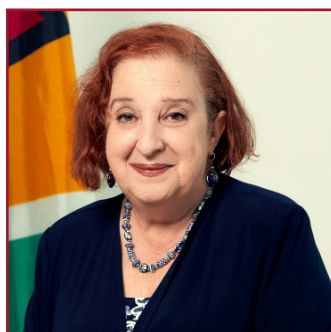
Ahead of the 67th CPC, the Regional Secretaries of the nine Regions of the CPA met to discuss the year ahead, joined by CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg, CPA Deputy Secretary-General, Jarvis Matiya and Head of Programmes, Matthew Salik. The nine CPA Regions are: Africa; Asia; Australia; British Isles and the Mediterranean; Canada; Caribbean, Americas and the Atlantic; India; Pacific; and South-East Asia.



Commonwealth Parliamentarian of the Year Awards for 2024 announced in New South Wales

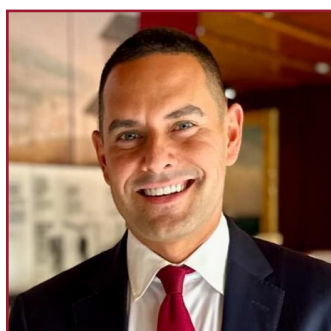
Parliamentarians from Pakistan, Jersey, Guyana and New South Wales were recognised with **Commonwealth Parliamentarian of the Year 2024 Awards** at 67th CPC in New South Wales

Hon. Khurram Ijaz Chattha, MPA, a Member of the Provincial Assembly of Punjab in Pakistan was announced as the recipient of the **2024 Commonwealth Parliamentarian of the Year Award** in recognition of his parliamentary service and promoting good governance.



Hon. Gail Teixeira, MP from the Parliament of Guyana was awarded the **2024 Parliamentarian Life-time Achievement Award** after 32 years of parliamentary service and **Deputy Raluca Kovacs** from the States Assembly in Jersey was awarded the **2024 New Parliamentarian Award** in recognition of her contribution to promoting parliamentary democracy after only being elected two years ago.

Hon. Alex Greenwich, MP from the Parliament of New South Wales was awarded the **2024 Parliamentary Equality and Diversity Award** in recognition of his commitment to LGBT+ Rights, reproductive rights and marriage equality in Australia.



CPA Awards are open to nominees who are current Parliamentarians across the Commonwealth. The next awards will be open for nominees in 2025.

The CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg said: *“The Commonwealth Parliamentarian of the Year Awards aligns with our strategic objective of promoting the Commonwealth values of parliamentary democracy and sustainable development to a wide audience. Through these annual awards, the CPA recognises and highlights the invaluable contributions that Parliamentarians are making to their local communities within the Commonwealth.”*



Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities highlight local rehab centre working with persons with disabilities in New South Wales

The Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) network, led by the **CPwD Chairperson, Hon. Laura Kanushu, MP** (Uganda), highlighted the work of a local rehabilitation centre working with persons living with disabilities. The CPwD Chairperson, accompanied by the Regional Champions of the network, went to the Royal Rehab Ryde, a rehabilitation hospital, in Sydney to see their work and tour the Brain and Spine Injury Units and the Royal Rehab Lifeworks Unit. The visiting CPwD Regional Champions and Members also participated in an interactive demonstration on Wheelchair Basketball and Tennis. The visit was organised through Hon. Liesl Tesch, MP (New South Wales Legislative Assembly) who is the CPwD Regional Champion for the CPA Australia Region. The CPwD Regional Champions also met for their annual governance meeting to set the agenda



of the network for the year ahead and review CPwD activities including the Capital Investment Fund supporting Commonwealth Parliaments to become more accessible.

Delegates at the 67th CPC also joined a workshop on creating inclusive elections for Persons with Disabilities (PWD) which examined practical examples of inclusion during election campaigns and processes and featured CPwD Regional Champions as guest panellists.

Australian Prime Minister addresses delegates at 67th CPC

The Prime Minister of Australia, Hon. Anthony Albanese, MP, spoke to delegates at 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference at Sydney Town Hall and said: *“Democracy is the backbone of our Parliaments. A strength demonstrated in the tremendous diversity and mobilising power of the nations represented at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference. But democracy is more than abstract - it’s about making a positive difference, delivering for people, taking on the big challenges. Challenges like tackling climate change and seizing the economic opportunities of clean energy. Challenges we will take on together. Thank you for the contribution you make to life and the strength of Parliaments around the world.”*



67th COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE – WORKSHOPS:

Conference theme: *‘Engage, Empower, Sustain: Charting the Course for Resilient Democracy’*

At the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, delegates took part in eight learning and development workshops. The workshops provided a space for delegates to share their experiences as Parliamentarians and discuss issues including the use of Artificial Intelligence and technology; the security of MPs; ending human trafficking; combatting discrimination legislation; supporting LGBT+ and people with disabilities to participate in Parliaments and engaging with indigenous peoples. Detailed reports from the workshops will be available in the next issue of *The Parliamentarian*, Journal of Commonwealth Parliaments.

