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Calendar of Forthcoming Events
Confirmed as of 6 March 2017

2017

March


April

1 to 5 April  IPU General Assembly, Dhaka, Bangladesh
25 to 27 April  Mid-Year CPA Executive Committee Meeting 2017, Darwin, Northern Territory, Australia

May

15 to 19 May  International Professional Development Programme for Parliamentary Staff (Residency Seminar) - Montréal, Québec, Canada. For more information on this programme, please contact the CPA Secretariat at hq.sec@cpahq.org.

July

1 to 3 July  CPA Post-Election Seminar for the Parliament of Tanzania, Dodoma, Tanzania
18 to 22 July  Parliamentary Staff Development Workshop for the CPA Africa Region, Lusaka, Zambia

The publication of a Calendar of Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) events is a service intended to foster the exchange of events and activities between Regions and Branches and the encouragement of new ideas and participation. Further information may be obtained from the Branches concerned or the CPA Secretariat. Branch Secretaries are requested to send notice of the main CPA events and conferences to hq.sec@cpahq.org in advance of the publication deadline to ensure the Calendar is accurate.

Further information can also be found at www.cpahq.org or by emailing hq.sec@cpahq.org.
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A COLLABORATIVE COMMONWEALTH: UNITY, DIVERSITY AND COMMON CHALLENGES

The Editor’s Note

Commonwealth Parliamentarians focus on what unites them to find global solutions at 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference

Over 400 Commonwealth Parliamentarians from across the world gathered in London, United Kingdom from 11 to 17 December 2016 for the 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (62nd CPC), hosted by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Headquarters Secretariat.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference is the annual conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA). 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 the Afro-Asian and South-East Asia.

The CPA reaches all 52 countries of the Commonwealth as well as national, sub-national, devolved and territorial Parliaments and Legislatures bringing together over 180 CPA Branches of the Association.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association organises its annual Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) where global political issues and developments in the parliamentary system are analysed in conference debates among leading Parliamentarians representing Parliaments and Legislatures throughout the Commonwealth. These plenary conferences were biennial from 1948 to 1959 and annual since 1961. A summary of the main views expressed in conference debates is published in the Conference Concluding Statement which is sent to Members, Commonwealth governments and international agencies. The following CPA Branches have hosted Commonwealth Parliamentary Conferences in recent years: 2014 Cameroon; 2013 South Africa; 2012 Sri Lanka; 2011 United Kingdom; 2010 Kenya; 2009 Tanzania; 2008 Malaysia; 2007 India.

The main conference theme for 2016 at the annual event held in London, United Kingdom was: A Collaborative Commonwealth: Unity, Diversity and Common Challenges. Workshops and debates were held during the conference on a wide range of topics including the role of the Commonwealth in fostering freedom of religion or belief; ending violence against women and girls; the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); Climate Change; and the radicalisation of young people. Conference reports from all of the main workshops and sessions appear in this issue of The Parliamentarian and our thanks go to all of the Conference Reporteers from across the Commonwealth who have assisted the CPA Headquarters Secretariat with capturing the reports that feature in this publication.

The Chairperson of the CPA International Executive Committee, Hon. Dr Shirin Shamim Chaudhury, MP, Speaker of the Parliament of Bangladesh, urged Commonwealth Parliamentarians to work together to find concrete solutions to global issues as she opened the 62nd CPC. The Chairperson welcomed Parliamentarians from across the Commonwealth on behalf of the CPA at the opening ceremony and said: “The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) provides a unique platform for inter-parliamentary dialogue to take place. The diverse nature of the membership provides the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association with a unique position within the parliamentary community to offer a comprehensive perspective on how to strengthen parliamentary democracy and a wealth-wide and discuss new and innovative approaches on how to do so.” To read the full text of the CPA Chairperson’s opening speech at the 62nd CPC please turn to page 6.

The opening ceremony of the 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference heard from the Secretaries-General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and 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.” To read the full text of the CPA Secretary-General’s keynote plenary at the 62nd CPC please turn to page 8.

The Commonwealth Secretary-General, Rt Hon, Patricia Scotland QC said: “The Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference is like a beacon. It buzzes with politicians whose work will result in fruit throughout the Commonwealth. Thanks to Commonwealth Parliamentarians coming together, law reform and progressive social and economic development are accelerated. Exchanges of knowledge and expertise lead to institutions of governance being strengthened, while respect and goodwill within the rich diversity of Commonwealth identity helps build a safer, more prosperous and more inclusive future for us all.” To read the full text of the Commonwealth Secretary-General’s speech at the 62nd CPC please turn to page 12.

The Mistress of Ceremonies for the opening ceremony was Hon. Lindiwe Maseko, MP (South Africa) who welcomed all delegates before introducing the Commonwealth Youth Choir who performed both the Commonwealth Anthem and the Commonwealth Song under the conductorship of Simon-Haw MBE, the Commonwealth Music Ambassador 2016-2018. During the 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, there were a number of additional conferences and meetings including CPA Executive Committee; CPA General Assembly and Society of Clerks-at-the-Table (SOCATT) Meetings.

The 8th triennial Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Conference (CWP) Conference was held on 14 and 15 December 2016 with over 100 Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians attending the conference from 43 countries and 56 Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Branches across the Commonwealth. Reports of the CWP conference sessions can be found on pages 28 to 55.

The 39th CPA Small Branches Conference was held on 13 December 2016 with forty-seven Members of Parliaments and Legislatures from 26 CPA Small Branches attending the conference. The reports of this conference appear on pages 58 to 94.

The Executive Committee of the CPA met ahead of the 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in London, UK. The CPA Executive Committee represents the nine regions of the CPA. The Executive Committee is chaired by Hon. Dr Shirin Shamim Chaudhury MP, Speaker of the Parliament of Bangladesh. During the 62nd CPC, a meeting of the CPA Regional Secretaries also took place.

Alongside the substantive conference workshops and the CPA governance meetings, the 62nd CPC also saw a number of additional events. Delegates at the conference also had the opportunity to attend the CPA Caribbean, Americas and the Atlantic Regional Hot Topic Forum on the ‘hot topic’ of the region - Seeking to increase Women’s Political Participation. The CPA Regional ‘Hot Topic’ Forum heard from a number of distinguished speakers. The CPA Regional ‘Hot Topic’ Forums bring together not only Commonwealth Parliamentarians, but also academics, students, civil society organisations and the wider Commonwealth family. Please turn to page 67 to read about the CPA Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Regional ‘Hot Topic’ Forum that took place in the margins of the 62nd CPC.

The inaugural Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Lecture was held alongside the 62nd CPC with former Lord Speaker of the UK Parliament’s House of Lords, Rt Hon. Baroness D’Souza CMG PC, who spoke of the Commonwealth’s enduring political values that bring challenges and opportunities for Commonwealth Parliamentarians. The theme for the new Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Lecture Series is ‘The Promotion and Implementation of the Commonwealth’s enduring political values - Challenges and Opportunities!’ Please turn to page 66 to read about the CPA’s inaugural lecture.

The United National Development Programme (UNDP) held a workshop event for Commonwealth Parliamentarians on the UN’s Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3: Tobacco Control Frameworks and effective Parliamentary Oversight. Please turn to page 70 to read about the UNDP event.

A lunchtime event was held for Commonwealth Parliamentarians by the Commonwealth Initiative for Freedom of Religion and Belief (CIFoRB) on Engaging Effectively with Freedom of Religion or Belief. Please turn to page 69 to read about the CIFoRB event.

In addition to the reports of the 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, this issue of The Parliamentarian also reports on the 8th Commonwealth Youth Parliament (#CYP8) which was hosted by the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia in Canada from 6 to 10 November 2016. Hon. Linda Reid MLA, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia reports on the events of the 8th Commonwealth Youth Parliament and hosting over 60 young participants representing the different regions of the Commonwealth while Laura Elliot from Wales shares her experiences as a young participant in the CYPB.

The Parliamentary Report and Third Reading section in this issue includes parliamentary and legislative news from Canada Federal, Quebec, India, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Australia States and Territories and the Australia Federal Parliament.

We look forward to hearing your feedback and comments on this issue of The Parliamentarian; on the issues of concern to Parliamentarians across the Commonwealth and to receive your future contributions.

Finally, we would like to wish all of our Members and readers a happy Commonwealth Day 2017 on Monday 13 March. Please do let us know about your celebrations of the day.

Jeffrey Hyland
Editor, The Parliamentarian
director@cpahq.org
A COLLABORATIVE
COMMONWEALTH: UNITY,
DIVERSITY AND COMMON
CHALLENGES

The Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee, Hon. Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury MP, Speaker of the Parliament of Bangladesh gave the opening address at the 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

Master of Ceremony, Hon. Lindingwe Maseko, Commonwealth Secretary-General, RI Hon. Patricia Scotland QC, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Honourable Speakers, Deputy Speakers, Honourable Parliamentarians, Honourable Members of the Executive Committee of Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, distinguished delegates of 62nd CPC, media representatives, friends, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, a very good morning to you all.

I’m deeply honoured to be here and to have the opportunity to speak before this august gathering as the Chairperson of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. We have all gathered here in London this winter morning to celebrate the inauguration of the 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC).

We bring with us a deep commitment to uphold the values of Commonwealth – democracy, development and diversity.

It is an aspiration to build a collaborative Commonwealth – unity, diversity and common challenges – echoed in the theme of this conference. Collaboration is more than hosting events together. It is about true exchange of ideas that can offer innovative solutions to our common problems and challenges.

A collaborative Commonwealth would therefore denote accommodating diversity. Diversity of people and culture is the strength as well as a source of wealth for us.

Commonwealth is the platform to draw upon this diversity and bridge the differences. A collaborative Commonwealth is therefore about creating a common platform to come together to explore diverse ideas and opinions, policies and programmes. It is about addressing, identifying and facing the common challenges together.

It is the diversity of experience that reflects the richness of Commonwealth.

Each Commonwealth country at different stages in its own history and development, when it comes together, it helps to build a trust within the community, within the Commonwealth family of nations, which is the integral part of working effectively towards achieving the common goals.

While it is important to celebrate the diversity of people, of culture, of experience and opinions, it is even more important to be embracing and inclusive of this diversity that leads to the unity of nations.

Valuing diversity is an integral part of unity. Unity requires acknowledging that people are different, countries are different; they stand at different stages of development yet face common challenges and can work together.

The critical challenges of the eradication of poverty, the elimination of inequality, ensuring food security, adapting to climate change, disaster reduction and many more need to be addressed by Parliamentarians of all Commonwealth nations to bring about positive changes in the lives of 2.4 billion people, nearly one third of the world’s population.

Parliamentarians need to come together and join hands in charting out a bright future for the 60% of the Commonwealth that is the youth population. It is time to unite to ensure gender equality. It is for us, the Parliamentarians to reckon how democracy can deliver, in combating emerging challenges posed by globalisation.

The changing pace of globalisation is creating a new order of emerging economics, technology and development. The intricate linkages between national policies and its economy, including trade and finance with that of global markets have brought about new dimensions.

Issues related to energy crisis, the rapid evolution of technology, economic recession, peace and security issues and migration issues transcend national boundaries.

Parliamentarians must take account of changing economic patterns, deepening interdependence and the prospect of creating greater opportunities for human development and social inclusion, as well as the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

Parliamentarians must act to transform and translate their commitments into actions and ensure that democracy delivers in an effectuating manner, and there lies the relevance of Commonwealth.

I would like to conclude with a quote by Robert A. Needham – he’s the author of a book named ‘Collaborative Commonwealth’. In his book he uses the concept of water. I quote; “the essence of any great ocean, river or stream begins with one drop. Drops come in all sizes, shapes and forms – just like people. Each unique drop was created for a purpose and so were you. This purpose will change throughout the life of a drop which is called emergence. Like you, water can be used over and over again to cause its environment to flourish, change, evolve and renew.”

The metaphor of water is used here to show how each individual aligns with others to form streams. Streams then merge to become rivers, which have power and are movements. These rivers merge to create oceans of great potential to accomplish anything they set their thoughts to.

I found a very interesting definition of politics and I would like to share that with you. “Politics is a medium that takes place within language. It is a matter of providing people with the linguistic and rhetorical abilities both to construct their purpose and imagine their future. It is a matter of providing people with the linguistic and rhetorical abilities both to construct their purpose and imagine their future.”

Distinguished delegates, let the language of politics be collaborating with others to bring about positive change.
Mr Akbar Khan, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association gave the keynote plenary at the 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

Master of Ceremony: Honourable Lindiwe Maseko MP, Madam Chairperson, Hon. Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury MP, Speaker of the Parliament of Bangladesh; Honourable Officers of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association; Honourable Members of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association International Executive Committee; The Commonwealth Secretary-General, RI Hon. Patricia Scotland QC; Hon. Speakers, Presiding Officers, Clerks, Branch Secretaries and Heads of Delegations; Members of the Diplomatic Corps; Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen. It is an honour and privilege to welcome you to the 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in London. I am also delighted that we are joined here today by the Commonwealth Secretary General.

Let me also thank Her Majesty The Queen, the Patron of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, for her best wishes for a successful Conference.

The theme of this 62nd CPC is ‘A Collaborative Commonwealth: Unity, Diversity and Common Challenges’. This is indeed pertinent as the CPA, the recognised parliamentary wing of the Commonwealth, reaches its 100th anniversary. From its formation in 1911 as the Empire Parliamentary Association, to its evolution as the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in 1948, the Association has steadily grown to approximately 180 branches representing national, state, provincial and territorial parliaments and legislatures, with a total membership in excess of 17,000 Parliamentarians.

This diversity of Commonwealth legislatures inspired by the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy is underpinned by a shared commitment to the rule of law and individual rights and freedoms, and by the pursuit of the positive ideals of parliamentary democracy. Distinguished delegates, in the Commonwealth, we have large and small States, island and landlocked, developed and developing - augmented by an impressive array of civil societies, professional bodies and voluntary organisations all forming our ‘Commonwealth family’. Some will argue that too much diversity can be destructive of cohesion - as not all differences can be held together - and that some can divide us.

Distinguished delegates, I would argue that some differences make for even deeper unity. This may sound counter-intuitive but as one commentator has observed ‘[everyone] knows that groups don’t have to become identical to each other in order to [seek harmonious]ly together. In fact, it is often precisely the differences that make their [relationship] more interesting and more enduring.”

The fact that CPA embodies diversity; yet shares values of democracy, rule of law and human rights, only serves to strengthen and deepen our unity.

As observed by Lord Howell, a former British Minister of the Commonwealth: ‘the Commonwealth is a creation of self-assembly... it leads to territory that [other] organisations do not reach, and often cannot see. This is its power and its weakness. It is a truly vibrant global family of cultures, economies, societies and political groups, far from perfect but looking in the same direction.”

Distinguished delegates, the question is: how can we use our shared values - the fact that we are all ‘looking in the same direction’ to overcome the challenges of our time that face today’s parliamentary community? Given the limited time, let me just touch on three areas.

The first is backsliding on democracy. The commitment to representative democracy is a distinctive core value of the Commonwealth. Experience tells us it takes time and nurturing for democracy to take firm root. We know that democracy encompasses values of responsibility and accountability where citizens control the political process.

In recent times we have seen two Commonwealth states withdraw from the organisation amidst concerns of a democratic deficit and human rights violations. There have been more instances of the separation of powers being undermined and of powerful Executives ignoring or seeking to use Parliament simply as a ‘rubber stamp’ and where members of the Executive do not attend Parliament in order to avoid being held to account. As with any ‘family’ it is to be expected that from time to time there will be differences of opinion and on occasion, even a breakdown in relationships, but repeated violations of the Commonwealth’s core political values pose a serious challenge to democracy if unchecked.

Respect for the separation of powers and the independent role of Parliament is crucial to the healthy functioning of democracy.

To quote the late Sir Winston Churchill: ‘Democracy is the worst form of government, except all the others that have been tried from time to time.’ His comment may well have been prescient, as the overwhelming evidence today shows that a healthy democracy generally means a stronger economy, higher standard of living and better human rights records. Equally, the public’s trust in its representatives is a fundamental ingredient to a healthy democracy. If Parliamentarians demonstrate high standards of ethics and conduct consistent with their important public interest roles, it enhances public trust and reinforces democracy.

In this context last year, the CPA developed the ‘Recommended Benchmarks for Codes of Conduct applying to Members of Parliament’. Many CPA Branches have adopted these as a good practice guide and are using them to help tackle the public trust deficit in our Parliaments. The Benchmarks for Codes of Conduct state clearly that as public officers, Members of Parliament have a fiduciary relationship with their citizens on whose behalf they act and they are entrusted with responsibility to protect and uphold the common interest of citizens. In other words, they must put the public interest above all others.

This guidance is yet another example of a collaborative Commonwealth identifying unity in diversity to address the common challenge of building public confidence in our Parliaments and Parliamentarians.

The second area is youth. With approximately 60% of the Commonwealth’s 2.4 billion population under the age of 30, we repeatedly see young people being portrayed in the media as disengaged in politics. From my own engagement with young people as Secretary-General, my observation is that young people, far from being disinterested in politics, are increasingly engaged with relevance of their lives and are politically active across social media and other networks.

The challenge is for...
Parliaments to adapt to be more accessible, open and transparent to all citizens including actively engaging young people through greater outreach and the use of digital technology.

This speaks to the need for Parliaments to work harder to capture the views of young people about political issues that are of importance to them. Many Commonwealth Parliaments are stepping up to this challenge through responsive parliamentary outreach - including internship programmes, local youth parliaments and the Universities Model Parliament. Such valuable collaborative initiatives help to bolster and promote the ideals of parliamentary democracy for future generations.

The third area is gender equality. Earlier this year, I heard a Clerk from one of our legislatures describe Parliament as a ‘micromos of society’. Democratic Parliaments gain their legitimacy from their ability to represent all the citizens in their country whether minorities, those with disabilities, women, and the young and old alike. Only through respect for genuine diversity and a willingness to include and embrace different points of view can equitable and inclusive outcomes be achieved for all. This is especially important as Commonwealth parliamentarians consider how best to implement the post-2015 UN Sustainable Development Goals so that no one is left behind.

In practice, this means Parliaments ensuring a diverse composition and achieving equality of participation. Although the Commonwealth Charter recognises gender equality and women’s empowerment as essential components of human development and basic human rights, we continue to see across the Commonwealth measures of low representation of women in Parliaments. In some Parliaments we have no women at all. Recent 2016 figures from LN Women show that although the number of Women Parliamentarians has nearly doubled in the last 20 years, this only translates to 22% of women in national Parliaments today. However, there is reason to remain optimistic. The work of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians has been impressive in supporting greater female representation through:

- inter-generational conferences that encourage young women seeking a more active role in political life;
- Raising important issues like political violence against women; and
- Mentoring programmes to strengthen and inspire female Parliamentarians.

Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians is an excellent example of collaboration leveraging unity in diversity to meet common challenges and to create a gender equal and inclusive Commonwealth.

As Her Majesty The Queen, noted in her Commonwealth message this year: “the willingness to share, to exchange and to act for the common good and by working together; we lay the foundations of a harmonious and progressive society. The greater the diversity of those included in such shared enterprise, the greater the gains.”

Distinguished delegates, I have been Secretary-General for just under one year. It has been a privilege getting to understand the Association; listening to the views of Branches to better serve our membership. Like any organisation that has stood the test of time, it is important to continually adapt to the changing needs of our membership and to demonstrate relevance and value and good governance.

The need for the CPA to continue to strengthen its core programme of work to translate the practical benefits of democratic governance to the peoples of the Commonwealth has never been greater. In this context permit me to express my sincere thanks to all the vibrant CPA Branches that have so generously and warmly welcomed me this year. I have been humbled by their kindness and strengthened in my resolve to quicken the pace of reform and renewal at the CPA Secretariat to achieve the CPA’s truly fit for the 21st century.

As such, this year we have launched a revised CPA Secretariat work programme and I would like to share some highlights with you:

- The CPA Roadshow was launched in March 2016 to connect young people with their elected representatives to discuss diversity, development and democracy. The CPA Roadshow has now reached over 8,000 young people across the Commonwealth.
- In November 2016, we inaugurated the Regional ‘Hot Topics’ Forum in the CPA Asia Region hosted by the Parliament of Pakistan, focussing on ‘Democracies in transition and the challenges they face’.
- At this conference, we will roll out a further strand of work, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Lecture Series; and
- In February 2017, we will launch the flagship programme ‘Parliamentary Fundamentals’ – comprising two accredited professional development programmes on parliamentary governance in association with McGill University, Canada and the University of Whittierstrand, South Africa. These are unique courses, accredited for the first time for the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and demonstrate the pioneering and enduring spirit of our Association.

Distinguished delegates, before closing, I wish to take this opportunity to mark my deep respect and appreciation to the late Hon. Request Muntanga, former Member of the Parliament of Zambia, who sadly passed away earlier this year. A strong advocate of the Association, he shared his vast experience as a Parliamentarian with the CPA, including as CPA Treasurer, Executive Committee Member and Trustee. He is fondly remembered by us all.

I also wish to express my appreciation to the outgoing Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Chairperson, RH Hon. Rebecca Kadaga, Speaker of the Uganda Parliament. Her leadership over the past three years in promoting gender equality and female representation in Parliament has greatly enhanced the CPA’s truly fit for the 21st century.

I also wish to express my appreciation to the outgoing Vice-Chairperson of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Hon. Shirley Osborne MLA, Speaker of the Montserrat Legislative Assembly, and to outgoing Members of the Executive Committee. Over the past year, their individual and collective commitment to supporting the Association has been invaluable.

I wish to thank the Hon. Chairperson, Co-ordinating Committee and Executive Committee for their guidance and patience during the past year as we set the Association on the road to renewal and reinvigoration. The support, advice and wise counsel of the Regional Secretaries and Branch Secretaries to me over this past year has been invaluable – I am incredibly grateful to each of you.

I also wish to express my sincere gratitude the Hon. Speakers of CPA Cayman Islands and Malaysia Branches for demonstrating their commitment to the Association by offering to host the CPC in their respective jurisdictions, for this we are profoundly thankful.

Last but not least, I wish to recognise the CPA Secretariat staff members and several branch volunteers from across the Commonwealth for all their hard work in preparing for this conference. Without their commitment and dedication, we would not be here.

Finally, I wish you all an enjoyable and productive conference which strengthens our networks and nurtures our shared Commonwealth democratic values.
Good morning, Master of Ceremonies, Hon. Maseko; Hon. Chairperson of the CPA, Dr. Shin Chauxthuy; Speaker of the Parliament of Bangladesh; Secretary-General Aikar Khan; Hon. Chairpersons of the Parliamentarians; distinguished guests; Commonwealth friends.

I am absolutely delighted to stand before you today and even more delighted to be on a panel with so many remarkable women, and I just want to note that this may be the first Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in 62 years where you have the Master of Ceremonies as a woman; the Chairperson as a woman; the Secretary-General of the CPA is a woman; and the Commonwealth Secretary-General is a woman. I think that is something we can all be proud of.

I want to also say thank you to each and every one of you, not just for being here today, but having the courage, the fortitude, the strength of being here today, but having the determination and the desire to represent the 2.4 billion people of the Commonwealth that four comers of the world.

So I address you as your Commonwealth Secretary-General, I wish you all a successful and enjoyable Conference. I look forward to celebrating and working with you.

Thank you very much.
62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference
Photo Gallery

Images from the 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference:
A selection of images from the conference appear on these pages. For more images from the conference please visit the CPA Flickr Website at www.cpahq.org/cpahq/flickr where you can view, share and download images. The main group image of delegates from the conference appears on pages 50-51.
**NEWS FROM THE 62ND COMMONWELLTH PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE**

**New CPA Treasurer and Vice-Chairperson elected at the 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference**

During the 62nd CPA General Assembly which took place at the 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, Members of the CPA endorsed the appointment of Hon. Vicki Dunne, MLA, Deputy Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of the Australian Capital Territory as the new CPA Treasurer. The Treasurer, who is a Member of the Association nominated by the Executive Committee, is elected for three years by the General Assembly and works with the CPA Secretary-General and the CPA Headquarters Secretariat to monitor the finances of the Association. The CPA Treasurer also joins the Trustees board of the Association.

Prior to being appointed as the CPA Treasurer, Hon. Vicki Dunne MLA had been the Acting CPA Treasurer since July 2016 following the passing of the late Hon. Request Muntanga and had also previously been a Regional Representative for the Australia Region on the CPA Executive Committee (2013-2016).

The 62nd General Assembly was followed by the new CPA Executive Committee during which Hon. Emilia Monjowa Lifaka, MP, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Cameroon and a Regional Representative for the CPA Africa Region was elected by Members of the Executive Committee to the position of Vice-Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee. The position of Vice-Chairperson is for a term of one year.

The new CPA Treasurer, Hon. Vicki Dunne MLA, is a Member of Parliament from Malaysia whose political career began in 2000 as the Secretary-General of the Young Women’s Wing, who was later elected to lead the movement in 2004. Hon. Dato’ Noraini Ahmad MP was first elected as a Member of Parliament in 2008, representing the constituency of Parit Sulong. She has served as Deputy Minister of the Human Resource Ministry and is currently the Chair of the Malaysia Trade, External Trade Development Corporation (MATRADE).

In the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Hon. Dato’ Noraini Ahmad MP was a Member of Parliament from Malaysia whose political career began in 2000 as the Secretary-General of the Young Women’s Wing, who was later elected to lead the movement in 2004. Hon. Dato’ Noraini Ahmad MP was first elected as a Member of Parliament in 2008, representing the constituency of Parit Sulong. She has served as Deputy Minister of the Human Resource Ministry and is currently the Chair of the Malaysia Trade, External Trade Development Corporation (MATRADE).

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The new CPA Treasurer and Vice-Chairperson elected at the 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

**Newly elected Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Chairperson pledges to increase women’s political participation**

The newly elected Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP), Hon. Dato’ Noraini Ahmad MP (Malaysia) has pledged to renew the effort to increase women’s political participation across the Commonwealth.

The new Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians was elected for a three-year term at the CWP Business Meeting at the fifth triennial conference of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP), which took place in London, United Kingdom as part of the wider 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in December 2016.

The new Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP), Hon. Dato’ Noraini Ahmad MP is a Member of Parliament from Malaysia whose political career began in 2000 as the Secretary-General of the Young Women’s Wing, who was later elected to lead the movement in 2004. Hon. Dato’ Noraini Ahmad MP was first elected as a Member of Parliament in 2008, representing the constituency of Parit Sulong. She has served as Deputy Minister of the Human Resource Ministry and is currently the Chair of the Malaysia Trade, External Trade Development Corporation (MATRADE).

In the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Hon. Dato’ Noraini Ahmad MP was a Member of Parliament from Malaysia whose political career began in 2000 as the Secretary-General of the Young Women’s Wing, who was later elected to lead the movement in 2004. Hon. Dato’ Noraini Ahmad MP was first elected as a Member of Parliament in 2008, representing the constituency of Parit Sulong. She has served as Deputy Minister of the Human Resource Ministry and is currently the Chair of the Malaysia Trade, External Trade Development Corporation (MATRADE).

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Commonwealth Parliamentary Association launches new university accredited CPA Parliamentary Fundamentals Flagship Programme for Commonwealth Parliamentarians

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) advances parliamentary democracy by enhancing knowledge and understanding of democratic governance, and by building an informed parliamentary community, capable of deepening the Commonwealth’s democratic commitment and co-operation among its Parliaments and Legislatures.

To further this objective, the CPA launched its pioneering flagship programme – the CPA Fundamentals Programme on Parliamentary Practice and Procedure - at the 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

This is the first course of its kind and through the new CPA Fundamentals programme, the CPA aims to assist Commonwealth Parliaments in building the capacity of their newly-elected and returning Parliamentarians, by equipping them with:

- Greater depth of knowledge of parliamentary practice and procedure
- Increased in-depth and practical knowledge based on accepted theories and international good practices
- An accredited qualification from an internationally recognised university that will benefit participants for life during and after Parliament.

The programme is interactive and comprehensive, comprising online modules as well as face-to-face contact sessions on-site with our partner universities. This programme aims to develop well-informed, skilled parliamentary leaders, who will go on to contribute to creating strong democratic legislatures that adhere to principles of good governance.

The unique CPA Fundamentals Programme focusing on Parliamentary Practice and Procedure has two main courses, with one course specifically developed for CPA Small Branches. The CPA works closely with Small Branches (jurisdictions of less than 500,000 people) in all Regions of the Commonwealth to identify their particular needs and requirements in parliamentary strengthening, development and cooperation.

The Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Mr Akbar Khan said: “The new CPA Fundamentals Programme on Parliamentary Practice and Procedure, which launched at the 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, will further the aims of the CPA in advancing parliamentary democracy by enhancing knowledge and understanding of democratic governance. We are especially honoured to be working alongside two prestigious Commonwealth universities to provide this flagship programme for our Membership and I’m delighted that we have a course specifically for CPA Small Branches.”

The CPA is be working alongside two Commonwealth universities to provide this flagship programme. The CPA Fundamentals course is provided to Commonwealth Parliamentarians in partnership with University of Witwatersrand in South Africa. The specialised CPA Fundamentals course for CPA Small Branches is delivered to Commonwealth Parliamentarians from CPA Small Branches in partnership with McGill University in Canada, in the form of the Professional Development Certificate in Parliamentary Governance.

The CPA Parliamentary Fundamentals Flagship Programme is now available and any newly elected or returning Commonwealth Parliamentarians interested in these programmes should contact the CPA Headquarters Secretariat via email hq.sec@cpahq.org.

Commonwealth Parliamentarian Association Small Branches

For more information about the work of the CPA in Small Branches visit www.cpahq.org or contact the CPA Headquarters Secretariat via hs.sec@cpahq.org.
THERE IS A ROLE FOR THE COMMONWEALTH IN FOSTERING FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF

Moderator: Hon. Vicki Dunne, MLA, Deputy Speaker of the Legislative Assembly (Australian Capital Territory)

Discussion Leaders:
- Hon. Umar Buba Jibril, MP (Nigeria)
- Baroness Berridge (United Kingdom)
- Hon. Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani, MP (Pakistan)

Rapporteur: Mr Neil Iddawala (Sri Lanka)

Workshop Report:
Freedom of religion or belief is a fundamental human right of the people in a country with a state religion, freedom of religion is generally considered to mean that the government permits religious practices of other faiths and sects besides the state religion, and does not persecute believers in other religions. On 25 November 1981 the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief was passed in the United Nations General Assembly. This declaration recognizes freedom of religion as a fundamental human right in accordance with several other instruments of international law. In 1993, the UN's Human Rights Committee declared that article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights "protects theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief." The Committee further stated that "the freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief necessarily entails the freedom to choose a religion or belief, including the right to replace one's current religion or belief with another or to adopt atheistic views." Signatories to the convention are barred from "the use of threat of physical force or penal sanctions to compel believers or non-believers to recant their beliefs or convert." Despite this, minority religions still are persecuted in many parts of the world.

Religion, Belief and Peace Building
Delegates at the conference discussed the role for the Commonwealth in fostering freedom of religion or belief and they also examined how to improve and support policy directives in the decision-making process in respective legislatures. Although throughout the history, religions or beliefs had contributed more to social change and civilizations, in some contexts, that have led to conflicts. It was noted that "religious" conflicts are not based on religious beliefs exclusively and instead should be seen as clashes of communities, identities and interests.

Religion and peace building refers to the study of religion's role in the development of peace. Scholars generally accept that religion has been, at different points in history, both advantageous and ruinous to the promotion of peace. Religious pluralism is an attitude or policy regarding the diversity of religious beliefs systems co-existing in society. The plurality of religious traditions and cultures has come to characterize every part of the world today. Today, religious diversity is a given, but pluralism is not a given; it is an achievement. More diversity without real encounters and relationships will yield increasing tensions in society.

Some States have adopted secularism as a measure to resolve the conflicts between religions or beliefs. Hon. Umar Buba Jibril, MP (Nigeria) led the discussion by explaining that Muslims and Christians continue to fear discrimination or abuse based on their religious affiliation. Muslim and Christian leaders reported that a lack of trust between members of two faiths continued as a result of the ongoing conflict in the northeast of the country. Some Muslims or Christians who converted to another religion reportedly faced threats and ostracism by adherents of their former religion. Communities sometimes stigmatized those who did not believe in the existence of a divine being. For example, some secular humanists reported that they felt the need to hide their identities and fear religious devotion to avoid threats of violence.

Many religious leaders publicly supported tolerance and interfaith methods of conflict resolution. Some religious leaders reported that distrust between Christian and Muslim communities and discord among groups within the same faith tradition could threaten interfaith efforts. Muslim leaders regularly publicly condemned the activities of Al-Qaeda, ISIS and Boko Haram as un-Islamic and disassociated themselves from the ideology and actions of the group. The terrorist organization Boko Haram has killed thousands of people in indiscriminate acts of violence and attacks deliberately targeting Muslims who spoke out against or opposed their radical ideology.

In Nigeria, the Constitution bars the federal government or state governments from establishing a state religion. It provides for individuals' freedom to choose, practice, propagate or change their religion and prohibits religious discrimination. The rights defined in the Constitution cannot supersede the interests of defense, public safety, order, morality or health, or protecting the rights of others. Finally, Hon. Umar Buba Jibril, MP pointed out that violence related to religions or beliefs is spreading out in many countries, such as Fiji, Nigeria and Pakistan; and the CPA may help to mediate with the proper mechanisms, mainly through capacity building.

Baroness Berridge (United Kingdom) said that she joined with others in celebrating the Magna Carta, which opens with the words: "the English Church shall be free", meaning free from state intervention, which at that time in history, of course, meant free from the King. Freedom of religion or belief, as set out in Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Oslo Declaration on Freedom of Religion or Belief was adopted in 1998 to be given the highest priority. As the UN Special Rapporteur illustrated in his comments to Baroness Berridge: "There is lots of religion in Vietnam but not a lot of it is free." The declaration is founded on individuals enjoying human rights when the state knows how to behave, knows its own limits and understands its role as protector of its citizens' human rights from violation by third parties. In old communist states, such as Vietnam, religion is controlled by the state.

Baroness Berridge spoke of the common violations against Article 18 which include an inappropriate connection between a religious institution or a faith or a stream of one faith, and the state. Often, that institution or faith has such preference from the state that pluralism is suffocated, and, in the extreme, a religion becomes identified with nationality.
is semi-connected to identity, and to see the persecution of a large number of Muslims and Christians.

Who knows what the future holds? Many Governments, Parliamentarians, religious leaders and royalty have, however, grasped the Article 18 issue, and the Pope’s celebrity status at the UN General Assembly in September 2015 is incredibly timely. However, if by 2020 violations have decreased then this will indeed be an achievement through proper training and the leadership of Parliamentarians through the CPA.

Hon. Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani, MP (Pakistan) briefed conference delegates about the need of an attitude change from grass roots level upwards, including a change of school curriculum because in some school text books, non-Muslims are mentioned as ‘Kafir’.

If a non-Muslim is accused of blasphemy then this can result in hundreds of people in his community being attacked. The peak of the religious violence is that 10 to 15 forced conversions are being reported every month and annually 4,000 - 5,000 Hindus are migrating to other countries…” Hon. Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani said. Religious freedom in Pakistan takes many shapes. The Constitution talks about the protection of minorities and equal human rights but it also says Islam is the state religion. He suggested that humanity should be prioritized instead of religion, to ensure that human rights are valued at all levels.

Recommendations from the workshop were:

The Commonwealth should be able to sanction or call to order States perceived to be impugning freedom of religion.

Provide a master class and/or bespoke training for Parliamentarians on freedom of religion or belief.

The CPA may constitute a Committee to discuss loopholes and devise strategies for ensuring protection of an individual’s freedom of religion.

Conclusion and Recommendations in the workshop session, the CPA’s potential role in fostering freedom of religion and beliefs was highlighted. In the following ways it could be undertaken: capacity building; awareness on pluralism and principles of Human Rights; promoting inclusivity and religious freedom; promoting co-existence and tolerance at community level; promoting peace education at secondary and tertiary level; and guiding the States in enacting laws against hate speeches and hate incidents.

The protection of religious freedom is an integral element of a functioning pluralist democracy. Whilst there are many different approaches to protecting religious freedoms, it is important that limitations on the exercise of civil liberties are avoided.

It should also be noted that through the directive principles of State policy, the State shall strengthen national unity by promoting cooperation and mutual confidence among all sections of the people, including the racial, religious, linguistic and other groups, and shall take effective steps in the fields of teaching, education, and information in order to eliminate discrimination and prejudice.

THE ROLE OF THE COMMONWEALTH IN SUPPORTING THE OUTCOMES OF THE COP21 PARIS AGREEMENT ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Small Branches Topic

Moderator: Hon. Ghislain Bolduc, MNA (Québec)

Discussion Leaders:
- Hon. Mike Summers, MLA (Falkland Islands)
- Hon. Gan Thiam Poh, MP (Singapore)
- Mr Robert Ondhowe (United Nations Environment Programme UNEP)

Workshop Report: Delegates noted the adverse effects of climate change such as drought, flooding and the rise in sea levels, and the fact that the impact was worse on small island states and developing countries.

Delegates further noted the obligation under the Paris Agreement for countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to below 2% of pre-industrial levels. They acknowledged the difficulties smaller countries encountered addressing the effects of climate change and meeting the reporting obligations under the Paris Agreement. They, in this regard, acknowledged the need to share best practices and assist small island states and developing countries tackle the problem of climate change. Additionally, they acknowledged the need for the Commonwealth to consider adopting a joint reporting strategy and joint climate change agenda.

Delegates also discussed measures being taken by some countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. These included giving incentives to businesses that employed clean energy technology and using renewable energy sources such as solar, hydroelectric and wind energy and by encouraging the use of electrical vehicles in the transportation industry.

Hon. Cryuff Buckley, MLC (St Helena) raised concerns that small island states sometimes lacked sufficient information to make well informed decisions that took into account their climatic conditions. He illustrated that the design of the new airport in St Helena had failed to take into account the windy conditions of the area.

In this regard he asked how a platform to exchange technical advice and experiences on environmental management...
and renewable energy could be created.