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

Workshop A: Building Bridges: Parliamentary Frameworks for Meaningfully Engaging with Indigenous Peoples (CPA New South Wales Branch Host Topic)

This workshop focused on how Parliamentarians and society can establish and implement frameworks which allow for meaningful engagement with Indigenous peoples. Panellists from Australia, New Zealand and Vanuatu shared their lived experiences and professional expertise in establishing such frameworks. This included ‘The Voice’ referendum in Australia, focusing on Indigenous women in Vanuatu and New Zealand’s example of entrenching Maori rights in their Constitution and wider society. Panellists discussed the difficulties and obstacles they have faced in their fight to get the rights of Indigenous peoples and groups recognised. These were particularly pronounced in jurisdictions that do not have a foundation document, such as a constitution, which expressly acknowledges the existence of Indigenous peoples and their rights. For example, the two Australian panellists reflected on their journey to set up ‘The Voice’ and constitutionally recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This ultimately failed despite being an exercise deeply rooted in community engagement and consultation.



This contrasted with the New Zealand experience in recent years, where it has successfully established a Maori health authority, a national Maori holiday and specific Maori local government seats. However, the panellists also warned about the dangers of introducing change through legislation only, as there is a risk it will be dismantled by a new government with a different

At the end of the session, workshop participants endorsed the recommendation that:

- **Parliamentarians across the Commonwealth have a responsibility to establish and implement parliamentary frameworks which enable active and meaningful engagement with Indigenous Peoples.**

political agenda. Other obstacles included navigating societal and cultural norms, as well as pushback from parts of the community who believed that granting rights or benefits to Indigenous peoples was ‘racist’.

Workshop B: The Use of Artificial Intelligence in Parliamentary Processes and Practices - Opportunities and Challenges

This workshop focused on how Parliaments are implementing Artificial Intelligence (AI) into their processes and practices, and the opportunities and challenges this presents. While many jurisdictions have begun to introduce AI into various aspects of their processes, such as transcribing parliamentary debates and simplifying administrative tasks to improve efficiency, this is in the early stages.

Panellists agreed that AI can undoubtedly bring great opportunities and potential benefits to Parliaments, but cautioned that safeguards must be developed against dangerous and/or unintended consequences, such as the inclusion of bias and ‘fake news’ in AI-produced analysis, leaks of private and sensitive information, and the risk of hacking of AI systems by ‘bad actors’.



Panellists agreed that Parliaments and jurisdictions need to develop the capabilities to take advantage of the benefits that AI can offer while mitigating the potential risks, noting that it is a complex issue and that different responses will be needed based on the individual context of each jurisdiction. Panellists suggested the scrutiny of Parliamentary Committees as an important tool in examining the issue based on their experiences with inquiries in the United Kingdom’s House of Lords and the Canadian Senate. The workshop also featured a presentation on the AI initiative of the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies, which includes AI-powered analysis of citizens’ opinions on Bills, as well as AI summarisation of Bills and parliamentary speeches.

Participants of the workshop agreed that there are risks with the use of AI in parliamentary processes and supported a participant’s suggestion that the CPA create a Steering Committee on the use of Artificial Intelligence in Parliaments.

At the end of the session, workshop participants endorsed the recommendation that:

- **Parliaments should encourage the sharing of best practice and lessons learned from integrating Artificial Intelligence into parliamentary processes and practices, and consider the creation of a CPA Steering Committee on the use of Artificial Intelligence in Parliaments.**



Workshop C: Violence and Abuse of Parliamentarians: Case Studies from the Commonwealth

Parliamentarians carry out a crucial role in democracy. Threats to their safety impact not only their physical and mental wellbeing but also their ability to speak openly and freely in the democratic systems they work in. This workshop considered issues of violence towards and the abuse of Parliamentarians, the changing trends in such behaviour, their impacts on individual welfare and the wider society, and which cohorts are more vulnerable. Panellists spoke on the topic from Pakistan, Kenya, the United Kingdom and Compassion in Politics.