Mr Robert Ondhowe (UNEP) said that one of the functions of the United Nations Environment Programme was to create a platform for countries to obtain the information they needed to make appropriate policy decisions. He stated that this had been done for the Alliance of Small Island States. He added that UNEP also brought together a Global Adaptation Network in which the majority of players were small island states. Rt Hon. Shri Tensing Norbu Thongdok (Arunachal Pradesh, India) asked whether adopting the ‘polluter pays’ principle could help arrest climate change. He further wondered whether the advanced nations could be made responsible for providing green technology and financing to address climate change. Mr Robert Ondhowe (UNEP) explained that in Copenhagen, countries failed to reach an agreement on climate change because different countries failed to agree on who would be responsible for climate finance and providing the appropriate technology. It is for this reason that the Paris Agreement adopted the approach that each country was legally obliged to take some action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. He added that climate financing was available for bankable projects and countries were urged to develop such projects. A Deputy from Guernsey submitted that the exchange of information was very important for smaller countries. He asked whether there were any concrete incentives to encourage the private sector to develop and adopt clean energy solutions. He further wanted to know what was being done to make climate change financing more accessible. Hon. Mike Summers, MLA (Falkland Islands) informed delegates that there was need for an audit to determine what small countries should do to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

As regards encouraging the private sector to adopt environmentally friendly technologies, he informed delegates that that was the role of the government. He, however, said small countries could encourage companies to invest in greener technologies by giving them grants and demonstrating to them that using renewable energies was in their best interest. Mr Lazarus Chunge Bwalya, MP (Zambia) said there were countries that had signed the treaty would subsequently ratify it. Hon. Mike Summers, MLA (Falkland Islands) informed delegates that in some cases countries did not ratify a treaty because they lacked the capacity to carry out its obligations. He proposed that the Commonwealth should consider what it could do to assist such countries. A Member from Singapore asked whether the new Commonwealth Climate Finance Assistance Hub designed to offer assistance to the least developed countries had been formed. Hon. Ghislain Béléduc, MNA (Québec) informed delegates the hub had not yet been formed, but that negotiations for its formation were ongoing. A Member from Singapore said that the CPA was a platform for countries to share their experiences. In this regard, she urged the CPA to establish a mechanism for countries to share experiences on the measures being taken to increase the use of renewable energy sources and reduce greenhouse gas emissions so that countries could adopt the best practices of other countries. Hon. Ghislain Béléduc, MNA (Québec) informed delegates of measures being taken by some countries to reduce the emissions. He said that in the United States of America, the State of California had many electric vehicles and as a result of GHGs on vehicles, it had a lot of electrical loading stations and 20 hydrogen stations. Japan had 120 hydrogen stations. The USA was investing in 4 new nuclear plants and was also planning to make an investment in offshore windmills in which it expected to put up 300,000 windmills in the next 20 years. In Canada, Ontario was refurbishing all its nuclear plants to make them operate on renewable energy. Quebec had 800 electric loading stations and intended to have 2,000 by 2020. Montreal was investing in a public transport system to remove petrol/diesel cars from the roads. He added that the countries in North America exchanged experiences on the measures they were taking on a regular basis and urged the CPA to create a forum for members to exchange such information. Hon. Mike Summers, MLA (Falkland Islands) said that the issue of more investment in renewable energy should be taken to the Commonwealth and that the Commonwealth should consider what resources it should make available to its membership to assist them put in place climate change initiatives. A Deputy from Guernsey observed that most climate change initiatives were usually strategic and long term while countries had other short term and immediate needs. She asked how a country could prioritise climate change initiatives under such circumstances. She further asked which segments of society supported climate change initiatives. Hon. Mike Summers, MLA (Falkland Islands) stated that such a situation presented two competing interests of improving the standard of living of the people on the one hand and the longer term interest of protecting the environment. He said one of the options to consider was offsetting policy, where if a project was likely to have a detrimental environmental impact, the project developers should be required to contribute towards offsetting the damage. A Deputy from Guernsey asked how the public could be encouraged to adopt renewable energy technology, such as electric cars, when in some cases taxes were introduced to support these projects and this inevitably transferred the cost to the public. Hon. Ghislain Béléduc, MNA (Québec) said that public interest in renewable energy technologies could be encouraged by subsidising renewable energy products so that they were cheaper than carbon emitting ones. Hon. Mike Summers, MLA (Falkland Islands) said that incentives rather than punitive measures were more effective at encouraging the public to embrace greener technologies. He illustrated that rather than taking petrol cars, for instance, governments should reduce tax on electric cars.

Hon. Gan Thiam Poh, MP (Singapore) suggested that the reduction of greenhouse gas emission should be done gradually and within the means of each country. Rt Hon. Shri Tensing Norbu Thongdok (Arunachal Pradesh, India) expressed concern on how developing countries could revert to cleaner energy solutions such as nuclear energy when the United Nations legal framework for nuclear energy was very restrictive. Hon. Ghislain Béléduc, MNA (Québec) said that currently nuclear energy produced a lot of nuclear waste which was difficult to dispose of safely. In this regard, nuclear energy was not in a position where globally it was not entirely considered as clean energy. Therefore, many countries were cautious about its use. A Member from Canada asked what kind of assistance larger countries could give smaller countries to address the problem of climate change. Hon. Mike Summers, MLA (Falkland Islands) said that the larger countries should assist with technology and knowledge transfer. Mr Robert Ondhowe (UNEP) informed delegates how Philips International had entered into an agreement with some African countries to replace ordinary bulbs with vehicle electrification.

The successful implementation of the Paris agreement requires collective and concerted efforts from all stakeholders, including national and local governments, individuals, business and community groups.

The role of Parliament is essential in implementing the Paris Agreement and initiatives such as the sustainable development goals, including the added value of entities such as UNEP.

Climate change is an issue for all nations and the Commonwealth should assist smaller nations in reducing their greenhouse gas emissions and dealing with the effects of climate change.

All recommendations from the workshop were endorsed.
**THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS IN IMPLEMENTING AND MONITORING POLICIES RELEVANT TO THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)**

**Workshop Report:**
While broadly supportive of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the conference workshop discussed the challenges in raising awareness of the goals and translating them into policy priorities at local and national level. It was noted that the SDGs apply to all countries, irrespective of their state of economic development.

Implementation starts with personal choices but is influenced by the decisions taken by government bodies at all levels. Every country starts from a different position and the work involved in achieving the goals will be significant. Members were concerned about the resource implications and how international aid could assist achievement of the SDGs in developing countries.

Parliaments have a role to play in engaging the public and civil society on the SDGs, discussing and passing legislation and monitoring government action. Members raised questions about how the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) could assist parliaments both in setting up new monitoring mechanisms and ensuring that oversight of work to meet the SDGs is integrated across the broad span of parliamentary processes.

Mr Charles Chauvel (UNDP) initiated the discussion by asking whether government and parliamentary institutions are in good shape to achieve the 17 SDGs, which are broader in scope than the millennium development goals (MDGs) they have succeeded. The goals apply across all countries and seek to promote dignity, prosperity, justice, partnerships, caring for the planet and the welfare of the people.

He argued that Parliamentarians must play a part in achieving the goals, based on inclusive processes, transparency and accountability. Parliamentarians needed to consider if the public had confidence in parliamentary institutions. For example, was there an up-to-date register of interests so that the public could form a view on whether or not Parliamentarians were influenced by private considerations when making decisions? The scrutiny function was vital but it was important for compliance with the SDGs to be scrutinised across parliamentary processes and not side-lined in a stand-alone scrutiny committee. Parliaments also needed to develop strong relationships with official statisticians and auditors and to engage actively with civil society.

Mr Chauvel suggested that Members of Parliament could champion development issues in party caucuses, in parliament and in the media. He recommended [www.gender-parliaments.org](http://www.gender-parliaments.org) as a useful information source for Parliamentarians active in this area.

Shri Gaurishankar Agrawal (Chhattisgarh, India) argued that national and provincial parliaments were the bridge between action on the SDGs at local, national and international level and were thereby essential in achieving the goals. Politicians had a direct role to play in setting budgets to achieve the SDGs.

Parliamentarians also had a role in ensuring that developed countries could help overcome the challenges presented. Membership was growing in this area.

**Discussion Leaders:**
- Mr Charles Chauvel (United Nations Development Programme UNDP)
- Ms Maree Edwards, MP (Victoria, Australia)
- Shri Gaurishankar Agrawal, MP (Chhattisgarh, India)
- Mr Charles Chauvel (UNDP)

**Rapporteur:**
Mr Mark Egan (Jersey)

Parliamentarians active in this area.

Workshop Report:
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A COLLABORATIVE COMMONWEALTH: UNITY, DIVERSITY AND COMMON CHALLENGES

Hon. Elwee Ethuro (Kenya) expressed concern that there might be too many SDGs for all countries to achieve but said that lessons could be drawn from the experience of achieving the previous Millennium Development Goals. Many countries had rightly continued to focus on embedding human rights and there might be a risk that switching attention to the SDGs would lead to a loss of focus on those areas.

Mr Charles Chauvel (UNDP) acknowledged these challenges but said it was important to make incremental improvements in the areas covered by the SDGs.

Shri Nanjan Pujar (Orissa, India) raised the issue of finding resources to achieve the SDGs given the demands placed on governments by other priorities. Hon. Sreeeramakrishnan Purayath (Kerala, India) expressed a similar sentiment.

Hon. Lobin Lowe (Malawi) emphasised the importance of raising awareness about the SDGs. Hon. Lechesa Tsenoli (South Africa) asked about the relationship between the SDGs and other fundamental aims of government such as the promotion and other fundamental aims of government programmes and communicating with government about how such schemes could be made more effective.

Mr Tim Crookall MLC (Ile of Man) also emphasised steps necessary to raise public awareness of the goals.

Shri Tenzing Norbu Thongdok (Arunachal Pradesh, India) argued that resource allocation should be fixed for ten years in order to achieve the SDGs and that short-term adjustments to such funding should be prohibited. In his view there should be greater judicial emphasis on fundamental duties owed by the populace to their community and country, in order to achieve the SDGs, rather than on individual rights.

Mr Tim Crookall MLC (Ile of Man) and Hon. Lechesa Tsenoli (South Africa) suggested that it would be helpful if the workshop recommendations were circulated in advance and were capable of being amended.

During the workshop the following additional recommendations were proposed:

• Each parliament to make a report to the CPA annual meeting on the progress towards Implementation of SDGs (Peer Review Mechanism).
• CPA to conduct seminars in parliament on the sensitization, processing and implementation of SDGs.

Recommendations from the workshop were:

• Effective parliamentary oversight of the achievement by governments of the Sustainable Development Goals is essential to ensuring the quality of such achievement.
• Parliaments must ensure women’s leadership, including best practice strategies developed by women’s health, community organisations and networks, to improve gender equality and reduce gendered violence. Parliamentary recommendations should proactively centre stage and monitor implementation of SDGs to ensure their rightful place in national priorities to become a reality by 2030.

62nd COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE
London, United Kingdom
11 to 17 December 2016

Conference Workshop D - 15 December 2016

ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS: THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE INTERNET IN PERPETRATING VIOLENCE

Gender Topic

Moderator:
Hon. Alexandra Mendes, MP (Canada Federal)

Discussion Leaders:
• Hon. Yasmin Ratansi, MP (Canada Federal)
• Hon. Natalie Neita, MP (Jamaica)
• Hon. Ayeesha Gulalai Wazir, MP (Pakistan)

Rapporteurs:
Ms Sandisiwe Schalk (South Africa) and CPA Headquarters Secretariat

Workshop Report:
The growing reach of the internet and social media presents opportunities, social connections and networks. However, these social media platforms are used by perpetrators to carry out acts of violence against women and girls. Hon. Yasmin Ratansi MP (Canada Federal) spoke of her experience as a former Chairperson of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women where the Committee addressed issues such as human trafficking and violence against women. Cyber-violence is becoming increasingly prevalent and the perpetrators are difficult to trace. According to UN estimates, 73% of women around the world have been exposed to or have experienced some form of online violence. Cyber violence has broad categories as identified by the United Nations:
• Hacking;
• Impersonation;
• Surveillance/tracking;
• Harassment or spamming;
• Recruitment; and
• Distribution of malicious information.

Added to the above is revenge pornography aimed at humiliating and shaming women and girls. The results of cybercrime are often permanently online and victims have little prospect of removing any content about them.

Victims of cyber violence suffer serious consequences,
including murder in some instances and teenagers are driven to suicide. At political level, women tend to be unfairly targeted, stereotyped and bullied using body shaming rather than the focus being on the substance of their work or ideologies. Laws that specifically address cybercrime are needed as reliance on existing legislation on gender based violence is not sufficient. Input made indicated that most countries in the Commonwealth have legislation that seeks to address cyber violence, however the following challenges were identified:

1. Lack of implementation;
2. Obscurity of perpetrators;
3. Lack of effective instruments for monitoring and tracking of perpetrators;
4. Lack of political will to dedicated resources to cyber violence;
5. In some instances women and girls are perpetrators themselves against other women.

Hon. Natalie Neita, MP (Jamaica) spoke of the prevalence of violence against women across the world and the especially high levels of murder and violence in her own jurisdiction of Jamaica. Many incidents of this kind also result in images and comment posted online.

As Parliamentarians, how will we implement meaningful solutions to combat these acts of violence against women and girls and to punish those who perpetrate them? Legislation without enforcement is not going to be effective. Violence against women and girls is both a sign and a driver of gender inequality which influences and is influenced by social constructions. In addition, gender inequality combines with many forms of discrimination to make women and girls even more defenseless against violence. Social media and the internet are important communications tools for modern life – however social media is often used by devious entities to harass and victimise individuals who use these platforms. In addition, social media is often used to encourage physical violence against women offline.

Hon. Natalie Neita, MP outlined the need for support to be given to strengthening governmental and non-governmental organisations in order to fully implement and advance laws for the protection of women and girls. Gender laws do not belong only in the gender ministry and issues relating to protecting women and girls from offline and online violence should be incorporated in the policy positions of every sector and should have visible consequences for violation.

Hon. Ayesha Gulalai Wazir, MP (Pakistan) discussed the benefits of technology for some countries of the Commonwealth, particularly but not exclusively developing countries. However the prevalence of violence against women and girls through online and social media is increasing, especially character assassination through the use of images and comments online. Hon. Ayesha Gulalai Wazir, MP spoke about her own experiences of fake news being posted online about her to damage her reputation and the reaction of people in her community.

Stronger messages should be sent to social media networks such as Facebook and Twitter that these types of crimes are taking place and more should be done by the networks to counteract this.

The moderator, Hon. Alexandra Mendes, MP (Canada Federal) opened the workshop to questions and comments from Members from the floor.

Hon. Nicole Lawder MLA (Australian Capital Territory) highlighted the online comments targeted towards women standing for Parliament and the focus on appearance rather than what they are saying.

RH Hon. Maria Miller MP (United Kingdom) spoke of her hope that the UK’s Law Commission will be undertaking a review of how effective UK laws are in tackling online crime and the gaps in law to protect women from online violence. Laws need to be developed specific to online crimes and using existing laws for offline crimes are often insufficient.

Hon. Angela T. Dizda MP (South Africa) commented that the speed of cybercrime is rapid but the consequences of cybercrime last for a long time. The processes for investigating cybercrime needs to be speeded up to protect people as investigations are often very drawn out.

Hon. Jennifer Van Den Heever, MP (South Africa) commented that the speed of cybercrime is rapid but the consequences of cybercrime last for a long time. The processes for investigating cybercrime needs to be speeded up to protect people. It is important to have a variety of ways. Young people can maintain social connections and support networks.

Hon. Nafoita Talaimanu Ketl, MP (Samoa) shared his experiences of cybercrime as a former police officer with the workshop. Police need to be better equipped to combat cybercrimes and the Commonwealth can also play a role in sharing information to help address these problems. During the workshop the following additional recommendations were proposed:

- The Commonwealth should ensure transfer of technology and knowledge used to track cyber violence to less developed countries.
- Inclusive government approach and multi-sectoral approach should be adopted to address cyber violence.

Recommendations from the workshop were:

- Parliament must ensure that Parliamentary Committees on Cyber Crime are resourced with technical assistance to adequately respond to cyber threats through Computer Incident Response Teams.
- CPA should develop digital literacy initiatives that provide awareness campaigns and strategies to address cyber violence; computing and social media workshops to empower women through technology.
- The internet and social media provide young people with a range of benefits, and opportunities to empower themselves in a variety of ways. Young people can maintain social connections and support networks.

All recommendations from the workshop were endorsed.
THE RADICALISATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND HOW WE ARE DEALING WITH THIS CHALLENGE THROUGHOUT THE COMMONWEALTH

Workshop Report:
Delegates in the conference workshop discussed the important topic of the radicalisation of young people and how parliaments within the Commonwealth are dealing with this challenge.

Discussion leaders from Kenya and Pakistan discussed their perspectives and experiences from within their jurisdictions. The workshop also heard from an outside expert - the Commonwealth young person of the year from Cameroon - who shared his experiences trying to combat youth radicalisation and create a space for young people to promote peace.

Delegates and discussion leaders compared their experiences of what causes of radicalisation of young people were, noting that younger people were more often the target of such approaches - one discussion leader pointed out that she never heard about older people retiring and being lured into terrorist acts. Some causes discussed in the workshop include the use of gangs, convicted terrorists using jails to convert young people, poor governance and a lack of democracy which contributes to intolerance and injustice, and the internet including social media.

The first discussion leader, Hon. Justin Bedan Njoka Muturi, MP (Kenya) pointed out that young women and men have been used as conduits for carrying out acts of violence and crime not only in terrorist organisations but by mWAs and organised gangs. He noted that studies now show that more young people from western countries are joining terrorist organisations, including young people from the Commonwealth. He quoted the MIS Chief stating in November 2001 that terrorists were methodically and intentionally targeting young people and children in the UK, and they had seen individuals as young as 15 implicated in activities related to terrorism.

In his own country of Kenya, the Al-Shabaab (meaning ‘the youths’) which is behind many of the terrorist attacks in Kenya, has made a concerted effort to recruit Somali youth in diaspora communities, with the result being that a number of youth Somalis as well as young people from America and Europe have travelled to Somalia to train and fight alongside Al-Shabaab. Hon. Justin Muturi, MP noted that one of the outcomes from the CHOGM meeting held in 2015 was to combat radicalisation, with the Commonwealth counter-terrorism unit unveiled at the summit being one of the measures to strengthen the ability of Commonwealth countries to counter extremist narratives. This would result in increased co-operation between countries around the world to share best practice and new approaches in countering radicalisation and assembling a team of experts seconded to the unit to work with civil society networks and Commonwealth governments including through capacity building.

Using youth as agents of change was also discussed, with the discussion leader pointing out that young peace-builders in African countries have also set up regional youth spaces following capacity building events by the Commonwealth Youth Peace Network (CVYN) which is focussed on youth-led peace building and conflict prevention strategies.

Hon. Justin Muturi, MP outlined the conference workshop Kenya’s recent experiences with terrorism since 1980 which were linked to religious extremism, and he detailed a series of incidents which had affected the country and had resulted in a significant loss of life, suffering and pain both as a downturn in some sectors of the economy owing to insecurity problems. He then listed what he saw as the factors contributing to radicalising in Kenya which included:

- Structural and Institutional factors, including poor governance, radicalisation in prisons, geographical location and regional conflict and infrastructure (i.e. ease of travel, access to social media platforms etc);
- Socioeconomic factors i.e. extremist organisations target young people that have no access to education or employment and thus are attracted to the promise of material wealth; and
- Political factors including marginalisation and discrimination and prolonged and unresolved conflicts.

The discussion leader concluded his remarks by reflecting that there is a strong link between governance, democracy and development; the stability that the youth felt in their environments. He also stated how this environment can be exploited, and that forums such as this workshop are essential to identify the bigger picture and offer solutions towards peace.

The second discussion leader, Mr Achaleke Christian Leke, Commonwealth Young Person of the Year 2016 (Cameroon) congratulated the CPA for bringing this topic for discussion at an international conference workshop, and indicated that it was quite relevant to the work that he had been doing as the Commonwealth Young Person of the Year. It was his view that a number of youth needed to create a space for young people to progress peace.

Mr Achaleke Christian Leke then presented to the workshop a short YouTube video on young people and radicalisation. Amongst the points made in the video were that:

- Young people between 7-24 years old are targets of violent extremist groups as soldiers and agents of violence in conflict situations in African countries;
- The absence of violent conflicts in Cameroon is a source of inspiration to many African countries;
- Cameroon’s greatest fear is the recruitment of young people as soldiers;,
- Women especially are vulnerable, often being caught between being soldiers, sex toys or subjects of violent acts towards them;
- Recruiters of young people prey on socioeconomic and political challenges affecting young people, e.g. religious differences, exclusion, unemployment and poverty; Those recruited pay a high price in terms of loss of childhood, physical and psychological damage which can have long lasting effects;
- The video urged state and other development stakeholders to:
  - Create and promote institutions to provide sensitisation and experience sharing initiatives among young people so as to condemn violence, conflicts and imbibe in young people a culture of peace;
  - Reshape the educational system towards building young people’s skills, changing mentalities and encouraging young people to face challenges; and

- Enact laws to prevent the existence of violent extremist groups, circulation of arms and promotion of youth participation in conflict prevention and peace building processes.

The third discussion leader, Hon. Sultan Mohammad Khan, MPA (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan) stated that Pakistan had one of the most affected countries in terms of violence in recent years, and that more than 50,000 lives had been lost in the last decade. His country was particularly affected by the radicalisation of young people, and he noted that approximately 30% of the overall population of Pakistan was aged between 15-29.
Hon. Sultan Mohammad Khan, MPA then outlined the stages of radicalisation, whereby people start off as peaceful and tolerant, but as time goes on it can develop into intense dislike/discriminative of each other, then intolerance of diversity of opinion, then polarisation of minds, then sympathy for violence, then support for violence which ultimately leads to actual involvement in violence. He noted that the youth – some as young as 12 and up to 25 - are most affected by radicalisation, and that you never hear of a retired person turning into a terrorist.

He noted that there are different kinds of radicalisation: religious, socio-economic disparity, ethnic and racial tension and Shia and Sunni. He pointed to various causes of radicalisation of youth, including a high level of religious intolerance, lack of a democratic structure and poor governance, the school curriculum not being altered to address the issue, Hon. Helen Sambil MP (Kenya) quizzed what were the practical measures countries and governments can take to prevent radicalisation?