The discussion highlighted both the presence of combative political climates and the rise of online platforms and social media as factors contributing to modern abusive behaviour towards Parliamentarians. Social media, ‘fake news’, Artificial Intelligence and cyberbullying are some examples of threats in the online space. These can impact on the mental health of those targeted; however, they can also cross over into threats to physical safety. Moreover, they may foster a wider climate of distrust and fear of speaking out in public and in democratic institutions.

The workshop discussed those cohorts who are vulnerable to abuse, especially women and other marginalised communities. One panellist noted that any conversation about threats against Members of Parliament is also a conversation about gendered violence. Women, historically a silenced cohort, may find themselves again unwilling to speak out of fear for their safety when



elected to public office. Panellists named social media regulation, legislation around truth-telling in politics, less combative debate environments in Parliament and policies targeting misogyny as potential solutions to the issue of abuse.

The recommendation was amended by inserting the words “and legal” into the original proposed recommendation.

At the end of the session, workshop participants endorsed the recommendation that:

- **Parliaments of the Commonwealth should be committed to providing robust security measures for Members and their staff, adaptable to changing political landscapes, and supplemented by adequate and accessible medical, physical, mental health and legal support.**



Workshop D: How can Legislatures Best Support and Promote LGBT+ Participation?

The workshop focused on how Legislatures can promote and encourage a positive environment for the political engagement of LGBT+ voices in the democratic process. Panellists were from Belize, Victoria (Australia), the Cook Islands and UNDP.

Panellists discussed the importance of a diverse range of voices and experiences in both the membership of Legislatures and in the views presented to them through political engagement. The panel discussion highlighted the need to acknowledge different LGBT+ perspectives and encourage diverse representation. Panellists agreed that without LGBT+ participation, legislation and policies may overlook critical social perspectives and experiences.



The workshop highlighted the challenges some jurisdictions face in supporting and promoting LGBT+ participation. Workshop participants spoke about some societal and cultural norms being 'less welcoming' of LGBT+ participation, making it politically challenging for some Legislatures to support the LGBT+ community.

Panellists agreed that inclusive and equal political systems are fundamental to sustainable legislative development, noting the value of meaningful engagement, open dialogue and participation between parliamentary and LGBT+ communities. While there was recognition that some jurisdictions had made significant progress in this space, there was a general consensus

that most jurisdictions could do more to support and promote LGBT+ participation. Other key themes that were raised by workshop participants included the economic cost of inclusion and exclusion, the role of the CPA in supporting and promoting LGBT+ participation, and the impact of cultural and religious resistance to LGBT+ participation in some jurisdictions.



At the end of the session, workshop participants endorsed the recommendation that:

- **Political actors across the Commonwealth have a responsibility to listen to the voices of LGBT+ citizens and support their meaningful participation in the democratic process.**

Workshop E: Human Trafficking, Refugees and Immigration across the Commonwealth: Open Doors or Building Walls?

This workshop focused on the complex opportunities and challenges presented by immigration, displacement and the movement of people throughout the world, including the particular issues associated with human trafficking as well as the unprecedented number of refugees.



Panellists highlighted how different countries have responded to these challenges in unique ways, and the critical role to be played by Parliamentarians in implementing change at the local level.

Panellists from Canada (Ontario), Kirabati, Kenya and Australia described the specific nature of some of the challenges presented by human trafficking, the impact of climate change on low lying countries and the migration pressures that result, the various approaches to refugees adopted by different countries, and free movement protocols in Africa. A range of strategies that have been implemented by countries in response to these issues were outlined, including 'migration with dignity' policies, and the wiping of forced or fraudulent debt accumulated through trafficking.

The implications of the distinction between migration and refugee processes, including the challenges and benefits associated with people movement within each of these systems were also discussed, as well as where changes may be needed in order to adequately respond to contemporary challenges.



A number of suggestions were also made which are to be taken to the CPA Secretary-General for further action.

At the end of the session, workshop participants endorsed the amended recommendation that:

- **All movements of people within the Commonwealth should be free from exploitation, within the framework of the Global Compact on Refugees, and Global Compact on Migration, and align with the commitment to universal human rights in the Commonwealth Charter.**

Workshop F: Benchmarking, Standards and Guidelines: Strengthening the Institution of Parliaments through the Adoption of Best Practice

This workshop focused on discussions around how the Commonwealth could explore benchmarking tools, standards and guidelines to improve good governance and strengthen Parliamentary institutions.

Panellists from India, Guyana, KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa), Deakin University and the Rule of Law Section at the Commonwealth Secretariat discussed the importance of benchmarking in building institutions that function effectively and are resilient to the



complexities of modern governance. In discussing why benchmarks are relevant, it was noted that they demonstrate commitment to democratic values and foster transparency around parliamentary processes, which in turn builds public trust.