In reply Mr Achaleke Christian Leke reminded delegates that there was a roadmap that the United Nations had provided by way of a UN Resolution 2025 – Youth, Peace and Security, and he urged countries to utilise that. Hon. Titus Thwalla, MP (Switzerland) asked what role was being played by the African Union and the United Nations. Hon. Justin Mutowa, MP and Mr Achaleke Christian Leke both replied outlining a number of actions that had occurred, with the latter suggesting that speaking up at forums like these give hope, and that we need to stop blaming and work together to address the issue.

At the end of the conference workshop, the moderator, Hon. Don Hanlin, MLC (New South Wales) put forward the recommendations proposed by the discussion leaders which were all unanimously endorsed by the workshop.

**Recommendations from the workshop were:**

- **Parliaments must ensure** that governance, structural and developmental challenges that engender radicalisation are prioritized and addressed, and that human rights-based counter-radicalisation programmes are adequately resourced.
- **Parliaments should** partner with young people for sustainable peace, prevention of violent extremism, as outlined in UN Security Council Resolution 2250 – Youth, Peace and Security.
- **Formulate practical steps, procedures and goals to contain and prevent radicalisation.** To promote de-radicalisation and set up a monitoring/grading system evaluating attainment of such goals.

**All recommendations from the workshop were endorsed.**

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**Moderator:**

Hon. Imran Ahmad, MP (Bangladesh)

**Discussion Leaders:**

- Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson, MLA (Northern Ireland)
- Senator Nigel De Frietas (Trinidad and Tobago)
- Shri Sukhendu Sekhar Roy, MP (Rajasthan, India)

**Rapporteur:**

Mr Mark Jones (New South Wales)

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**Workshop Report:**

The conference workshop took the form of a debate, with two of the discussion leaders speaking in favour of the motion that **“the media plays a large role in promoting public mistrust of Parliamentarians.”** and one speaking against.

The majority of speakers in favour of the motion highlighted examples of factual inaccuracies in news reports, perceived media bias and the rise of social media. Arguments against included the importance of freedom of speech, journalists holding politicians to account for their actions and a free press being the fourth estate in a modern democracy.

During a vote at the end of the workshop, the resolution was carried by 16 votes to 6.

**Discussion**

The first discussion leader, Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson MLA (Northern Ireland) was speaking in favour of the motion and began her comments by suggesting that she expected the “media promoting public mistrust of Parliamentarians” would be a common challenge to Parliamentarians across the Commonwealth.

Whilst acknowledging the importance of a free press, as well as the checks and balances that it provides, Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson MLA said that the nature of the modern press fuels low voter turnout or even depresses it. She claimed that focusing on frivolous details distracts from the substance of policy and the impacts of decision making, and turns politics into a soap opera. Mrs. Jo-Anne Dobson MLA also said that expenses and salaries of Parliamentarians was a common source of negative media coverage. Social media was described as a powerful tool to get the message across to the electorate, but the desire for instant news results in stories written and published without due care.

Shri Sukhendu Sekhar Roy (Rajasthan, India) also spoke in favour of the motion. He described a free media as one of the crucial pillars of democracy and as well as being the ‘Fourth Estate’ in conjunction with the Legislature, Executive and Judiciary. He also highlighted that Parliamentarians rely on the media to spread their message.

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She stated that the concept of a balanced and responsible press was challenging to define, because who decides what is balanced and responsible. She also argued that the legislation of press freedom can be very dangerous and questioned if you have the right to shout someone down who offends you, even if the same thing would not offend someone else. Hon. Nitha Moltsamai (Lesotho) believed that it was an indisputable fact that the media plays a large role in the public mistrust of politicians, it is politicians themselves through their conduct.

Senator DeFreitas said that the media provides a magnifying glass of what is happening in reality and that freedom of speech dictates that the media must be allowed to report on what they see. He also said the media played an important role in holding politicians to account, particularly with promises made before an election, and ensuring they are delivered when in a position of power.

He argued that Parliamentarians no longer have a private life because they will always be seen as being a community figure wherever they go and the rise of social media has led to more intense and continuous scrutiny of their actions. In doing so, he called for further training in handling the media before Parliamentarians enter public life.

Baroness D’Souza (United Kingdom) asked participants to consider the role of the media in a modern democracy. She suggested that it was important to educate, to entertain, to hold the government to account and to hold power to account. Moral values in the discharge of their public duties. The media focuses on negative coverage of Parliament harms the individuals, the institution and parliamentary democracy itself. He called for Parliamentarians and the media to respect each other and develop a healthy and cooperative working relationship, complementing and strengthening the democratic set up, and facilitating the emergence of a more informed democracy.

Workshop Moderator, Hon. Imran Ahmad MP (Bangladesh) then joined the discussion, observing that during the United States elections, the opposite effect was studied, whereby the whole media was in favour of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump won the election. He said that he doesn’t know how much blame we can put on the media for their reporting and how much blame we should put on Parliamentarians for their actions.

Dr Duncan McIntyre MP (South Australia) stated that the media are not the enemy of the Parliamentarian; they are a tool to be used to communicate with your community. In cases of Parliamentarians abusing the perks of power and privilege, it’s not the media’s fault if they then report their actions.

Speaker Angulu Farrugia MP (Malta) said that the question is not about the freedom of the press, it’s about the question that the media are promoting public mistrust of politicians. He suggested that the upcoming generation has a great level of apathy with politics, which is leading to greater mistrust.

Speaker Farrugia also described the interesting media platform in Malta, whereby every political party has its own radio station and TV station.

Hon. Eleni Mavrou (Cyprus) claimed the motion is not black and white, but various shades of grey. She stated that mistrust is not always the fault of the media and that we should look at the behaviour of politicians. In recent times in Europe, Parliaments have had to make difficult decisions and that this has had an impact on the perception of politicians.

She also claimed that social media has exaggerated the idea of emotion over reason and that the speed of reporting events is leading to false reporting or inaccurate reporting. Concerns were also raised over the concentration of ownership of media, as well as algorithms of social media resulting in people only seeing posts that agree with their world view. As a result, she alleged that Parliamentarians are losing the ability to hear the opposing view and to debate.

Miss Robyn Lynes (Bahamas) outlined her belief that the media does promote the mistrust of politicians, but they do not cause the public mistrust of politicians. The example was provided that politicians are the least trusted profession and doctors the most trusted, however, if the media only reported about doctor’s patients dying on the table, then they would become just as distrusted. She added that if the media tries to vilify you, the people will defend you if you have done a good job.

Ms Jan Logie MP (New Zealand) believed that in New Zealand the media thought a change in government would make for better news stories, so the media appeared to be biased in the build up to the election. She also said there is an issue with political commentators who are seen as journalists but can never be independent, due to their affiliation with political parties.

Senator Paul Routier (Jersey) said that potential new politicians are not prepared to put themselves through the media scrutiny that accompanies the role and called for the media to ensure accuracy in their reporting.

Hon. Russell Wortley MLC (South Australia) said that politicians have brought a lot of pressure to bear on the media, but if they are intentional then Members of Parliament need to be taken to task.

Recommendations from the workshop were:

- The media portrayal of politicians and Parliamentarians fuels public mistrust, distacts young people from politics and compromises those who work for constituents in public office.
- The media acts as an ombudsman for every endearment in public life. Its accurate coverage of Parliamentarians can encourage introspection and requisite course correction.
- The CPA should provide masterclasses on training for Parliamentarians on interaction with members of the media, effective communication and the use of social media.

The first and third recommendations from the workshop were endorsed. The second recommendation from the workshop was noted.
Women Parliamentarians from across the Commonwealth have gathered in London, United Kingdom for the triennial conference of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP), as part of the wider 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference. Over 100 Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians attended the conference from 43 countries and 56 Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Branches across the Commonwealth.

The theme of the fifth Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Conference was ‘Political Violence against Women’.

Political violence against women remains one of the key obstacles adversely affecting the welfare of many democracies within the Commonwealth and beyond. This manifests itself in terms of physical, sexual and psychological violence. It is commonly observed that women face violence and intimidation when they decide to run for political office.

The conference saw leading figures in Commonwealth Parliaments addressing delegates. The CWP conference included four wide-ranging sessions for Commonwealth Parliamentarians discussing new ways to tackle political violence against women at CWP triennial conference.

The CWP also held a gender-related workshop at the 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference on ‘Ending violence against women and girls: The impact of social media and the internet in perpetrating violence’. It was noted that the growing reach of the internet and social media presents opportunities, social connections and networks – however, these social media platforms are used by perpetrators to carry out acts of violence against women and girls. You can read the report of this workshop on page 29.

The CWP Conference was opened by the outgoing Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians, Rt Hon. Rebecca Kadaga MP, Speaker of the Parliament of Uganda who had held the office since her election in 2013. Rt Hon. Rebecca Kadaga MP had worked tirelessly in promoting inter-regional cooperation among members of the CWP. She established a CWP strategy, which has led to many activities, geared towards the strengthening of Women Parliamentarians across the CPA’s nine regions; and has convened women Parliamentarians from across the Commonwealth to discuss the key issue of ‘Political Violence against Women’.

The Chairperson of the CPA International Executive Committee, Hon. Dr Shiriin Shamim Chaudhury, MP, Speaker of the Parliament of Bangladesh congratulated Rt Hon. Rebecca Kadaga MP on her leadership, her dedicated and committed work that has brought about positive results for the CWP. The Chairperson went on to state that gender equality must be factored into food, energy and water policies in each respective jurisdiction. It is important that women take their place in Parliament to ensure that this may come about.

 мероприятие посвящено важным вопросам, таким как политическое насилие против женщин, рассмотрено в рабочей группе, организованной в рамках конференции по поводу принятия решений.

Сконцентрировавшиеся на этих темах женщины-парламентарии говорят о новых способах борьбы с политическим насилием против женщин на конференции CWP. Они также провели семинар для обсуждения вопросов гендерного равенства.

В рамках конференции было заложено внимание вопросам, связанным с гендерным равенством, важность которого заключается в том, что женщины в Парламенте должны занимать свои места, чтобы это могло произойти.

Заместитель председателя Международного исполнительного комитета, д-р Ширин Шами Шахмурад, спикер парламента Бангладеша, поздравил заместительницу председателя, ее преданность и постоянную работу, которые принесли положительные результаты для CWP. Председатель конференции отметила, что равенство полов должно учитываться в вопросах продовольствия, энергии и воды в каждом соответствующем регионе. Это важно, чтобы женщины занимали свое место в Парламенте, чтобы это могло произойти.
Speech by Rt Hon. Rebecca A. Kadaga MP, outgoing Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) at the Official Dinner of the 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, December 2016

“My dear colleagues of the CPA and the CWP. It is with immense gratitude to God Almighty that I address you today, maybe for the last time in the capacity of Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP). It is with great emotion that I say this.

As you are aware, my tenure as Chairperson of the CWP comes to a close during this Conference. And in compliance with the provisions of our constitution, I am required by law to handover the machinery of the Chair to another person who will steer CWP even further.

For me, it has been a very interesting time working with all segments of the CPA and in particular the CWP to provide leadership to our Association. Whatever the experiences we had in the course of providing leadership these three years, the time has come for us to leave.

As written in the scriptures in the book of Ecclesiastes 3:1: “To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under heaven.” There was time to assume office and now is time to handover.

In any fruitful administration the world over, a leader must work closely with his team. It was with a sense of immense pride and joy that I assumed the office of Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee – past and present. Thank you to Hon. Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury MP; to Rt. Hon. Sir Alan Haselhurst MP and to my predecessor as CPA Chairperson, Hon. Alix Boyd Knights MLA. I would like to thank the Chairpersons of the CPA Executive Committee for their support during my campaign for election as Chair and also for its role in bringing about my ascension to the office.

I want to thank my Parliament of Uganda for the support during my time as Chairperson of the CPA for women in Africa. The core notion of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians group was founded at the 1989 plenary CPA conference is to discuss ways to increase female representation in Parliament and work towards the mainstreaming of gender considerations in all CPA activities and programmes.

Approximately, three years ago in August 2013, in Johannesburg, South Africa, I was so proudly elected Chairperson of the CWP by you, fellow women Parliamentarians. I stood before you and vowed to strive for enhanced political party participation, more equity for women, and more access to justice; to use my previous experience. I have from the CWP Africa Region to ensure that the people we lead have the best services. I think therefore that we are at that stage where it is crucial to take stock of the progress we have registered as in as far as increasing women’s participation is concerned.

Some of our countries have really good world rankings. Of course, we continue to pride ourselves in the example of Rwanda which stands at number one for female Members of Parliament with 61%; but we are also equally proud of South Africa, Namibia, Uganda, Tanzania, the United Kingdom, Seychelles and Mozambique who have all achieved percentages well above 30% for women’s representation in Parliament.

We have worked tirelessly to ensure that women’s leadership in political decision-making processes improves. We have demonstrated political leadership by working across party lines through women’s parliamentary caucuses – even in the most politically combative environments - and by championing issues of gender equality, such as the elimination of gender-based violence, parental leave and childcare, pensions, gender-equality laws and electoral reform and I am proud of these efforts.

I am also happy to report that the CWP family continues to grow every day. During my term of office, we have been honoured to witness the opening of new CWP Branches and Chapters.

We have also intensified efforts for advocacy and mobilization for women’s emancipation. This we have been able to do through networking and most crucially through events such as regional and branch workshops, conferences and seminars. For us at the CWP, we believe that regular meeting and discussions are crucial cogs in pushing the agenda.

I am also proud to note that during the past three years, I and my gallant colleagues of the CWP have been fighting against violence against women and various other forms of women’s rights abuse. We have stood and condemned the activities of Boko Haram; we have protested the honour killings in India and the Sudan and we continue to pressure governments to take action where these violations continue to take place. And I can assure you that we have been unwavering in the pursuit of respect for the human rights of women.

We have also made a number of administrative achievements and adjustments. We were able to put in place a CWP Strategic Plan which helped us to streamline the process of envisioning our desired future, and translating this vision into broadly defined goals, objectives and a sequence of steps to achieve them. One unique feature of our strategic plan is that it is encompassing the ideas and inputs of all the CPA regions. This was crucial in ensuring that no one is left behind and also due to the fact there are diverse issues and challenges in the different regions which needed to be captured. I am happy with the progress of the implementation of this strategic plan which amongst other things, it has also helped us secure more funding from the CPA.

It is foolish for one to say that all is well – of course, challenges still exist and huge gaps are still extremely visible for us. The Commonwealth comprises 53 countries, across all six inhabited continents. The members have a combined population of 2.4 billion people, almost a third of the world population, of which 1.26 billion live in India and 94% live in Asia and Africa combined. Women constitute slightly more than half of the world population. Their contribution to the social and economic development of societies is also more than half as compared to that of men by virtue of their dual roles in the productive and reproductive spheres. Yet their participation in formal political structures and processes, where decisions regarding the use of societal resources generated by both men and women are made, remains insignificant.

Despite the pronounced commitment of the international community to gender equality and to the bridging of the gender gap in the formal political arena, reinforced by the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform of Action, there are only twelve countries within the Commonwealth where women hold 30% or more seats in the Parliaments.

I continue to be dismayed by the statistics of women in Parliament in some of our other regions. A case in point is the Pacific which stands at a combined average of 13% women’s representation in both the Lower and Upper Houses. We need to lend a hand to our sisters in some of these countries where the possibility for increased women’s representation is still hindered by wide ranging historical and structural factors.

Despite comprising over 50% of the world’s population, women continue to be underrepresented in other aspects of political and public life. According to the United Nations, as of September 2016, ten women are serving as Head of State and nine are serving as Head of Government across the world. Furthermore, only 17% of government ministers are women with the majority serving in the fields of education and health. Since 1992, women have represented fewer than 3% of mediators and 8% of negotiators to major peace processes. These numbers are too small. These are the places where decisions get made, and simply put, there aren’t enough women in them.

“With these massive strides forward and the obvious challenges, I take this opportunity to wish all the best to the in-coming CWP Chairperson and her team.”
VIOLENCE AND INTIMIDATION OF WOMEN DURING ELECTIONS

Moderator: Hon. Shirley Osborne, MLA, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly
(Montserrat)

Discussion Leaders:
• Rt Hon. Rebecca Kadaga, MP, CWP Chairperson and Speaker of Parliament (Uganda)
• Hon. Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar, MP (India)
• Ms Nerina Covra (Westminster Foundation for Democracy)

Rapporteur: Ms Elizabeth Kingston (Canada Federal)

CWP Session Report: The first session of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Conference was on the subject of ‘Violence and Intimidation of Women during Elections’. The session focused on the fact that throughout the Commonwealth, women face violence and intimidation when they decide to run for political office. Such intimidation may range from being assaulted, sexually abused, psychologically manipulated or even murdered.

It is imperative that women in public office work to safeguard the protection of their right to serve in political life, and to put in place such measures as to ensure their protection. While violence and intimidation may be dismissed as a cost of doing politics, it rather serves as a severe detrimental cost to the entire political process.

Rt. Hon. Rebecca Kadaga, MP (Uganda) stated that violence and intimidation against women during elections poses a serious challenge to democracy and human rights throughout the Commonwealth. Moreover, not many countries have any specific laws in place to confront this ever-increasing trend. Noting particularly the tragic murder of Jo Cox, MP during the United Kingdom ‘Brexit’ referendum campaign, she noted that many women who campaign are subject to assault, sexual abuse, even death. Also cited was the tendency in South-East Asia for a majority of women not to participate in the political process for fear of violence. Moreover, they receive no support from their own political parties when being subjected to any measure of intimidation. Women have had their properties vandalized, and have been intimidated in public both physically and psychologically. It was also expressed that social media is a strong disincentive for women looking to seek public office.

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Rt. Hon. Rebecca Kadaga, MP called upon the countries of the Commonwealth to put in place measures to counteract such violence and to engage in discussions to develop strategies leading to a sensitization of women’s rights and stature in society. She called for a greater involvement by civil society, for legislative measures to be introduced in Parliaments to target specifically those engaged in acts of violence directed against women when they choose to stand for political office, for the training of law enforcement officials to provide greater protection for women and for enhanced safety measures by electoral authorities to enable those eligible voting women to feel safe when returning home after voting or when attending political meetings.

Hon. Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar, MP (India) noted that violence and intimidation against women is not only pervasive in politics, but exists everywhere. She called upon the empowerment of women to combat such violence, citing it as the greatest threat to lasting peace and good government. Due to this tendency, women do not stand for political office in the numbers representative of their numbers in society. They remain conspicuously absent in the political realm. Moreover, the negation of full equal political participation costs communities, societies and nations.

Hon. Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar, MP noted that greater empowerment of women would arise through enhanced education and training opportunities. ‘Freedom ends when violence begins’, she stated. It is a holistic and comprehensive approach, from the state, from Parliament, from political parties, from civil society and from the media that is needed to bring about the change necessary to allow for women to take their place as full, dignified partners in seeking the strengthening of those democratic values inherent across the Commonwealth.

A particular emphasis was placed on the media and civil society as they play a critical role in raising awareness with voters, thereby creating an atmosphere conducive to allowing women to take their rightful place in political life without fear of intimidation and other forms of violence otherwise directed against them.

Ms Nerina Covra (Westminster Foundation for Democracy) defined violence against women as the systematic, intentional use of force or intimidation intended specifically to keep women out of politics. As a gender-based violent act, its sole intention is to harm with the effect of influencing the political process through the marginalization of women, thereby preventing them from exercising their rightful duty as legislator and politician.

The impact and motive for such actions not only hurts the individual, but also serves as a deterrent for others looking to enter the political sphere, while signaling to the whole of society that women are not allowed in politics. In this regard, it perpetuates the traditional stereotypical role of women that they should stay at home. Violence targeting women is more often not reported, and is often dismissed as the cost of doing politics. However, such violence is simply of great cost and harm to the entire political process, and it can be argued that it sets up the next generation of women for failure as well.

Violence comes in four kinds: physical, sexual, economic and psychological and impacts women to a much greater disproportion than their male counterparts. Such abuse of human rights undermines the integrity of democratic practice and culture, yet no international legal document exists to date outlawing such violence and abuse.