The CPA has 132 benchmarks which have been developed since 2006. Thirty Legislatures have undertaken assessments since the benchmarks were updated in 2018. Panellists provided examples of supported self-assessment processes that have taken place in different Parliaments around the world. While a report with recommendations is developed by the CPA Secretariat, it is up to each individual Parliament to implement the recommendations. The recommendations can serve as an opportunity for self-reflection and a roadmap for change, regardless of whether or not they are implemented.

Panellists reinforced the relevance of establishing appropriate codes of conduct, which are complementary to and act as ethical standards supporting the benchmarks. Codes of conduct establish clear expectations and sanctions, and therefore set a high bar for accountability. It was highlighted that any benchmarks and codes of conduct should be flexible so that they can be adapted to different Legislatures.

Following the presentations, the panellists answered questions on the practical challenges of adopting benchmarks, including those related to digitalisation and the emergence of social media, and preserving democracy in the face of change.

At the end of the session, workshop participants endorsed the recommendation that:

- **Commonwealth Parliaments should commit to exploring relevant benchmarking tools, standards and guidelines, including but not limited to the CPA Democratic Benchmarks, that can be adapted and implemented within their respective Parliaments to strengthen their institutions and promote good governance.**

Workshop G: Combatting Discriminatory Legislation: 365 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence (Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Topic)

This workshop examined the role that Parliamentarians and Governments have in combatting discriminatory legislation, particularly that which negatively impacts women and girls, and the challenges that come with addressing persistent gender inequalities and enacting gender-responsive laws. Discussions focused on the unique ways that different countries have responded to those challenges, and addressed how the CPA membership and international organisations like UN Women could contribute to developing best practice.

Panellists from New Zealand, The Maldives, Australia and UN Women highlighted the current trends regarding the rights of women and girls in their jurisdictions. Each presented specific examples of initiatives that have been undertaken to address discriminatory laws on marriage and divorce, inheritance, welfare benefits, gender-based violence and the gender pay gap, such as the passing of Bills or resolutions, convening of subject matter Committees and unannounced visits to relevant agencies to assess work against human rights principles. All jurisdictions are experiencing similar issues, to a greater or lesser extent, and all panellists acknowledged that, despite the many successes, there is still much work to be done. Impediments to the swifter implementation of law reform include insufficient data collection due to weak reporting mechanisms, inadequate education of the public on the relevant issues and ineffective communication of legislative change, as well as the costs and difficulties typically associated with making change. At the conclusion of the presentations and the Chair's comments, participants from India, Pakistan, South Africa and Canada shared the progress their respective jurisdictions have made with respect to addressing discriminatory legislation.



At the end of the session, workshop participants endorsed the recommendation that:

- **Legislatures across the Commonwealth should ensure that they have CEDAW-compliant policies and legislation in place to effectively tackle all forms of harassment, discrimination and abuse.**

Workshop H: Creating Inclusive Elections for Persons with Disabilities (PwD) (Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities Topic)

This workshop addressed the critical need for inclusivity in the electoral process, exploring the challenges faced by different groups in society and proposing actionable strategies to ensure that all persons with disabilities can participate fully in elections. 2024 has been named the 'Year of Elections', with a record number of elections taking place and so many Commonwealth jurisdictions have faced these challenges in recent months. Panellists from Uganda, Malaysia and Scotland provided examples from each of their jurisdictions as to how their Parliaments had tackled these challenges and suggested inclusive processes in order to provide increased inclusivity. A virtual

panellist from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) also provided relevant examples from election monitoring and technical assistance activities in North America, Europe and Central Asia.

Electoral accessibility is for everyone, and no member of society should feel excluded from the democratic process. Through the presentations, discussions and shared experiences, the workshop helped to raise awareness, generate solutions and foster collaboration among stakeholders committed to enhancing accessibility to elections for persons with disabilities. Elections are a cornerstone of democratic practices in the Commonwealth and across the world, yet individuals with disabilities often face significant barriers that hinder their ability to participate in elections equally.



At the end of the session, workshop participants endorsed the recommendation that:

- **Commonwealth Parliaments should commit to integrating technological solutions and adjustments to allow for inclusive participation in electoral processes and practices for all persons living with disabilities.**

World Café Session: Solving contemporary challenges in the Commonwealth

The World Café at the 67th CPC was an opportunity for discussions about contemporary challenges faced in the Commonwealth, focused around five different topics: including challenges to global stability; addressing the colonial past; the Sustainable Development Goals; corporate lobbying against climate change; and assisted dying and human rights. Discussion leaders from Pakistan, the British Virgin Islands, Malawi, Fiji and Jersey guided the individual group discussions to generate collective ideas to address these issues. Participants were given the opportunity to circulate between the topics in small groups to share real world experiences from their jurisdictions as well as considering what a common goal could look like.