Delegates spoke of a real need throughout the Commonwealth and the world for a legal framework to enshrine the issue in national law and policy-making. Women legislators need to talk to their respective governments to make greater extent to bring about the cultural shift needed to ensure full and fair protection for women wishing to seek any measure of public office.

Summary

The session focused on the fact that throughout the Commonwealth, women face violence and intimidation when they decide to run for political office. Such intimidation may range from being assaulted, sexually abused, psychologically manipulated or even murdered.

It is imperative that women in public office work to safeguard the protection of their right to serve in political life, and to put in place such measures as to ensure their protection. While violence and intimidation may be dismissed as a cost of doing politics, it rather serves as a severe detrimental cost to the entire political process.

There were no specific recommendations from the CWP Session 1 – however the summary above from the workshop was endorsed.
PARLIAMENT’S ROLE IN RAISING AWARENESS OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND WOMEN’S EQUAL CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

Moderator: 
RT Hon. Rebecca Kadaga, MP, CWP Chairperson and Speaker of Parliament (Uganda)

Discussion Leaders: 
- Hon. Dr Fehmida Mirza, MP (Pakistan) 
- Hon. Alexandra Mendes, MP (Canada Federal) 
- Ms Brigitte Filion (Inter Parliamentary Union IPU)

CWP Session Report: The CWP Conference’s second session opened with Hon. Dr Fehmida Mirza, MP (Pakistan) who made a presentation in which she explained that, despite women being more than half of the world population, they are still fighting for their rights, which are basic human rights. The importance of gender equality in Sustainable Development was emphasised, quoting former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan who said, “Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting a challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance.” It was observed that, in the developing world, women are overwhelmingly deprived of the most basic and fundamental needs like health, education and social participation. Women continue to face the ‘glass ceiling’ and are victims of a patriarchal mindset.

Further, it was pointed out that women continue to face the critical challenge of political violence which is yet another unfortunate area of women’s harassment that is familiar to everyone, yet often ignored. Political bias, faced by women politicians in their respective parties as well as parliamentary forums, continues to be another matter of concern. It was noted that gender bias has always been dictated by tradition and not by religion or the law of the land. This challenge is greater in developing countries such as Pakistan, where democracy is still evolving. This has resulted in visible absence of the gender perspective in budget allocations. For instance, health and education in developing countries, explicitly impacting the underprivileged female population, receive a nominal percentage of national budgets.

Against this backdrop, the following recommendations were made:

- global parliamentary bodies such as the CPA should always engage in promoting the cause of women. Therefore, the CPA was urged to consider establishing an Observer and Inquiry Commission under Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians to ensure women’s grievances can be redressed;
- the need for the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians to regularly monitor the status of women in political participation and publish periodical reports thereof; and
- exert influence on member states in ensuring transparency and a level political field in and outside parliament; and
- notwithstanding the landmark parliamentary achievements in fighting political violence, it is necessary to partner with the media and civil society as a way of accelerating awareness with female voters, activists and candidates to prepare them against violence in politics. It was hoped that this would greatly help highlight the work of women and expose the discrimination against them.

Hon. Alexandra Mendes, MP (Canada Federal) also made a presentation on political violence against women and women’s equal civil and political rights, in which she elaborated that, according to the Inter Parliamentary Union research, parliamentary cultures are sometimes compared to a ‘men’s club’, especially from the perspective of women Parliamentarians, and parliaments themselves may be viewed as ‘masculine institutions’. This makes women Parliamentarians feel like outsiders and experience discomfort in the parliamentary environment. Sadly, this is at times reinforced by male Parliamentarians.

As an example of a best practice, Canada has prioritised ending gender-based violence, including political violence against all women. In this respect, in 2015, a code of conduct designed to foster an environment free from sexual harassment was appended to the House of Commons Standing Orders. The House of Commons Standing Committee on the status of Women is making an effort to address violence against women and girls in Canada through a study on the topic.

In moving forward to address political violence against women and in adapting to some of the good practices alluded to above, the following recommendations were made:

- in addition to recognizing that the problem exists, Parliamentarians need to enact and enforce specific measures on harassment and violence against women;
- creation of parliamentary codes of conduct, in all countries, that address sexual harassment and associated complaint-settlement procedures;
- women need to work individually and collectively to change this culture so that women are represented in parliament and, women’s voices and rights are respected;
- while each person regardless of gender has a responsibility to end gender-based political violence, women tend to seek out other women when they experience violence or harassment. Therefore, parliaments should consider establishing women parliamentary caucuses as a gateway to solidarity in ending gender-based political violence.

Ms Brigitte Filion (Inter Parliamentary Union) reiterated the fundamental role parliaments play in raising awareness of and addressing political violence against women. It was emphasized that this is possible if both men and women Parliamentarians, and parliaments as institutions, are to set the right example.

In addressing the issue of political violence against women, Ms Filion referred to the IPU Issues Brief on sexism, harassment and violence against women MPs which aims at raising awareness of the human rights violations against women MPs and the obligation of all Parliamentarians to respect and protect the rights of women including women in politics. The study emphasized that sexist remarks and sexual harassment are two types of gender-based violence perpetuated in private and public spheres.

In view of the above, it was stressed that some solutions to raise awareness, prevent and address this issue starts with recognising the existence of the problem, naming it and breaking the silence about it. Therefore, the following were recommended as a way forward:

- Parliamentarians should ensure strong and strictly enforced laws on equality and combating violence against women. This in turn guarantees a conducive environment and mechanisms for women to report and lodge complaints against all forms of discrimination and gender-based violence. In order to cover the current challenges, it was noted that the laws should cover new forms of...
has implemented some of the recommendations outlined. During discussions, two contributions from Canada and Malaysia further elaborated the presentations and recommendations that were made. Hon. Yasmin Ratansi MP (Canada Federal) restated the need for Parliaments to ensure that women politicians work in an environment free from sexist remarks and sexual harassment. It was noted that in Canada, as a way of mitigating sexual harassment, it is mandatory for new Members of Parliament to go through training on sexual harassment. It was noted that these have been an accident between a male and female Member of Parliament, Hon. Hannah Yeoh stressed that some form of protection for male Parliamentarians who are accidentally caught up in such situations has to be taken into account when enacting legislation that protects their female counterparts from sexual violence. In conclusion, it is necessary to note that the presentations had no specific recommendations for the meeting to deliberate on. However, during the presentations by the discussion leaders and from the floor, certain actions were proposed as means of raising awareness of political violence against women which have been highlighted in this report. The proposed actions in themselves were a clear representation of recommendations and therefore, this report has recorded them for future action.

Recommendations from the CWP Session 2 were:

- Parliaments should promote institutional reforms and political cultures that guarantee safe working environments for all, including internal policies against sexist language, attitudes and sexual harassment.
- Parliamentarians must provide conducive political environments for women by focusing on anti-women acts with no intention to assault or discriminate women. Citing the Canadian Parliament 'elbow' incident, which seemed to have been an accident between a male and female Member of Parliament, Hon. Hannah Yeoh stressed that some form of protection for male Parliamentarians who are accidentally caught up in such situations has to be taken into account when enacting legislation that protects their female counterparts from sexual violence.
- Parliaments should endorse legal provisions that guarantee protection and safety for women who are victims of political violence. It was noted that these have been an accident between a male and female Member of Parliament, Hon. Hannah Yeoh stressed that some form of protection for male Parliamentarians who are accidentally caught up in such situations has to be taken into account when enacting legislation that protects their female counterparts from sexual violence.
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Legislating Effectively to Protect Women from Political Violence

5th Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Conference
‘Political Violence against Women’
CWP Session 3 - 15 December 2016

Moderator:
RT Hon. Rebecca Kadaga, MP, CWP Chairperson and Speaker of Parliament (Uganda)

Discussion Leaders:
• Hon. Angela T. Didiza, MP (South Africa)
• Dr Roberta Blackman Woods, MP (United Kingdom)
• Hon. Dr Jiko Luveni, MP, Speaker of Parliament (Fiji)

Rapporteur:
Ms. Linda Kolody (Yukon, Canada)

CWP Session Report:
A dynamic, inspiring, and informative session was chaired by the Rt. Hon. Rebecca Kadaga, MP, Speaker of the Parliament of Uganda, and Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) on the topic, ‘Legislating effectively to protect women from political violence’. Each of the discussion leaders delivered an insightful, well-received presentation and members contributions added value to the wide-ranging discussion.

The first discussion leader, Hon. Angela T. Didiza, MP (South Africa), observed that despite gains such as the extension of the franchise and the creation of enabling instruments, many obstacles remained and that even women holding political office face structural impediments to the full exercise of their powers.

Hon. Angela T. Didiza, MP noted that negative stereotyping of women by the media, while a more subtle form of violence, can leave real trauma in its wake for women, children, and families. The literal cost of gender-based violence in South Africa had actually been quantified through a KPMG study, which concluded that this type of violence cost
the economy an estimated 0.9 to 1.3% (R28.4 billion to R42.2 billion) of the country’s yearly gross domestic product. The study considered not just lost private-sector productivity, but also took into account the costs to government of gender-based violence.

Hon. Angela T. Didiza, MP noted that while many think of the latter as beginning and ending with the criminal justice system, that other areas of the government are impacted, as well. For example, there are the costs associated with the preventative programmes and educational campaigns aimed at wiping out violence against women. There are also after-care costs stemming from the use of health facilities and social services by victims of violence. It was noted that though it is little considered in discussions of gender-based violence, that viewing the violence through the lens of transfers and social costs, could give a fuller picture of the cost of violence.

In the KPMG report it stated: “while it’s not easy to put figures on names … figures tell the story. That shakes people up, when they see how much they actually spend as a result of gender-based violence.”

A similar study had also been conducted in Australia in 2005, which found gender-based violence “cost the economy of Australia almost 13.6 billion Australian dollars.”

To address the societal issue, Hon. Angela T. Didiza, MP noted that many countries undertook the campaign 16 Days of Activism Against Violence Women and Children, and that in South Africa, it was decided the campaign should be a year long, and so the campaign was called ‘16 Days for No Violence against Women and Children’. In a number of countries, targeted legislation had been enacted to address domestic violence, and that certain other legislation protected women’s interests. Notably, in Bolivia, a law concerning harassment and political violence against women came into effect in 2012 to protect women and their political participation. The law establishes penalties for harassment and political violence. In the legislation, political harassment is defined as “the act of series of acts of pressure, threats, harassment or persecution, committed by a person or group of persons directly or through a third party against women candidate-elected or incumbent-in the exercise of a public or political function.”

Recalling her own experiences, Hon. Angela T. Didiza, MP spoke of the personal violence and intimidation that she faced in running for election in 2016 when her party put her name forward to stand as a mayoral candidate and why she feels that the Bolivian law is especially effective – in ensuring those protections are offered and in establishing penalties where in some cases, a person found guilty “can be banned from public office forever.”

Some of the gaps that still exist do so because it has been challenging for lawmakers, including women. “No country can sort out issues arising out of women’s experience in political office and within political parties.” Although according to parliamentary rules, it is not orderly to impugn someone’s character, members find ways around this. For example, in South Africa, where there is a fight for women to achieve 30% representation, “When you pass by, as a woman, male colleagues and colleagues will say, ‘30%.'”

In concluding her presentation, Hon. Angela T. Didiza, MP noted it isn’t possible to claim legitimacy if women, being half of humanity, aren’t “at the table to come development and the course of action for our countries.”

Dr. Roberta Blackman-Woods MP (United Kingdom) observed that she would be giving a “very, very different” talk last year, prior to the murder of her friend and fellow Member of Parliament, Jo Cox MP. For her political view prior to that brutal tragedy, Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods-MP says her presentation would have focused on the details contained in legislation.

Despite the fact that the United Nations defined political violence against women as “the connotation of any act of violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women politicians, including threat of such acts, coercion, discrimination of women or deprivation of liberty in public or private life.” Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods MP observed that increasingly, female activists and voters were found themselves as the targets of harassment and abuse for no reason other than that their participation was a political act.

Ironically, a consequence of the increasing participation of women in politics has been the greater prevalence of political violence against them and the UN’s Special Rapporteur on violence against women recently identified violence against women in politics to be one of her future priorities.

Dr. Roberta Blackman-Woods-MP noted that recent Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) research indicated that the global average for women in national parliaments was 22%. In the UK Parliament, the figures stands at 30%. Although in some African countries, over 50% of Parliamentarians are women, across the world that level of female representation is extremely rare.

The prevalence of violence against women in politics is shocking and recent IPU research found that “40% of female MPs from 39 countries have received threats of kidnap, assault, rape, death, or even the abduction of their children while in office.” Furthermore, “one in five women MPs reported being subjected to sexual violence.” In many countries, no statistics are available about violence against women in politics and collecting information about the issue is an important first step to take. New laws were needed to prevent political violence against women and they should address not only harassment in person but also harassment conducted online. Dr. Roberta Blackman-Woods-MP observed that the Istanbul Convention tasked government with bringing force to eradicate violence against women, that it provided unprecedented protections for women and girls and had been described by the UN as the ‘gold standard’ for the elimination of violence against women. A debate would take place in the UK Parliament on a Bill whose objectives were to ratify the convention.

The Istanbul Convention stipulated: “Parliaments shall ensure that culture, custom, religion, tradition or so-called ‘honor’ shall not be considered as justification for any act of violence.” Ratifying the convention would legally obligate the United Kingdom to raise awareness of the problem through programmes geared at education, prevention, and the treatment of violence against women, as well as by training professionals.

Dr. Roberta Blackman-Woods MP noted that in the UK, men who harassed women in Parliament were increasingly being held accountable for their actions and arrested.

Hon. Dr. Jiko Luveni MP (Fiji) had travelled a huge distance from the Parliament of Fiji to speak to the conference. Hon. Dr. Jiko Luveni MP observed that while a good deal of the narrative surrounding violence against women concerned issues like domestic violence, sexual violence, and human trafficking, that the violence to which women were exposed was due to their roles in politics, leadership, or public life. He received comparatively little attention.

Hon. Dr. Jiko Luveni MP remarked that it had long been widely understood that latter type of violence undermined women’s empowerment within the political realm. For that reason, and also because this type of violence served as “a strong deterrent to young and aspiring women politicians … the political arena must be made safe for women.”

Hon. Dr. Jiko Luveni MP acknowledged that policies and legislation on violence against women existed locally and internationally, and that certain international instruments, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the UN Declaration on Commitment on HIV/AIDS, had been ratified. As well, she observed that Fiji’s constitutional affirmed “our recognition of the human rights to freedom of all individuals and groups, safeguarded by adherence to the rule of law, and our respect for human dignity and for the importance of the family.”

Hon. Dr. Jiko Luveni MP discussed ways in which social media could expose women politicians to violence. Social media could be used as a platform from which to make untrue statements about female Parliamentarians and leaders. Even if the considerable efforts that may be required to have false claims taken down from the Internet meet with success, someone may have downloaded and saved the material beforehand, and so the damaging misinformation may wind its way back into social media, where it can again be forwarded and take on new life. Hon. Dr. Jiko Luveni MP shared a personal incident regarding untrue material being levied against her online.

In her closing remarks, Hon. Dr. Jiko Luveni MP reflected that conferences such as this provide a real opportunity to share experiences and to strengthen a common commitment to protect women from political violence.

Hon. Nithi Motsamai, MP (Lesotho) noted that such as that a woman’s mentorship of a minority group in their country exposes women Parliamentarians to more sexist remarks and violence.

In light of that finding, she wondered how female MPs who belong to minority groups – such as Indigenous women, women with a disability, or perhaps women who are lesbian, gay, transgender, or intersex could best be supported in politics.

Ms. Britany Luqa, MP (Qatar) noted that a study showed that “a woman’s mentorship of a minority group in their country exposes women Parliamentarians to more sexist remarks and violence.”

In light of that, she wondered how female MPs who belong to minority groups – such as Indigenous women, women with a disability, or perhaps women who are lesbian, gay, transgender, or intersex could best be supported in politics. Ms. Britany Luqa, MP (Qatar) noted that a study showed that “a woman’s mentorship of a minority group in their country exposes women Parliamentarians to more sexist remarks and violence.”

In light of that, she wondered how female MPs who belong to minority groups – such as Indigenous women, women with a disability, or perhaps women who are lesbian, gay, transgender, or intersex could best be supported in politics.
concurred with an observation one of the presenters had made in that that legislation that is not enforced, is akin to having no legislation whatsoever. She wondered to what extent women were failing to support other women, and noted that sometimes men used women to intimidate other women.

Hons. Akello Judith Franca, MP (Uganda) was interested in learning how easily the Bolivian legislation passed into law, the better for other jurisdictions to adopt similar legislation. Hons. Akello Judith Franca, MP observed that legislative measures should not only focus on women candidates, given that in the most recent election in her country, four women who supported candidates who were not their respective husband’s choice (without regard to whether or not the candidates were women) were “thrown out of their marriages.”

Princess Kausue, MP (Zambia) challenged women in politics to “really attempt to take advantage of social media because it is not going anywhere.” Ms. Kausue, MP also asserted that it was “critical that when a woman is being bashed on social media, that we, as fellow women, stand up and speak towards that.”

Hons. Thagasvari Suppiah (Penang, Malaysia) suggested that by adopting a more empowered mind-set, women could further their cause by projecting to society, “We are one, and we are a formidable force, and we have to be reckoned with.”

Dr Fehmida Mirza, MNA (Pakistan) observed that positive news is not news, as it fails to receive coverage in traditional media. Expanding upon this, Dr. Fehmida Mirza, MNA noted that the positive acts taken by women Parliamentarians in their official capacities are not projected in the regular media and she added that rather than looking for male champions, a commitment must first be fostered among women to support other women. After these questions and comments, the three discussion leaders had an opportunity to respond to some of the contributions from the floor before the recommendations arising from the session were considered and adopted. Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods MP agreed that it was important to work with men to change a culture that engenders violence against women – however added that first, women must support each other, and the subsequently they could reach out to colleagues who support women’s rights. Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods MP noted that this included efforts to bring more women into parliament as this “changes the culture and enables us to get legislation.”

Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods MP said that as far as women from minority parties were concerned, the factor of greatest concern was to protect all women in politics, as by extension, that would include women from minority parties. Hons. Angela T. Doliza, MP observed that there seemed to be agreement that “a multiplicity of interventions” was needed. This included legislation and enforcing existing legislation, as well as advocacy, building solidarity and partnerships, and civic education. On the subject of social media, Hons. Angela T. Doliza, MP found merit in the observation that as social media is an unescapable reality, it is important to look at how to engage with it. She observed that the prevention of cybercrime should be considered, as certain digital applications now in use can increase women’s vulnerability.

Hons. Angela T. Doliza, MP concluded that role models are important: “if in your home, you have seen your mother being a strong leader, your grandmother, your aunt in society, your mum, you get confidence.”

Dr. Jiko Luveni MP related that after the recent elections in Fiji, they now have the highest percentage of women in parliament ever – at sixteen percent - as well as their first female Speaker. She noted that some of the positive changes could be attributed to changing the electoral system as Fiji adopted the proportional representation list system, and at the party level, 30% of candidates must be women which had made a real contribution to achieving these good results.

Recommendations from the CWP Session 3 were:

- **Parliaments should undertake gender mainstreaming in their legislative processes and functions, through gender-based analysis built into standing orders and other rules of parliament.**
- **Parliament, having promoted the active participation of women in politics, must introduce effective measures to protect women from political violence.**
- **Parliament must promote good practice in legislating to protect women from political violence and work with Parliaments across the Commonwealth in raising awareness over women’s issues.**

All recommendations from the CWP Session 3 were endorsed.

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**5th Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Conference**

**‘Political Violence against Women’**

**CWP Session 4 - 15 December 2016**

**THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE MEDIA IN TACKLING POLITICAL VIOLENCE**

Moderator:

RT Hon. Rebecca Kadaga, MP, CWP Chairperson and Speaker of Parliament (Uganda)

Discussion Leaders:

- **Hons. Michelle O’Byrne, MHA (Tasmania, Australia)**
- **Hons. Shirley Osborne, MLA, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly (Montserrat)**
- **Hons. Dr Immaculate Swaree Semesi, MP (Tanzania)**
- **Mr David Donat Cattin, Secretary-General, Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA)**

CWP Session Report:

Political violence against women remains one of the key obstacles adversely affecting the welfare of many democracies within the Commonwealth and beyond. These manifest itself in terms of physical, sexual, and psychological violence. It is commonly observed that women face violence and intimidation when they decide to run for political office. Such intimidation may range from being assaulted, sexually abused, through hate speech and psychologically manipulated or even murdered. Delegates noted the different perspectives presented by the discussion leaders and made several recommendations for the consideration of Parliamentarians within the Commonwealth community.