There was discussion about the importance for Parliamentarians to work toward common goals when faced with a challenge, particularly conflicts and challenges to global stability. The need to join together as individuals, putting state policy to one side was highlighted. This may not be effective in solving conflict that is raging, but there is the potential to learn and resolve issues before they become conflicts. A collective movement is required when solving contemporary challenges faced in the Commonwealth. Another discussion looked at how some communities are still experiencing colonialism in real time. The group agreed that the acknowledgement of the continued presence of colonialism should be a starting point before considering any reparations. This should then be followed by adequate education on its legacy.

Recommendations: Most groups expressed how the CPA could be a catalyst for change. The CPA can be a sounding board to generate ideas and share successful initiatives. Parliamentarians may then be better equipped to canvas and influence innovative ways to resolve problems in their respective countries.

40th CPA SMALL BRANCHES CONFERENCE

Theme: 'Building a Sustainable and Innovative Future for CPA Small Branches'

Commonwealth Parliamentarians met at the 40th CPA Small Branches Conference to examine practical solutions for building a sustainable and innovative future for the smallest jurisdictions. The conference discussed strategies to meet the unique developmental needs of the CPA's smallest Legislatures through key thematic workshops that helped to build parliamentary capacity for Members and parliamentary staff while also creating greater opportunities for the sharing of knowledge, parliamentary strengthening and cooperation across the network.

The **outgoing CPA Small Branches Chairperson, Joy Burch, MLA, Speaker of the Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly** said: *"The CPA Small Branches Conference helps to build capacities for the small Parliaments and Legislatures of the Commonwealth and create greater and more constant opportunities for the sharing of knowledge and cooperation across the CPA network. The CPA Small Branches come together to address their common difficulties, common strengths and their shared experiences."*

The CPA Small Branches Conference included four plenary sessions exploring key themes proposed by the Membership. The CPA Small Branches network also elected **Hon. Valerie Woods, MNA, Speaker of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of Belize** as the new CPA Small Branches Chairperson at the conference.

In the margins of the conference, the CPA Small Branches Steering Committee met to discuss the strategic direction for the network. Of the almost 180 Branches of the CPA, fifty Branches

are classified as 'Small Branches'. The classification for CPA Small Branches was changed by the CPA General Assembly in 2022 to raise the population threshold to one million people. The 40th CPA Small Branches Conference took place as part of the wider 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia.



CPA Small Branches Workshop A: Strengthening Parliaments Through Twinning

This workshop discussed the value of parliamentary twinning, with a focus on the twinning programmes between Australian and Pacific Legislatures. Panellists from New South Wales, Solomon Islands, Kiribati and Bougainville discussed their experiences with twinning, including the benefits, challenges and resourcing considerations.

Generally, Parliaments agreed that twinning offers significant value to both Members and parliamentary staff, helping to strengthen relationships over the long term. The New South Wales Parliament, which is twinned with the National Parliament of Solomon Islands and the Bougainville House of Representatives, has worked with their Pacific colleagues since 2007

on a range of initiatives, including Standing Order reviews, skills relating to Committee inquiries and drafting reports as well as Member inductions. The Parliament of Kiribati has also had a very productive twinning relationship with the ACT Legislative Assembly, including procedural support provided to Members. The important role played by the CPA in supporting the twinning relationships was noted.

Speakers agreed that even without direct funding, opportunities can be harnessed to continue to strengthen relationships and provide support. For example, Parliaments could seek support from other agencies outside of formal twinning arrangements, such as the United Nations Development Programme.

Panellists noted that the success of the twinning programme depends on goodwill, commitment, time and resourcing. This commitment is seen as more important than formal partnership agreements.

At the end of the session, workshop participants endorsed the recommendation that:

- **Parliaments should explore the potential to establish twinning arrangements with another CPA Branch to build upon cross-parliamentary relationships.**



CPA Small Branches Workshop B: Accelerating Digital Innovation for Resilience and Growth in Small Jurisdictions

The workshop focused on how small jurisdictions in the Commonwealth can leverage technology through innovation, whilst facing unique and compounding challenges such as smaller populations and economies, climate change and technological barriers.

Panellists from Jersey, Maldives and Cayman Islands highlighted local digital initiatives through Government which encouraged digital innovation whilst responding and adapting to challenges unique to their jurisdictions. Several key themes emerged from the panel discussion, such as investing in upskilling the population in the use of new technology, innovation as a means of improving access to services, and tackling key challenges such as ageing populations, natural disasters, lack of digital infrastructure, COVID-19 and diversifying small economies.



Delegates were told that the costs of implementing new technologies and systems could be high but that the benefits outweighed the costs, given the success and improved accessibility of government services and the potential for economic growth. Nonetheless, the discussion also emphasised balancing innovation and economic growth with building resilience and fostering social well-being.

At the end of the session, workshop participants endorsed the recommendation that:

- **Together, the CPA Small Branches network and the Parliaments of the Commonwealth should explore and engage with practical strategies to accelerate digital innovations that build resilience, drive economic growth and foster social well-being.**

CPA Small Branches Workshop C: Balancing Tradition and Innovation: Modernising the Westminster System in Small Jurisdictions

The workshop focused on discussions about how the Commonwealth's smallest jurisdictions balance both tradition and innovation within the Westminster System.

Across the Commonwealth's small jurisdictions, there is a wide range of adaptations of the Westminster System. Examples range from the multi-level governance system of Canada's Northwest Territories to the tiny Niue Assembly in the Pacific that maintains a system of village-based decision making.



There was discussion of the role of elected representatives and how it intersects with the electorate's will, and how these smaller Westminster Parliaments have innovated and modernised their processes to enhance participation through scrutiny, engagement and technology. These modernisation processes must also be balanced with preserving the traditions of the indigenous cultures and communities of which the Parliament represents.

One discussion focused on the challenges of the Westminster System in small Legislatures. For example, the Niue Assembly has a culture of village-based decision making by consensus. This is in contrast to Westminster voting processes. The challenge of parliamentary oversight when all Members of the Parliament are also Government Ministers, who also have Committee duties was also discussed.

Another discussion looked at how a Parliament with no parties can have a government and an opposition. The panellists cited the challenges faced by those who have attempted to establish political parties but have ultimately failed. Instead, each Member of Parliament typically votes in accordance with their electorate's will, either voting with the government or against, with no party lines. This involves more voices during debates, which was noted as a positive aspect.

At the end of the session, workshop participants endorsed the recommendation that:

- **Parliament should continue to adapt and innovate to strengthen their governance systems, while ensuring these efforts respect and engage with tradition and local context.**



CPA Small Branches Workshop D/CWP Workshop B: Gender and National Climate Planning: moving from commitment to scalable action (Joint CPA Small Branches and CWP Workshop)

This workshop explored the intersection of gender equality and climate change. While everyone is impacted by climate change, each person faces different impacts based on gender and other social vulnerabilities. Women will experience greater impacts, which will potentially worsen existing gender inequalities.

Panellists highlighted how drivers of gender inequality lead to unequal exposure to the effects of the climate crisis and natural hazards. However, they warned against treating women as ‘just victims’ in climate action planning as women can be powerful agents of change.



This important role of women to drive climate action is largely recognised across most Commonwealth jurisdictions. Panellists from smaller island nations highlighted how gender is factored into their National Climate Plans and policies. There is a need to increase participation and representation of women in decision-making and climate planning.

Panellists also emphasised the uneven climate change impacts that small island nations face. Although they bear the smallest responsibility for the climate crisis, their nations are already facing the worst impacts of climate change. Panellists also highlighted examples of the programmes and projects that have been implemented from their National Climate Plans. These nations must continue to advocate for global climate action while progressing their own national plans.

Delegates proposed amending the recommendation to recognise that Parliamentarians do not make decisions about accessing climate financing and mainstreaming gender in climate plans. Rather, Parliamentarians are tasked with advocating to the Executive for action.

A delegate also proposed amendments to reflect gender mainstreaming already occurs but should be increased. Both of these amendments were agreed to.

At the end of the session, workshop participants endorsed the recommendation that:

- **Parliaments should advocate for the further mainstreaming of gender into National Climate Plans.**

8th COMMONWEALTH WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS (CWP) CONFERENCE

Theme: “Engaging, Promoting and Retaining Women in Power”.



Women Parliamentarians from across the Commonwealth held their 8th Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Conference in Sydney, New South Wales to discuss women’s representation in Parliaments, gender sensitisation and quotas amongst a wide range of topics. The CWP Conference brought together Members of Parliament to discuss equal representation in Parliaments through a series of workshops and governance meetings including four learning and development workshops for delegates.

The CWP Conference was opened by the CWP Chairperson, Hon. Dr Zainab Gimba, MP, Member of the House of Representatives at the National Assembly of Nigeria who welcomed delegates. The CWP President (2024), Ms Lynda Voltz, MP (New South Wales) spoke to the CWP conference about her experience as a legislator. Over 100 Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians and delegates attended the conference which saw leading figures in Commonwealth Parliaments addressing delegates and included four wide-ranging sessions.