The discussion leaders and contributors from different Commonwealth Parliaments noted that abuse of language influences certain gender stereotypes which denigrate women in different political settings. Equally, lack of penal codes in the specific legislations passed by Parliamentarians remain a challenge in many parliaments. To this end, it is imperative that women in public office work to safeguard their right to serve in political life, and to put in place such measures as to ensure their protection. While violence and intimidation may be dismissed as a cost of doing politics, it rather serves as a severe detrimental cost to the entire political process.

Media has played a role in shaping how individuals engage with the political system of their country for many decades. To an extent, even the national consciousness of a country can be impacted by the information citizens acquire about their political system through the media. Although media and civil society have a significant role to play in addressing the challenge of political violence against women, it is often argued that a majority of influential positions in the media are still occupied by male counterparts who are still dilatate about the rights of women. To this end, participants in the session endorsed the recommendations that Parliaments and Governments must work with media agencies to counter the use of language that minimises or trivialises violence against women in politics. Parliaments must criminalise political violence against women as such. When committed systematically, political violence against women is persecution, a crime under international law. Civic society must invest in education of a boy child and change of attitudes.

Hons. Michelle O’Byrne, MHA (Tasmania, Australia) was the first discussion leader for the session and she noted that civil society and the media have a great impact on political violence against women.
role to play in tackling political violence against women. There are many challenges that women face in their daily lives from abusive social media pressure and Parliamentarians have a responsibility to work with the media and with civil society groups to tackle these challenges.

H. Shirley Osborne, MLA (Montserrat) reaffirmed the persistent challenge of the negative and stereotypical in the form of language use in politics aimed at denigrating women has to be confronted with an aggressive civil society and women Parliamentarians.

She further recalled global interventions aimed at addressing the challenge. These include the 2002 Beijing Platform for Action adopted by the United Nations and pronounces itself on the need to strongly condemn the political violence perpetrated against women and the social exclusion it causes to women.

To this end, women must use the necessary policies and legislation passed in Parliaments to combat the challenge of political violence. Platforms such as social media and civic society must be encouraged to act aggressively in exposing political violence and stigmas perpetrated against women.

H. Dr Immaculate Sware Semesi (Tanzania) observed that social culture practices and discriminatory attitudes have over time played a detrimental role to the social being of women. The son preferences over a daughter is one of the principal forms of discrimination and one which has far-reaching implications for women. Though the preference of the boy child over the girl child. The practice denies the girl child, good health, development, recreation, and many other opportunities. When the girl child has been denied in all these, she will lack confidence to participate in political activities because of her limitations and inability to compete with men, as they got all the advantages to make them fit in the political competition. This turn can increase the number of women to be experience violence in politics.

It was further noted that civil society has been successful in shaping global policy through advocacy campaigns, community based organisation and the mobilising of people and resources. They use several mechanisms of lobbying and advocacy aiming at creating awareness in the community and influence the policy change and decision making. Civil society is at the forefront of educating women, girls and children about their rights and how to demand those rights. They also include boys and men to ensure that cultural norms that perpetuate and engender discrimination are well addressed. Through their advocacy, violation of women’s rights in politics can be reduced, since they know their rights and they will be aware of how to compete in politics and once they are politically violated they know where to go.

Equally, civil societies do collect various data on political violence against women and put them on record so as to address these issues with the public and with decision-making bodies. They develop indicators and collect data on the prevalence, form and impact of violence against women in politics and provide training to law enforcement officials to enable them to recognise such acts, reporting and prosecuting these crimes as a violation of the law. They also provide support and counselling for the women who are the survivors of political violence. Civil societies provide a space for women who are politically violated to give out their complaints and then work to resolve those complaints by sending them to legal bodies including the police, the electoral authorities and gender equality offices for justice decisions.

Civil society is obligated to ensure that the economic emancipation of women is highly prioritised by governments worldwide, especially in developing countries, where women are still undervalued and remain largely unrecognised. It is imperative that women are supported to enjoy equal access to opportunities and resources, and to take action as to opportunities for societal leadership and participation. A just and equal society will only be possible if the structural conditions that stifle efforts to advance women are addressed.

On the legal framework and policy change, civil societies influence policy making and help to enact laws that abolish discrimination in society. The laws against female genital mutilation and the marriage act are specific laws that have been introduced by the influence of the civil societies. Therefore, civil societies also have a role in influencing the government to create laws that will end or reduce the problem of political violence against women. Civil societies and the media work closely with the community and therefore they know a lot of the issues that are happening in society. Together with other stakeholders they work to make sure they address whatever is happening in society and make it known to the public.

Mr David Donut Cattin (Parliamentarians for Global Action – PAGA) argued that sexual violence against women are not reported and exposed. This is due to the challenge that in some countries the media tend to protect the government and so the facilitation of the truth remains a challenge. It is against this backdrop that mechanisms such as social media and other stakeholders must be used to expose the brutality, prejudice and stereotyping aimed at denigrating women.

Mr David Donut Cattin further questioned political violence against women and the manner in which it is defined. The contemporary definitions of political violence are not embracing and they do not address the plight of women from the social, economic and political perspective. To this end, action is necessary from the civic society to advocate for the redefinition of the education curriculum to deal with women’s issues from the psycho-social perspective as well as the economic angle.

The introduction of mentoring to a boy child with a view to change their attitudes on how they related with the girl child was recommended by the conference delegates from Canada.

Delegates from Kenya also shared their experiences in their own countries regarding political violence perpetrated against women. It was indicated that attention needed to be paid to rural women in relation to the sensitivity they are subjected to by local authorities in the villages.

Parliamentarians from the United Kingdom also shared their experiences and explained that the UK has enacted a number of laws aimed at protecting the rights of women. However there is a need to intensively scrutinise and parliamentary of oversight in an effort to ensure that there are penal codes which are punishable to the perpetrators of political violence against women.

The question of the media was recognised regarding women’s political campaigns that are not covered by the media due to men being the preferred candidates. It is noted that most of the media institutions are dominated by male journalists.

It is against this background that mechanisms such as the introduction of help lines through radio, social media and television must be utilised to expose and report political violence to the concerned Ministries of governments and other state institutions. With respect to civic education, Parliamentarians are encouraged share the good practices of the United Nations with countries and institutions that are already introducing good programmes aimed at improving women’s socio-political status in society.

H. Lindwe Maseko (South Africa) encouraged Commonwealth Parliamentarians to develop outreach programmes to educate citizens on issues of women’s rights as guaranteed in the constitution and different legislations. It should be enhanced through the establishment of partnerships with other state institutions that will include the judiciary, the legislature and different ministries of government. This would effectively assist women by enlighten them about the value of democracy itself and the extent to which the constitutional and legislation improves their lives for the better.

H. Lindwe Maseko MP further explained that such programmes can be facilitated through the association to citizens and facilitated by civic education with the support of the constitutional courts.

A large number of recommendations were suggested during the CWP Session for consideration by the CPA including measures to protect women from political violence and work with Parliaments across the Commonwealth in raising awareness of women’s issues.

That political violence against women is not limited to acts against women, but can be running for office but that it has its genesis and perpetuation elsewhere.

Women Parliamentarians united, should speak out, address root causes of violence against women, perform awareness-raising and place the issue on the agenda in different platforms.

Recommendations from the CWP Session 4 were:

• Parliament must promote good practice in legislating to protect women from political violence and work with Parliaments across the Commonwealth in raising awareness of women’s issues.

• That political violence against women is not limited to acts against women, but can be running for office but that it has its genesis and perpetuation elsewhere.

• Women Parliamentarians united, should speak out, address root causes of violence against women, perform awareness-raising and place the issue on the agenda in different platforms.
COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION

Small Branches address the issues affecting small parliaments and legislatures across the Commonwealth


The conference included three main plenary sessions exploring key themes proposed by the Membership: ‘The role of the Commonwealth in supporting the outcomes of the COP21 Paris Agreement on Climate Change’; ‘The role of parliament in the protection and safeguarding of children’; ‘Eliminating barriers to women’s leadership in politics in Small Branches’. Reports of these conference sessions appear in this issue of The Parliamentarian.

Of the over 180 Branches of the CPA, forty-three Branches are classified as ‘Small Branches’ which are defined as jurisdictions having a population below 500,000 people. Even larger countries like Northwest Territories in Canada, Overseas Territories such as Montserrat or territories within larger countries like Barbados and St. Lucia, as well as CPA Branches in UK Overseas Territories such as Montserrat or territories within larger countries like Northwest Territories in Canada.

The CPA Headquarters Secretariat works closely with Small Branches. Branches are classified as ‘Small Branches’.

Stronger in Numbers: The Role of the Commonwealth in Supporting the Outcomes of the COP21 Paris Agreement on Climate Change

Moderator: Hon. McKeeva Bush MLA (Cayman Islands)
Discussion Leaders:
• Hon. Mike Summers, MLA (Falkland Islands)
• Hon. Toka Hagai (Cook Islands)
• Hon. Cruyff Buckley (St. Helena)
• Mr Robert Ondhowe (United Nations Environment Programme UNEP)
Rapporteur: Mr Tim Mercer (Northwest Territories, Canada)

Small Branches Session Report:
The first session of the CPA Small Branches Conference was on the subject of ‘The Role of the Commonwealth in Supporting the Outcomes of the COP21 Paris Agreement on Climate Change’. Many CPA Small Branches struggle with a fundamental dilemma with respect to climate change. Many are island states who stand to feel the negative impacts of climate change first and most profoundly. However, because of their small populations and economies, they have limited ability to influence overall reduction targets and limited resources to adapt to the impacts of a changing climate. Notwithstanding, Small Branches feel a responsibility to participate in climate change mitigation as a means of putting pressure on the efforts of large states, particularly those in the developed world.

The Moderator and the discussion leaders for this workshop session represented small island nations that stand to experience the negative impacts of a warming climate most immediately and catastrophically. Changing ocean currents resulting from warming temperatures may negative impact commercial fishing activities which form a staple of many island nation economies. Warmer temperatures also place the drinking water resources of isolated island states at risk. Despite the severe and immediate impact of climate change on small nations, they are limited in terms of their ability to reducing carbon emissions to a meaningful degree. When small state reduction targets are included as part of the overall targets of their associated larger nations, the incentive to act is minimized.

Notwithstanding the above-noted paradox, each of the discussion leaders in this conference session expressed a firm commitment to action by small states. Small states can serve as testing grounds for new clean energy and adaptation technologies. Regional cooperation among neighbouring small states can be used to establish more meaningful emission targets and achieve economies of scale for technology acquisition, research and development. Most importantly, small states must lead by example to maintain pressure on larger, high emission nations to take real action to meet the COP21 emission targets.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)
A COLLABORATIVE COMMONWEALTH: UNITY, DIVERSITY AND COMMON CHALLENGES

and member parliaments have an important role to play in meeting the COP21 Paris Agreement Goals. The conference workshop was informed that the CPA and its member Parliamentarians must show leadership in encouraging ratification of COP21 by their national governments. Delay in ratification is slowing down the establishment of implementation rules. The CPA and its members also have an important role to play in ensuring that coherent legislation is enacted amongst signatories and that impediments such as national intellectual property laws do not prohibit the transfer of relevant technologies amongst signatory states. Finally, Parliamentarians must monitor and oversee the implementation of the COP21 Agreement and hold their respective governments to account.

Hon. Gregory Raymond Hall, MP (Tasmania, Australia) described his state’s move to 100% renewable hydro energy some years ago only to find it severely restricted as a result of recent droughts. The system, which is now back in full operation, incentivizes the installation of low carbon energy by individual residents by allowing them to sell excess energy back into their energy grid.

Hon. Anglo Farrugia, MP (Malta) described his country’s recent initiatives to adopt clean energy generation and waste management practices. He noted that educating other leaders and the public about the science supporting climate change is critical to maintaining pressure on the large polluter states to act.

Hon. Terry Mills, MLA (Northern Territory, Australia) stressed the importance of accessing the public mood for financial and legislative measures to reduce emissions and adapt to climate change. The importance of self-interest in creating a more favourable public mood was noted. Citizens must see a payback to adopting greener measures locally and nationally.

Hon. Francis (Buck) Watts MLA (Prince Edward Island, Canada) described the challenges of waste management on a small island state with limited population and incentive for private sector involvement. He also noted the island’s complete reliance on ground water and the risks associated with this in a warming climate.

Deputy Jonathan Le Toq (Guernsey) expressed support for the establishment of regional emission targets, particularly for states like his, which are lumped in with the reduction targets of a much larger state like the United Kingdom. The establishment of sea defenses was noted as a major adaptation challenge for small island states.

Hon. Dr Daniel Johnson MP (Bahamas) described a recent project to develop and produce small solar cars on his island state and noted the opportunities for cooperation amongst small states to develop and market such clean technology.

Mr John Tangi (Cook Islands) described recent efforts by Australia and New Zealand to assist his state in the development and implementation of green technology, and encouraged the CPA to play a coordinating role to encourage more of the same.

Deputy Michelle Le Clerc (Guernsey) inquired as to any successes with tidal energy production.

Hon. Andrew Wall MP (Australian Capital Territory) re-emphasised the importance of self-interest in finding and implementing workable solutions. He inquired as to the eligibility of small and large states to access funding from the UNED Adaptation Fund.

In response, Mr Robert Ondhowe (UNEP) indicated a move to eliminate the bifurcation of eligibility for access to the Adaptation Fund between developed and developing states as mandated in the Kyoto Accord during the implementation phase of COP21.

Hon. Winston Connolly MLA (Cayman Islands) described a motion for the adoption of climate change adaptation strategy that was unanimously supported by his Parliament as well as a proposed energy policy recently developed by a parliamentary committee that will recommend, amongst other measures, the reduction of import duties on electric vehicles and other green initiatives.

Recommendations from the Small Branches Session 1 were:

• Climate change is an issue for us all, but we cannot do it alone. The key role of the Commonwealth will be to support the smaller nations.
• The CPA can facilitate collaborative action, and it can support Parliamentarians in moving forward in terms of climate action.
• Global appetite for action on climate change has increased, which provides an opportunity for a small, isolated nation, to show global leadership and demonstrate commitment to combat this issue.

All recommendations from the Small Branches Session 1 were endorsed.

35th CPA Small Branches Conference
Small Branches Session 2 - 13 December 2016

THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENT IN THE PROTECTION AND SAFEGUARDING OF CHILDREN

Moderator: Hon K. H. Randolph
Horton, JP, MP, Speaker of the House of Assembly (Bermuda)

Discussion Leaders:
• Mr R. J. Simpson MLA (Northwest Territories, Canada)
• Hon. Gregory Raymond Hall, MP (Tasmania, Australia)
• Mr Orest Nowosad (Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights)

Rapporteur: Mr Mark Jones (New South Wales, Australia)

Small Branches Session Report:
The discussion leaders began the session by outlining some of the challenges currently faced by Parliaments around the Commonwealth regarding the protection and safeguarding of children. In a very open and compassionate discussion, delegates shared their experiences of serious issues facing children in their home countries and jurisdictions, as well as initiatives undertaken by their Parliaments to address them.

Similarly, it was suggested that the current system was failing children, causing them to have “worse long term outcomes” with children taken in to care shown to be more likely to be involved in crime, substance abuse and having their own children taken in to care. He stated the importance of Parliamentarians addressing the root cause of children being taken away from their families to help break this self-perpetuating cycle.

Increased levels of poverty, higher incarceration rates and substance abuse problems amongst the indigenous community must first be acknowledged and addressed of the state compared with the national average.

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Increased levels of poverty, higher incarceration rates and substance abuse problems amongst the indigenous community must first be acknowledged and addressed of the state compared with the national average.
Mr R.J. Simpson MLA also spoke about the "intergenerational trauma" suffered by indigenous children, who were forcibly separated from their families and taken to state and church-run residential schools. He detailed the ongoing issues caused by physical and sexual abuse of children in these schools, as well as the statistic that at one period in time "1 in 4 previously healthy indigenous children died in residential schools." He noted the importance of Parliamentarians taking historical factors such as these into consideration when considering new policies, stating that this had "created a sense of worthlessness that permeates generations" and "normalised physical and sexual violence" within the indigenous community.

Hon. Gregory Raymond Hall MP (Tasmania) began his contribution to the discussion by stating that "providing a safe and protective environment for our children to grow and develop is a fundamental responsibility for our society." As a part of a bicameral Westminster Parliament, he focused on the scrutiny of the Executive Government by the Upper House, which is comprised mainly of independent, non-party affiliated Members. He also highlighted that this was traditional for the state of Tasmania, where the Upper House is generally viewed as a house of review.

Details were given about the Committee system in Tasmania with particular reference to "how parliament can play a vital role in providing the best possible outcomes for children who have been caught up in the justice system," based on a Select Committee inquiry into a Tasmanian Youth Detention Centre. Mr Hall stated that he believed the Committee provided a way for Parliamentarians to "express their views in public and provide information free from repercussions."

Despite actions from a number of previous inquiries, the Committee was "apalled in the lack of cross-agency support for children in the youth justice system." The Committee took evidence from 44 witnesses and received 42 submissions, as well as visiting the youth detention centre in question, as well as other centres in Australia and New Zealand. Parliamentarians from the Committee made 32 recommendations to improve the youth justice system and took them to the executive government for consideration. One of the recommendations was the appointment of a specialist Youth Magistrate, which has now been established as a result of the inquiry and the Committee looked at a successful model in New Zealand.

Mr Orest Nowosad (Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights) spoke of the complex machinery of the human rights system, detailing the work of the six United Nations’ Committees and how they relate to protecting and safeguarding children. He spoke to the wish of the United Nations to involve Parliamentarians in the work of the Committees, enabling them to follow through on recommendations and see them implemented in countries around the world.

He outlined the details of the communications procedure, whereby children can appear before the Committees and plead areas of concern, with the Committees providing quasi-judicial recommendations that can assist Parliamentarians in their role as legislators. Mr Orest Nowosad encouraged legislators to consider their role with regards to oversight, legislative and budgetary functions, including ensuring that there are appropriate budgetary provisions for addressing issues of the rights of the child.

After hearing the contribution from Hon. Gregory Raymond Hall MP, he also encouraged Parliamentarians to use the Committee system and parliamentary hearings to undertake specialised investigations, as well as to review and study their own framework. Mr Orest Nowosad also touched on other global issues regarding the protection and safeguarding of children, including gender parity and gender respect, corporal punishment and the age of criminal responsibility, stating that in some countries it is still as low as 10 years old.

Senator Paul Routier (Jersey) acknowledged the powerful words of Mr R.J. Simpson MLA, noting that his Parliament currently had a Committee of Inquiry underway for child abuse in institutions as well as a compensation scheme in place for historical child abuse. He encouraged Parliamentarians to learn from the past and detailed Jersey’s large investment into children’s services. Senator Paul Routier also called for a focus on the whole family to look for signs of risk, as well as teachers and police looking for signs regarding the safeguarding of children. Deputy Michelle Le Clerc (Guernsey) said that she was a former foster carer of teenage children and this was one of her main reasons for getting into politics. She described the idea of "corporate parenting", whereby children under the care of government are the responsibility of Parliamentarians and should be treated as if they were their own.

Hon. Michael Weeks MP (Bermuda) spoke about the endemic nature of child sexual abuse in Bermuda and other countries around the world. He quoted the figures that 1 in 10 children in the United States suffer child sexual abuse, and that the rate in Bermuda may be as high as 1 in 3 girls, and 1 in 5 boys being sexually abused before their 18th birthday.

He called child sexual abuse "the most prevalent health problem children face, with the most serious array of consequences", affecting all generations, religions and socioeconomic classes. Hon. Michael Weeks MP informed the discussion that one of the reasons that child sexual abuse has been such an issue for Bermuda is due to the subject being "taboo" amongst the tight-knit communities. The advent of the SCARS (Saving Children and Revealing Secrets) organisation in Bermuda has helped to reduce the stigma around the issue and provided training for people working with children. He proudly stated that Bermuda is the first country in the world to have over 10% of its adult population trained in the prevention of child sexual abuse.