The CWP Business meeting updated on the CWP network’s activities during the previous year and the plans for the year ahead.





Ahead of the 8th CWP Conference, the CWP Steering Committee met to discuss activities as well as key themes for future conferences and meetings. The CWP Steering Committee elected Hon. Kate Doust, MLC from the Parliament of Western Australia as the CWP Vice-Chairperson for another one-year term.

The CWP Conference was previously triennial (every three years) but in 2023,

CWP Members agreed to hold an annual conference to be held in the margins of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

At the opening of the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, Women Speakers and Presiding Officers from Belize, Quebec, St Lucia, Bermuda, Grenada, Trinidad and Tobago, Tasmania, Australia Federal, Victoria, British Virgin Islands, Malawi and Anguilla were pictured together.



CWP Workshop A: Promoting the Political Participation of Young Women and Girls

The workshop sought to respond to the question ‘why are there so few young women in political leadership?’ by highlighting some of the current challenges that girls and young women face when trying to engage with and participate in politics. Key challenges included the perception of a woman’s role, a lack of visible representation of women in Parliament and inadequate access to education and training.

Panellists from Pakistan, Canada, India and Australia also shared examples of current initiatives and strategies in their jurisdiction which seek to increase the participation and representation of girls and young women in political leadership. Many of these programmes provide future leaders with training to build confidence, attain skills and cultivate networks. The panel discussion also emphasised the importance of retention, noting that while entering the field of politics may be one particular challenge, creating an environment which encourages women to stay is another.

At the end of the session, workshop participants noted the recommendation that:

- **Parliaments should have effective strategies in place to promote the political participation of girls and young women, including collaboration with civil society organisations.**

CWP Workshop B/CPA Small Branches Workshop D: Gender and National Climate Planning: moving from commitment to scalable action (Joint CPA Small Branches and CWP Workshop)

This workshop explored the intersection of gender equality and climate change. While everyone is impacted by climate change, each person faces different impacts based on gender and other social vulnerabilities. Women will experience greater impacts, which will potentially worsen existing gender inequalities.

Panellists highlighted how drivers of gender inequality lead to unequal exposure to the effects of the climate crisis and natural hazards. However, they warned against treating women as ‘just victims’ in climate action planning as women can be powerful agents of change.



This important role of women to drive climate action is largely recognised across most Commonwealth jurisdictions. Panellists from smaller island nations highlighted how gender is factored into their National Climate Plans and policies. There is a need to increase participation and representation of women in decision-making and climate planning.

Panellists also emphasised the uneven climate change impacts that small island nations face. Although they bear the smallest responsibility for the climate crisis, their nations are already facing the worst impacts of climate change. Panellists also highlighted examples of the programmes and projects that have been implemented from their National Climate Plans. These nations must continue to advocate for global climate action while progressing their own national plans.

Delegates proposed amending the recommendation to recognise that Parliamentarians do not make decisions about accessing climate financing and mainstreaming gender in climate plans. Rather, Parliamentarians are tasked with advocating to the Executive for action.

A delegate also proposed amendments to reflect gender mainstreaming already occurs but should be increased. Both of these amendments were agreed to.

At the end of the session, workshop participants endorsed the recommendation that:

- **Parliaments should advocate for the further mainstreaming of gender into National Climate Plans.**



CWP Workshop C: Future-Proofing Democracy: Innovations in Security and Support for Women Parliamentarians

This workshop examined the physical and psychological safety concerns faced by women Parliamentarians, as well as potential options for innovation and reform that could be explored in order to address these issues.

Panellists discussed the impact of social media use and viral internet misinformation on the safety of women Parliamentarians. It was noted that since 2017, there has been a significant increase in threats and physical assaults on women Parliamentarians, which appears in part to be caused by an increase in violent online behaviour. Panellists discussed options to address these concerns, including the use of Artificial Intelligence to identify the source of information and requiring social media companies to remove threatening language or content.

Panellists also discussed what approaches different jurisdictions have taken to protect the physical safety of women in light of serious threats and attacks, including undertaking security reviews and the use of duress alarms and escape rooms. However, it was also noted that precautions of this kind are often challenging, given the need for Parliamentarians to be available and accessible to their constituency.



The workshop canvassed what options are available to improve parliamentary culture and specifically, the Westminster system, to move away from an adversarial, conflict-based approach and towards a more collaborative and value-led system. Panellists also discussed what options are available within current systems, such as leveraging existing legislation and parliamentary processes in a way that seeks to improve the safety of women Parliamentarians

At the end of the session, workshop participants endorsed the recommendation that:

- **Commonwealth Parliaments should with the support of experts put in place protective measures that address the multifaceted security challenges that Women Parliamentarians face.**



CWP Workshop D: The Retention of Women in Parliaments: How to Keep Women in Politics?

This workshop examined the challenges faced by women Parliamentarians and how these impact on women remaining in politics. While the focus, to date, has often been on encouraging women to enter politics, proactively exploring efforts to retain women Parliamentarians is important if we are to reach near equal representation.

Discussions focused on some of the main reasons women Parliamentarians leave politics, including toxic and abusive cultures and a lack of support for caregiving roles, particularly for parents of young children. Also discussed was the increasing prevalence of deepfakes, cyberbullying and nonconsensual distribution of intimate images, which especially impacted women Parliamentarians.



A range of initiatives to support the retention of women in Parliaments were canvassed. For example, enabling hybrid participation in parliamentary activities could help support women with caregiving responsibilities to maintain a better work/life balance.

Anti-harassment policies, proxy voting and on-site childcare could also play a role. Practical approaches to addressing online harm were also discussed, including the importance of referring instances of online abuse to the appropriate authorities, wherever possible.

While politics is a competitive arena, the workshop agreed that women Parliamentarians needed to work together across party lines to support and celebrate each other, to address the barriers that prevent women from staying in politics and to work towards a common agenda.

At the end of the session, workshop participants endorsed the recommendation that:

- **Parliaments should proactively explore all necessary measures and support systems to allow Parliamentarians to undertake their term in office.**

58th GENERAL MEETING OF THE SOCIETY-OF-CLERKS-AT-THE-TABLE (SoCATT) IN COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTS

The 58th Meeting of the Society-of-Clerks-at-the-Table (SoCATT) took place in the margins of the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) in New South Wales.

The meeting brought together Parliamentary Clerks and parliamentary staff from Commonwealth Parliaments to discuss the latest legislative practices and to share best practice.



The meeting was jointly chaired by Mr David Blunt, Clerk of the Parliaments of New South Wales and Honorary Secretary / Treasurer of the CPA New South Wales Branch and Ms Helen Minnican, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales.

Presentations were made during the two-day meeting by a number of different Parliamentary Clerks on a wide range of subjects including: citizen participation in Parliament; Parliamentary oversight of Executive undertakings; Parliamentary reform; Parliamentary privilege; initiatives to promote transparency; digital democracy; the impact of legislators in managing natural disasters; reconciliation with indigenous peoples and Legislative Assemblies; the development of relations between Parliaments and the CPA's work on Standards for Codes of Conduct in the Parliamentary workplace.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Society's accounts for 2023 and proposals for the agenda for the 59th SoCATT General Meeting to be held in Barbados in 2025 were agreed.

Please note that SoCATT has a separate administration to the CPA.
Visit http://www.societyofclerks.org/SCAT_Home.asp for further details.

-ENDS-

Issued by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Headquarters Secretariat on 9 November 2024 following the conclusion of the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC).

This document contains the Conference Concluding Statement for the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) which took place in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia from 3 to 8 November 2024, hosted by the Parliament of New South Wales and the CPA New South Wales Branch. The statement is also available at the CPA website: www.cpahq.org.

To catch up on all of the news from the 67th CPC – please visit the CPA website and social media hashtag #67CPC.

Images from the events of the 67th CPC are available at the CPA's Flickr page.

Image credits: Parliament of New South Wales/CPA Headquarters Secretariat/CPA Branches.

A full round up of all of the conference news and workshop reports from the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) in New South Wales will appear in *The Parliamentarian: Conference Issue* out in December 2024.

The Parliamentarian, the Journal of Commonwealth Parliaments is available to Members of Parliament and parliamentary staff through their CPA Branch Secretaries (print and digital editions) or to individuals and organisations by subscription. Email editor@cpahq.org for details about *The Parliamentarian*.

With thanks to the Rapporteurs team from the Parliament of New South Wales for assistance in compiling these reports.

Please contact the CPA Headquarters Secretariat if you require any further information about the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

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**67th Commonwealth
Parliamentary Conference**
3-8 November 2024 | Sydney, Australia

A graphic consisting of several blue, curved lines of varying lengths, arranged to suggest a stylized '67' or a series of upward-pointing arrows.

**67th COMMONWEALTH
PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE
NEW SOUTH WALES
3 to 8 NOVEMBER 2024**

CONFERENCE CONCLUDING STATEMENT

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