Hon. Michael Weeks MP also issued a plea to action for legislators to do more, including mandating the professional rehabilitation and therapy of convicted child sex offenders; assessment of offenders before their release back into the community; the creation of an accessible sex offenders’ register; and mandated training for people working with children.

Hon. Angelo Farrugia MP (Malta) spoke about the topical issue of child refugees in the Mediterranean, referencing the Convention of Rights of the Child which states that children have to be safe from violence. He also said that there are currently 300,000 child soldiers younger than the age of 18 as well as children fighting in armies around the world from the age of 15.

Hon. Terry Mills MLA (Northern Territory, Australia) spoke about the Australian Government’s recent undertaking of a Royal Commission into the detaining of children. He also expressed frustration that whilst there was a coordinated national response to equine flu in the racehorse industry, Parliaments across Australia struggle to reach agreement on the protection of children.

Hon. Mike Summers MLA (Falkland Islands) said that denial of child abuse in the community and in Parliament is a major issue to overcome. He also spoke about the Falkland Islands abolishing time limits on prosecution cases for abuse of children, as many cases of abuse can take many years to be revealed.

Senator Robyn Lynes (Bahamas) discussed the impact of social media on children being abused, with people not wanting to come forward for fear of being exposed as a victim. She called for better regulation and monitoring of institutions, stating that children who were abused at home can be exposed to more abuse in the institutions that are supposed to protect them.

Deputy Scott Wicksend (Jersey) called for resource sharing between smaller jurisdictions, stating that the cost of lawyers was prohibitive to small jurisdictions looking into issues and drafting legislation.

In closing, Mr R.J. Simpson MLA said that the situation faced by people in the Northwest Territories was more common than he previously expected, commenting that you could replace ‘Northwest Territories with ‘Northern Territory, Australial and the historic treatment of indigenous children is similar in pattern.

He said that it was time for action rather than recommendations and that he would like to see further movement to keep indigenous children with their families rather than in the institutions that are supposed to protect them.

Mr Orest Nowosad concluded his contribution by suggesting that "corporate parenting" was something that should be looked into further. He also described the ‘anger’ of youth in the world today, calling on Parliamentarians to engage with young people, particularly using social media.

Bringing the session to a close with some final remarks, session moderator, Hon. Randall Horton MP (Bermuda) stated that many disadvantaged youth in our countries are facing a myriad of issues. He called on Parliamentarians to work harder at finding the solutions and having the will to ensure that they follow through.

Recommendations from the Small Branches Session 2 were:

• In small states the Parliament must play a pivotal role in ensuring legislative and administrative safeguards for our children, including though its committee system.
• Parliamentarians must be keenly aware of the historic and cultural factors that have led to the need to protect certain populations of children.
• Parliamentarians should give due attention to the implementation of human rights mechanisms and recommendations ensuring adequate budgetary provisions for the rights of the child.

All recommendations from the Small Branches Sessions 2 were endorsed.

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Small Branches Session 3 - 13 December 2016

ELIMINATING BARRIERS TO WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP IN POLITICS IN SMALL BRANCHES

Moderator:
Hon. McKeeva Bush MLA
(Cayman Islands)

Discussion Leaders:
- Deputy Michelle Le Clerc (Guernsey)
- Hon. Niki Rattle, Speaker of Parliament (Cook Islands)
- Hon. Shirley Osborne, MLA, Speaker of the Legislative A ssembly (Montserrat)

Rapporteur:
Mr John Tangi
(Cook Islands)

Small Branches Session Report:
The session moderator introduced the topic ‘Eliminating barriers to women’s leadership in politics in Small Branches’ and also the various discussion leaders.

Beginning with the first discussion leader, Deputy Michelle Le Clerc (Guernsey) noted that true democracy ought to provide equal opportunity for women and men. As in her jurisdiction, governments should ensure that adequate funds are available for programmes that promote women to participate and be encouraged to stand for politics and enter into Parliament. Such programmes in Guernsey has increased the number of women standing in elections into politics and has also attracted ‘mentors’ to encourage and build confidence in women in this endeavour. In this regard, there was an effective slogan to further encourage women which said ‘Women to Win!’ As a result, there was an increase to 30% women Members in Parliament in Guernsey at the most recent election.

In February 2016, under the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP), assistance was provided for a successful training workshop in Guernsey which called for women to ‘work together’. The workshop helped to mobilise women and it contributed to the increase in the number of women wanting to stand for parliament and encouraged funding to support this endeavour. Deputy Michelle Le Clerc concluded that making funding and resources available and working together would help to increase the number of women in Parliament.

The second discussion leader was Hon. Niki Rattle (Cook Islands) who as introduced by the moderator is not a politician, but is a passionate ‘humanitarian’ worker being a registered nurse, and a long time worker in the Red Cross community at national, regional and global level. She became a Speaker of Parliament in June 2012.

Hon. Niki Rattle noted that this was a topic that she was passionate about, having a ‘humanitarian’ background. She was disappointed that the tradition of women trying to prove they are worthy to be Parliamentarians and to be in politics, still continues in many of our societies, including the Cook Islands. The trend should be for women and men to be walking and working together. Gender equality should be promoted and encouraged. There should be a paradigm shift and this should be put into practice to rid our societies of these barriers.

Traditionally, women’s place has been in the home, caring for the children, caring for the health of the family, and so on. Because of their varied tasks, women became ‘multi-skilled’ covering wide-ranging areas and so what better person is there to debate in Parliament about education for example than women?

Hon. Niki Rattle spoke of women’s roles in teaching and training the children in the home; looking after the health of the family; and ensuring that water and sanitation are looked after in the home. Women have expertise in all of these roles and so should be speaking about these issues in Parliament.

Hon. Niki Rattle gave two examples from the Cook Islands Parliament to illustrate her point. The first was the example of the election of Members of Parliament onto the Purse Seining (Fishing) Select Committee which resulted in a membership of all male MPs. As Speaker, Hon. Niki Rattle enquired as to the reason for this and was told that women MPs were excluded from the Select Committee in the first instance because it was assumed that men do all of the fishing in the community. However it was successfully argued that women in the low lying atoll islands do a lot of the fish as well. The result was that two women MPs were included in the new Select Committee.

A second example was the Te Mato Vai Water Project Select Committee which was also a male dominated Committee.

Following Hon. Niki Rattle’s argument that it was in fact women who were the greatest users of water in the home (for cooking, washing, etc), the membership of the Select Committee was changed to include women MPs.

Hon. Niki Rattle noted that taking small steps will eventually achieve greater things for the inclusion of women in politics and Parliament. Women are the highest number of victims from domestic violence and abuse, yet across the Pacific Region, women have the lowest representation in Parliament. MPs are in the best position to get rid of barriers depriving women of opportunities to enter politics and Parliament by enacting much needed legislation, and to advocate gender equality in society including Parliament. Previously, the Cook Islands Public Service across middle management and executive positions were male dominated, however today there has been an increase in women holding these positions. Hon. Niki Rattle concluded that there should be equal opportunity for women and men in all sectors of society.

The third discussion leader for the session was Hon. Shirley Osborne, MLA (Montserrat). Hon. Shirley Osborne, MLA noted that even in the labour market there are great discrepancies where women are considered second rate and their potential is undermined. These are noticeable in the education sector, health care and so on.

There is also the prevalence of ‘private violence’ against women, in small island communities where everyone knows everyone else, even small issues relating to a specific woman would result in her being ostracised in the community and their chances of moving to the next level and even into politics would be minimal. On the other hand, men don’t experience this kind of treatment.

Sometimes the perceptions raised about women in their own society has not been too encouraging and people are generally very judgmental about women.

Nevertheless, Hon. Shirley Osborne, MLA encouraged women to be ‘role models’ for other women and young girls to look up to for their future. Women need to speak up and speak out, and also to manage their environment. Social barriers will continue to plague women but they should persevere and endure and not give up.

Hon. Angelo Famagia, MP (Malta) thanked the discussion leaders for their presentations and stated that ‘equal rights for women and men’ should not be expressed verbally only but should be followed up with commitment and practical meaningful actions. He went on to say a quotation by the former female President of Brazil who said “A better democracy is equality should be promoted and encouraged. There should be a paradigm shift and this should be put into practice to rid our societies of these barriers.

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are elected as Members of the Legislative Assembly recently. Hon. Niki Rattle (Cook Islands) stated that today there is an increase in the sharing of responsibilities between men and women in the home environment. For example, some men are caring for the children at home while the women are engaged in paid work either in the civil service or in the private sector to earn an income to support the family. MPs can design policies and pass legislation to improve women’s representation in Parliament. However, even in the Parliamentary precinct, steps should be taken to establish a children’s care centre for the children of Members to enable young children to be close to their parents during the working day.

The moderator, Hon. McKeena Buch (Cayman Islands) concluded by stating that in the Cayman Islands, there are opportunities for both women and men alike, with similarly, opportunities for young girls and boys. Academically, young girls excelled much more than young boys at school. Previously, there use to be system barriers’ either in the civil service or in the private sectors, where disadvantages resulted in disadvantaging women. However today, many of these so called ‘system barriers’ have been overcome through the recognising of the importance of gender sensitisation and gender equality in society. Politics on the other hand is perceived as being “too confrontational” and as a result, there is a reluctance by some women to be involved in politics or even contest Parliamentary elections.

Recommendations from the Small Branches Session 3 were:

- Parliaments must ensure that there is funding and support for campaigns to encourage more women to stand for election and take leadership roles within parliaments.
- Gender Based initiatives on increasing Women’s representation in Parliament be backed up by mechanisms, strategies and Fundamental Principles including targets, supported by the CPA.
- The logic would suggest that women experience fewer and less severe obstacles to their leadership ambitions in small branches, but the reality is very different.

The first and third recommendations from Small Branches Session 3 were noted. The second recommendation from the workshop was endorsed.

NEWS FROM THE 62ND COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE

As is the custom, the Society of Clerks-at-the-Table (SOCATT) met alongside the 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference at the recent conference held in London, United Kingdom in December 2016. This was the 52nd meeting of the Society. The tradition of the Society is for the meeting to be chaired by the host parliament of the conference, but as the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference was hosted by a Commonwealth Parliament, but by the CPA Headquarters Secretariat in London, the Clerks of the House of Commons and Clerk of the House of Lords of the United Kingdom Parliament acted as hosts for the SOCATC meetings. Around sixty five Commonwealth Parliamentary Clerks and senior officials were able to participate in the SOCATC meetings. Due to the limitations of the conference being held at short notice in London and restrictions on the number of delegates, a number of members of SOCATC, particularly from the Africa and India regions, were unable to join the meetings.

Over three sessions of the Society, papers were presented on:
- Recent parliamentary developments in the UK – David Natidier and David Beamish, Parliament of the United Kingdom
- Supporting an inclusive Parliament - Beverley Isles, House of Commons, Canada
- ICT applications to support House and Committee Operations - Robyn McClelland, House of Representatives, Australia
- Use of languages other than English in the Chamber - Michael Tatham, Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory, Australia
- Support for private members’ bills: principles, procedures and practice - Andrew Mylne, Scottish Parliament
- Co-operative government and intergovernmental relations in South Africa – Eric Modibedi Phindela, National Council of Provinces, South Africa
- Petitions and petitioning in the UK House of Commons - Mark Hutton, House of Commons, United Kingdom

Reports on some recent procedural and constitutional developments in their parliaments and assemblies were also given by: Liam Laurence Smyth, United Kingdom, House of Commons; Gilbert Lawrence, Western Cape, South Africa; Michael Siala, National Assembly, Kenya; Roosme Hamzah, House of Representatives, Malaysia; Tom Duncan, Australian Capital Territory, Australia (presenting on the Parliament of Victoria); Paul Martinez, Gibraltar; and John Tangi, Cook Islands.

At the end of the SOCATC Meeting, the Secretariat of the Society passed from Crispin Poyser to the new Clerk of the Overseas Office of the United Kingdom House of Commons, Matthew Hamlyn.

For further information about the Society of Clerks-at-the-Table (SOCATT) please visit www.societyofclerks.org.

Report written by Mr Crispin Poyser, Clerk of the Overseas Office, House of Commons, Parliament of the United Kingdom.
NEWS FROM THE 62ND COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE

‘Commonwealth’s enduring political values bring challenges and opportunities for Commonwealth Parliamentarians’ says former UK Lord Speaker as the inaugural speaker for new Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Lecture Series

Former Lord Speaker of the UK Parliament’s House of Lords, RI Hon. Baroness D’Souza CMG PC has spoken of the Commonwealth’s enduring political values that bring challenges and opportunities for Commonwealth Parliamentarians as she launched the new Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Lecture Series.

As the inaugural speaker in the new Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Lecture Series, Baroness D’Souza commented: “How should we characterise the world we currently live in? We have conflict, despair, inaction, short-termism, globalisation, growing disparity between the rich and the destitute. I hope that you will agree that there has never been a time when the diversity and unity that the Commonwealth represents has been more needed.”

The Commonwealth occupies a special place in the world and stands for the enduring Commonwealth political values, which are universal and timeless. These include democracy, human rights, the separation of powers, good governance and the rule of law, as stated in the Commonwealth Charter.

Therefore, the theme for the new Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Lecture Series is ‘The Promotion and Implementation of the Commonwealth’s enduring political values – Challenges and Opportunities’. The inaugural Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Lecture was held in the margins of the 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, one of the largest gatherings of Commonwealth Parliamentarians in London, United Kingdom in December 2016.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Lecture Series will offer Members a unique opportunity to hear from distinguished Parliamentarians, such as Baroness D’Souza, who have made an outstanding contribution to their nation’s democracy and to the institution of Parliament and all that it represents. Individually, these Members have devoted their careers to public service and have set the bar of outstanding parliamentary leadership. Collectively, this series of lectures will contribute not only to the CPAs continuing dialogue within its membership, but also to reach out beyond to other stakeholders such as members of the international community, the diplomatic corps, civil society and the wider public.

During 2017/18, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Lecture Series will take place across the CPA Regions and Branches with lectures due to be delivered in Africa, Australia, Canada, India and the United Kingdom. Each of these lectures will be delivered by an eminent Parliamentarian in the margins of CPA Regional Conferences or governance meetings.

The lectures will offer unique opportunities for Members and guests to engage with Commonwealth Parliamentarians from both within the Commonwealth Parliamentary community and from further afield. For Members who are unable to attend in person, the lectures will be recorded and made available on the CPA website to encourage the further sharing of knowledge, understanding and best practice.

For more information on confirmed speakers and dates of future lectures, please visit www.cpahq.org. If your organisation is interested in sponsoring a CPA Lecture or other event, please contacthq.sec@cpahq.org.

CPA Secretariat YouTube channel: To view video highlights of the inaugural Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Lecture or to watch the full lecture please visit www.cpahq.org/cpahq/youtube.

‘Increased Women’s Political Participation will benefit wider society’ says CPA Caribbean Regional ‘Hot Topic’ Forum

Delegates and participants at the CPA Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Regional ‘Hot Topic’ Forum have heard from a number of speakers on the need for increased women’s political participation for the benefit of wider society as they discussed the ‘hot topic’ of the region - ‘Seeking to Increase Women’s Political Participation’.

The CPA Regional Hot Topic Forum heard from a number of distinguished speakers including: Hon. Shirley Osborne MLA, Speaker of the Montserrat Legislative Assembly and Caribbean Regional Chair of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWMP); Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar MP, Leader of the Opposition in Trinidad and Tobago and former Prime Minister; Dr. Josephine Ojiambo, Deputy Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Secretariat; Hon. Rayburn Blackmore MP, Minister of Immigration and National Security, Dominica; and Professor Verene Shepherd, Director of the Institute for Gender & Development Studies and Professor of Social History, University of the West Indies.

The Forum was introduced by Ms Sobhnan N. O’Garro and the moderator was Hon. Alx Boyd-Knights MHA, Speaker of the House of Assembly of Dominica.

The CPA Regional ‘Hot Topic’ Forums bring together not only Commonwealth Parliamentarians, but also academics, students, civil society organisations and the wider Commonwealth family.

The Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Mr Akbar Khan said: “Despite constituting half of the world’s population, women continue to be disproportionately represented in governance and at all levels of decision-making. The stark reality is that globally, there are 58 countries in which women account for less than 10% of Parliamentarians. It is vital that this burning or
It is always a huge privilege to be among one of the largest gatherings of Commonwealth Parliamentarians and the 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference held in London, UK in December 2016 was no exception. This was my first annual CPA international conference, and it seems, I am getting involved at a time of new beginnings. The Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Akbar Khan is now in his post, and together with the new Commonwealth Secretary-General Patrick Scotland, charged the room with a sense of excitement and confidence in the role that Parliamentarians play in ensuring good governance and prosperity for their people. After attending the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Malta, it is progress that freedom of religion or belief is beginning to be mentioned by platform speakers. Given the world we live in, where so many are experiencing conflict and persecution and are targeted due to their religious beliefs, it was heartening to feel that my Commonwealth colleagues - all of us rich in diversity of beliefs, political affiliations, race and nationality - could come together to discuss the challenges and opportunities for effecting change in our 52 nations. This was my desire in leading a side event meeting at the conference sponsored by the Commonwealth Initiative for Freedom of Religion or Belief (CIFoRB). CIFoRB drew in Parliamentarians from around the Commonwealth to discuss CIFoRB — freedom of religion or belief and - what it represents to them as elected representatives and to their countries at ministerial, regional and community level.

As you will all be aware CHOGM is due to take place in 2018 in the UK, with the British Prime Minister taking over the Chair. It will be the 25th meeting of heads of government of the Commonwealth of Nations and it is imperative that FoRB becomes a familiar term to all Parliamentarians and Government Ministers.

In many ways the special side event to the 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference was the starting point. The purpose of this event was to have a focused discussion among Commonwealth Parliamentarians on the importance of FoRB protections, as expressed in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in their countries. Article 18 affords wide-ranging protections to ‘freedom of thought, conscience, and religion’. It thus protects not only religion, but a range of other beliefs, as well as the right not to subscribe to religious beliefs at all, it is not only a right of individuals, but also a collective right of religious communities and religious groups. It includes not only private belief, but also the public expression of belief in civil society and the public sphere. It is not merely a right to believe and to worship, but also inextricably linked to rights of speech, expression, assembly, association and education, alongside the rights to religious practice and observance. These concerns and others were manifest at the Commonwealth gathering, as Parliamentarians discussed frankly both the problems of recognising and speaking out on behalf of FoRB in their societies, but also the urgent need to do so to prevent conflict and promote security and development in their home countries and around the Commonwealth.

Parliamentarians noted the ways in which religion may seem to be excluded from debate, even within the parliamentary halls themselves. One spoke of attempting to organise a prayer breakfast that was opposed by other Parliamentarians: offended by such overt expressions of religion. Determination of when religious expression may be perceived negatively as an offence to the beliefs and feelings of others can be especially difficult in Commonwealth nations that have seen growing numbers of religiously unaffiliated people and non-believers, as well as those with robust secular, humanist and ethical traditions. What emerged from the Parliamentarians’ accounts was a sense of the necessity to find ways to discuss FoRB issues in all their complexity to avoid misconceptions. When construed as ‘religious freedom’ or ‘freedom of religion’, FoRB can give the impression of being about ‘religious rights’ or ‘rights for the religious’. Article 18 has been broadly conceived as including a range of religious and non-religious beliefs. It is, indeed, the case in religiously pluralistic societies that differing beliefs can lead to conflict, discrimination and even outright religious persecution by and among religious groups. But the world’s religions are not only powerful sources of human rights in and of themselves, they also bring resources for transforming conflict and securing peace and social development.

Different societies at times may be at different places when it comes to freedom of religion or belief. Nowadays, international human rights doctrine affords what is known as a ‘margin of appreciation’ when it comes to recognising the efforts that nations make toward human rights realisation. This can vary from society to society. Thus, the discussion among the Commonwealth Parliamentarians became more nuanced when it turned to how FoRB issues are understood and addressed in their own national contexts.

Some Parliamentarians spoke of the dominant religions in their societies having great political and social power that becomes problematic when used to deny FoRB rights to religious minorities. Recent legislative efforts to grant rights to religious minorities — for example, recognising Hindu marriages and passing laws against forced conversion in Pakistan or revision of citizenship registration rules to allow Pakistani Hindus and other religious minorities to register as citizens in India — attest to new levels of concern about the plight of religious minorities in these Commonwealth nations. Also raised was the issue of national constitutional гарантий For FoRB rights, along with protections for freedom of expression in ways that are sometimes in tension. Freedom of religion and freedom of expression often goes hand in hand, since many religions deem speech and other forms of expression essential to practicing their faith and religious rights.

What the gathering on FoRB at the 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference showed was the need to find spaces for solidarity and support for Commonwealth Parliamentarians in speaking out on FoRB matters. The day after the CIFoRB event, I was speaking at a workshop at the main conference as a discussion leader on Freedom of Religion or Belief. I attended by over 40 parliamentarian colleagues. It is imperative this issue is recognised and that FoRB is on the agenda at CHOGM 2018. I am acutely aware of the overwhelming and pressing challenges Ministers face at such meetings, but FoRB shouldn’t be seen as another issue, rather as a solution. The 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference proved that FoRB is clearly an issue of the moment.

Parliamentarians are quite literally the ‘keepers’ for the communities and nations they represent — but there are not always safe spaces for speaking on freedom of religion or belief across the Commonwealth expanses. The CIFoRB project leads us to ensure the foil Commonwealth Parliamentarians to find spaces, terms and strategies for speaking out in support of FoRB in ways that serve the needs of their constituents and the advancement of their nations. The CIFoRB team looks forward to providing Parliamentarians with the knowledge and tools that they need to achieve these FoRB goals. The need to address FoRB is clearly there — and we at CIFoRB look forward to helping.

Although the 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference had not taken place in Bangladesh in 2016, visiting the country is one of my personal resolutions for 2017 and so I hope to look forward to the hosting of the 63rd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Bangladesh later this year.

Report by Baroness Elizabeth Berridge. Baroness Berridge is a Member of the House of Lords in the Parliament of the United Kingdom and Co-Director of the Commonwealth Initiative for Freedom of Religion or Belief. In the UK Parliament, she Co-Chairs the All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief, ebride@contacts.bham.ac.uk Twitter: @CIFoRB_uk
The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) held a session for Commonwealth Parliamentarians on Tobacco Control Frameworks and effective Parliamentary Oversight at the 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

When Members of Parliament from Commonwealth countries met in London for the 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, there was an opportunity to advance tobacco control efforts globally. The United Nations Development Programme, along with the United Nations Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC), organized a side event at the conference on the implementation of the WHO FCTC.

The objective of the event was to assist Parliamentarians in engaging more effectively in developing tobacco control legislation and oversight of tobacco policies, learning from experiences across different countries and settings.

Hon. Alando Terrelonge MP, a first term Parliamentarian from Jamaica, reminded assembled MPs of the severity of the tobacco epidemic: “Every six seconds someone dies of a tobacco related illness,” he said. “Legislation is essential in preventing these unnecessary deaths.”

The initiative was driven by the need to help prevent disease and death caused by tobacco addiction with more targeted laws and regulations.

The building of measures that effectively aid public health have proved beneficial in supporting sustainable development, tackling issues such as poverty reduction, building food security, assisting economic growth, delivering better educational outcomes and improving domestic resource flows.

Every one of the Sustainable Development Goals has a relevance to tobacco,” stressed Lord Faulkner of the United Kingdom. “Take ending poverty in all its forms everywhere. Money spent on tobacco is obviously not available for spending on food, education and healthcare. In some African countries, the poorest households are spending as much as 15% of their disposable income on tobacco,” he added.

Parliamentarians in attendance from 10 CPA Branches - the Cook Islands, Jamaica, Namibia, New Zealand, St Kitts and Nevis, Singapore, Swaziland, Tanzania, the United Kingdom, and Zambia - were asked how tobacco control measures can support their own work and advance sustainable development.

The event also proved a good chance to assess the effectiveness of existing tobacco control laws in the countries represented at the event and provided an opportunity to learn from experiences shared between the Parliamentarians.

Hon. Poto Williams MP, a member of the Health Committee of the Parliament of New Zealand, shared her country’s experience of tobacco control. “We saw the harm tobacco was doing in our indigenous communities, with smoking rates twice that of the general population,” she said. “Targeting prevention efforts [and] recognising the needs of our most vulnerable groups have been central to our successes as we move towards a tobacco-free New Zealand.”

In the twentieth century, tobacco killed 100 million people. It is now on track to kill 1 billion during the twenty-first century, and by 2030, 80% of deaths will be in low and middle income countries.

If the WHO FCTC is fully implemented by all 180 Parties to the Convention, it could halt the tobacco epidemic, increase government revenues and help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and global targets to reduce non-communicable diseases.

The event was funded by the European Union and supported by Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) and the Framework Convention Alliance.

UNDP report by Charles Chauvel, Team Leader, Inclusive Political Processes, Governance and Peacebuilding, United Nations Development Programme. E-mail: charles.chauvel@undp.org or visit www.undp.org
Fifty-two young people, aged 18 to 29, from 22 countries, and representing seven Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) regions, attended the 8th Commonwealth Youth Parliament (CYP8). Only two regions, India and South-East Asia, were unable to send representatives.

The programme began with a welcome reception at the Royal B.C. Museum, located in the Steapearance Terminal in Victoria's Inner Harbour. The Centre houses and displays the iconic work of Canadian artist, Robert Bateman. The welcome reception provided the youth Parliamentarians with an opportunity to get to know one another, engage with me as Speaker, with Mr. Abker Khan, the Secretary-General of the CPA, the six current Commonwealth Parliamentarians who would be their mentors, and with many of the other staff involved in the CYP8 programme.

The official opening of the Commonwealth Youth Parliament, as with all events at the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, began with the recognition that the parliamentarian precinct is situated on the traditional territory of the Lekwungen people, now known as the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations. This was followed by a blessing by Elder Mary Ann Thomas of the Esquimalt First Nation. This recognition acknowledges and shows respect for the culture, tradition and wisdom of the Lekwungen people, both past and present.

At the Legislative Assembly, we have a Talking Stick that is prominently displayed in the Chamber, next to the Speaker’s dais, and we decided that it would be fitting to use this as the symbol of CYP8, including using it as the Mace during House Proceedings.

The Opening Stick was a gift from the Songhees First Nation to the former Lieutenant Governor, Steven Point, to commemorate the naming of the Salish Sea. In 2014, the current Lieutenant Governor, Her Honour Judith Guichon, presented it to me as Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia. The Talking Stick serves as a reminder that First Nations and reconciliation should be a consideration in all debates and discussions in the Legislative Assembly. In May 2016, Elder Mary Ann Thomas, along with Elder Elmer George, led a special blessing ceremony of the Talking Stick. Elder Thomas explained that the Talking Stick is about dialogue, relationships, respect and ‘talking together and being patient with one another.’

The opening ceremony concluded with a poetry reading by Zoe Duhaime, the City of Victoria’s 2015 Youth Poet Laureate and one of the CYP8 youth Parliamentarians. Ms. Duhaime performed her poem entitled ‘One Hundred Candle Bonfire’ which commemorates the 100th anniversary of the franchise being extended to some women in British Columbia. An excerpt of that poem reads:

‘...the vote hasn’t solved all, but it’s a measure of worth it’s a light’

This was a fitting introduction to CYP8, where diversity and inclusion are qualities we need to work on. The youth Parliamentarians had a wide range of backgrounds and life experience as well as varying levels of parliamentary knowledge. Many indicated that one of the most valuable elements of the programme was the opportunity to network with, and learn from, other young people across from the Commonwealth. As the Leader of the governing Progressive Party, Adriou Vanavanapradit put it: “The CYP represented an opportunity for people from all backgrounds to have a platform to be heard. A platform to learn. And a platform to lead.”

Prior to their arrival the youth Parliamentarians were provided with party profiles, and based on their preferences, organized into two parties. In the first caucus meeting, each party decided on a name. The Progressive Party formed government with 33 youth Parliamentarians, and the United Nationalist Initiative formed the Opposition with 19 youth Parliamentarians. Each party also elected a leader, and designated a deputy leader, whip, and members or opposition critics.

For the first time since the Commonwealth Youth Parliament became an annual programme in 2012, both the government and opposition leaders were women. Subsequent caucus sessions provided the opportunity to learn about party politics and to strategize and network. It was remarkable how quickly each party developed their messaging, and how supportive they became of one another.

An integral part of the programme was the involvement of six current Commonwealth Parliamentarians who graciously served as Mentors during the programme: Spencer Chandra Herbert MLA and Jodie Wickens MLA, Members of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia; Jessica Littlewood MLA, Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta; Kate Forbes MSP, Member of the Scottish Parliament; Adam Marshall MP, Member of the Parliament of New South Wales, Australia; and Chathura Sandeepa Senaratne, Member of the Parliament of Sri Lanka. Each of the Mentors was assigned to either the government or opposition party. The Mentors provided guidance, support, and advice during caucus sessions and House Proceedings, and truly became invested as their assigned party faced challenges and successes throughout the week.

The Mentors also led educational sessions during which they shared their individual experiences and perspectives on a given topic, followed by a question and answer period. Topics included the role of a Member of Parliament; Question Period; the Media; and Campaign Planning and the Electoral Process. The perspectives provided by the Mentors were diverse, transparent, and candid, and the youth Parliamentarians really appreciated the opportunity to connect with current Parliamentarians in this educational, and less formal, setting.

Each session of House proceedings began with a Prayer and Introductions and Statements by youth Parliamentarians. These items of routine House business provided the opportunity for youth Parliamentarians to introduce themselves and their home jurisdictions. Many highlighted local culture, natural beauty and resources as well as initiatives and causes they were involved in or passionate about.

Youth Parliamentarian Sara Ashan sought to dispel myths about Pakistan, explaining that women do actually have a voice. “We’ve had a female Prime Minister, we are not all covered. We are not all behind closed doors, either.” Youth Parliamentarian Anne Ogada from Kenya described the work of Hon. Isaac Mwaura, a Member of the Kenya Parliament who lives with albinism and has created the Albinism Society of Kenya. Mark Munnich explained challenges faced by indigenous people in Australia, noting that indigenous Australians are more likely to die 17 years earlier than non-indigenous people...and within our justice system, indigenous peoples are overly represented.” For several of the young people, this was their first experience rising to speak in a parliamentary chamber.

Perhaps the liveliest part of each day was the Oral Question Period. Ministers were questioned by the opposition and government members on their portfolios. Key themes raised by youth Parliamentarians included health care, post-secondary education, indigenous people and the environment. The passion for parliamentary debate was clear as the youth Parliamentarians supported and challenged one another by cheering, desiring, and raising points of order.

The opposition party held the government to account by demanding detailed plans in support of policy, and frequently suggested that government was fiscally irresponsible.

Sky Losier, the Environment Critic, accused the government of “lot of talk, a lot of big talk, a lot of big ideas, but… no plans on how to deliver on these big ideas…” this government is acting

Above: Participants, mentors, parliamentary staff and CPA representatives gather for the opening of the 8th Commonwealth Youth Parliament at the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia.

8TH COMMONWEALTH YOUTH PARLIAMENT CYP8: ‘A PLATFORM TO LEARN AND A PLATFORM TO LEAD’

From 6 to 10 November 2016, the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, located in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, was honoured to host the 8th Commonwealth Youth Parliament (CYP8), the first time that this event has been held in Canada.

Hon. Linda Reid
MLA has served as Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, Canada since her election to the position in June 2013. Previously, she served as Deputy Speaker from 2009 to 2013. Hon. Reid served as Minister responsible for early childhood development and child care. First elected as a Member of British Columbia’s Legislative Assembly in 1991, Hon. Reid is British Columbia’s longest-serving current MLA.
During Oral Question Period, the Leader of the Opposition, to rise causing Aaron McDonnell, Deputy Kerr, responded on behalf of the executive Members responding. 

One of the highlights of the programme for many of the young people involved was a mock press conference held in the Members’ Lobby outside of the Chamber. At the outset of the programme, youth Parliamentarians were provided with potentially controversial scenarios on which the press could ask questions. Mentors and reportors from the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia served as the press. This ‘real-life’ media experience presented a challenge and opportunity. As can be imagined, some of the comments made by government ministers in the heat of the moment at the press conference provided for a lively debate during subsequent Oral Question Periods.

On the final evening, a dinner was held at Government House, the official residence of the Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia and the ceremonial home of all British Canadians. Government House is located on an expansive plot of land in the Rockland neighbourhood, surrounded by beautifully manicured gardens, wooded areas, a pond, and a small orchard. Her Honour, Judith Guichon, Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia, hosted the event. As youth Parliamentarians arrived, they were greeted by an official receiving line, and each had their photograph taken. It was a fun and lovely evening - we were even treated to entertainment by youth Parliamentarian Jabari Lynch who shared his inspiring poem about diversity, entitled ‘Soul’, a few lines of which read:

All these different paths make a whole.
All these different paths, yet wholly, all together,
Agree to make a unique flavour.
It was inspiring to see first-hand how CYP8 engaged and empowered young people from across the Commonwealth. The young people really dedicated themselves to the programme, and embraced the opportunities to learn about parliamentary democracy and to network with each other.

Opposition Health critic Stefanie Papanikolas captured the tone of the programme when she wrote: ‘Not once did I feel that my voice or thoughts were not important, that my opinion wasn’t wanted or appreciated. There was a certain air to this crowd of individuals that welcomed different views and difficult conversations. I know that [there] are foundations for lifelong partnerships which will continue to grow and ripen as our minds challenge us to think and act innovatively. Together our voices are amplified and we become stronger than we are alone.’

During the closing ceremony in the Chamber, I wanted to impress upon these young individuals that if you stay and make a difference, anything is possible.

In April of this year, we will mark the 100th anniversary of some women being granted the right to vote and stand for office in the province of British Columbia. The campaign to extend the vote to this first group of women in British Columbia spanned 45 years, but their dedication and commitment changed the nature of politics in British Columbia. Using this story, I reminded the young Parliamentarians that they all had a role to play: to make a difference and to continue the story of those who came before them.

We heard mentors discuss the role they had played in the Prime Minister’s Office and the opposition side of the House.

Our Party Whip was excellent and we were frequently protected with ‘Points of Order’ and notes being passed down the Chamber as to which way we should be voting. Concessions were agreed between parties outside of the Chamber and then we were instructed as to what the party line would be when these discussions arose.

On day two of the programme, the main business of the day was the second reading of the Party Apprenticeship and Internship Act which was the Bill introduced on day one. Youth Parliamentarians on both sides of the House spoke to the Bill and I took the opportunity to speak about my experience of youth education and employment in Wales, and how important I feel informal education and soft skills are in creating well-rounded and employable individuals outside of the classroom. It was fascinating to hear other youth Parliamentarians speak about their experiences, although predominantly the addresses tended to be given from a perspective which was inside the sphere of our Commonwealthland, the fictional country that our parliament represented.

During lunch on the second day, we were addressed by David Spence, President of the Vancouver Island Branch of the Royal Commonwealth Society. It was a very interesting talk and added to the value which we attributed to having this experience, something which became clearer as the week went on. Tuesday afternoon was spent continuing the second reading of the Youth Apprenticeship and Internship Act and in Caucus preparing for the Committee of the Whole and Amendments.

During the evening, we spent dinner together watching the results of the US Presidential Election come in - a surreal experience and the atmosphere was quite subdued as the result became clearer. Youth Parliamentarians reflecting on the day were heavily referenced towards the need to continue to fight for freedom of speech and equality, whilst condemning racism, homophobia, sexism, and discrimination. During the morning session it felt like there was more than a matter of miles between us and the USA. On Wednesday, we had an educational session from MLAs and representatives from local press who discussed the importance of the media in politics and how the relationship to take up office as the Minister of Environment; I had been keen to take on the role given my background – from a farming family and being now employed on a renewable technologies project. We also started to prepare addresses in reply to the Speech from the Throne in the afternoon. Each party had mentors, actual MPs/MLAs, to guide them. I was under 35 from Commonwealth Legislatures, and ours advised us that our responses should be a nod to our participation at the event and greetings from our home nations.

After the session began it was clear to see that the Opposition had been advised otherwise and our Party Policies were ridiculed and questions were thrown at us during their responses to the Speech from the Throne. Any trepidation about how confrontational the sessions would be ended there!

For the rest of the day we had another Caucus session, had the official photograph of CYP8 prepared for and took part in Question Time (an experience I found to be highly nerve wracking as a Cabinet Minister) and heard mentors discuss the role of a Member of Parliament and introduced our first Bills to the House.

Our Party Whip was excellent and we were frequently protected with ‘Points of Order’ and notes being passed down the Chamber as to which way we should be voting. Concessions were agreed between parties outside of the Chamber and then we were instructed as to what the party line would be when these discussions arose.

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Typically worked. This was in advance of each party holding a mock press conference.

The most complicated procedural session of the week was the Committee of the Whole. Youth Parliamentarians lead the session and we were fortunate in Government to have a delegate who had taken part in one of these sessions before to guide us through it. It dealt with the step by step acceptance or amendment of the Bill with suggestions made from both sides of the Chamber; all delegates were present and could contribute to the session freely. It was an excellent insight into the stages of progressing an Act of Law; however, we would have benefited from more time to be able to thrash out all the details as a lot of compromises were made on the wording of the Bill given the limited time available.

On Wednesday evening, we were transported to Government House for the Closing Dinner of CY8, hosted by the Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia. Judith Guichon was appointed in 2012 and is the vice-regal representative of Queen Elizabeth II of Canada in the Province of British Columbia. It was a very great honour to be hosted by the Lieutenant Governor and shortly after our arrival we learnt that some of her most recent visitors had been the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge.

Our final day was very short and contained a question period, by this time a little more jovial and, as Government, we employed the ‘jabber’ tactic of talking for as long as possible in answering to prevent any more questions being asked. I would have laughed if you’d told me at the start of the week that I would be playing for tax in the Chamber! The closing speeches included an address from Hon. Ingrid Moses-Scatliffe, Speaker of the House of Assembly in the British Virgin Islands who will be hosting the 9th Commonwealth Youth Parliament next year. It was at this point a sense of disappointment dawned, a feeling of sadness that our Parliament was coming to a close, and that a new cohort of delegates would be benefiting from this wonderful event and experience next year.

I was fully prepared that the enormity of the experience would not fully sink in until I returned home. Having been able to reflect on the CY8, it has become clear to me that it was a once in a lifetime opportunity and one I will treasure forever. Being able to gain practical experience of the parliamentary system whilst working with like-minded young people who have a range of different backgrounds and life experiences would be very difficult to replicate elsewhere. The future of the Commonwealth is in very safe hands given the calibre of the people in attendance at CY8 and I hope that the Assembly will be encouraging of an open dialogue whilst we establish our own Youth Parliament.

"ISLE OF MAN CELEBRATES 150 YEARS SINCE THE FIRST GENERAL ELECTION TO THE HOUSE OF KEYS"

The CPA Isle of Man Branch are celebrating the 150th anniversary of the first general election of the House of Keys in 2017. The House of Keys is one of the two Houses of the Isle of Man, or more formally, the High Court of Tynwald, the legislative of the Isle of Man. The oldest continuous Parliament in the world, Tynwald started in 979, although its roots go further back.

The first public election of the House of Keys took place during the period from 24th to 5th April 1867 and saw 13 of the previous 24 Members elected. The reforms were major steps towards more competent and mature self-government, and political democracy becoming a reality.

To celebrate, the Isle of Man Post Office has issued a special set of stamps in celebration of the 150th anniversary of the first general election of the House of Keys. Four commemorative stamps illustrate the most significant events to the House of Keys.

"Pictured outside the Old Court House in Douglas is (from left to right) CH Kit Grenie, text writer, Speaker of the House of Keys, Hon. Juan Watterson, MH and the President of Tynwald, Hon. Steve Rodan MLC."

The closes speeches included an address from Hon. Ingrid Moses-Scatliffe, Speaker of the House of Assembly in the British Virgin Islands.
MISSING PERSONS BILL PASSED IN SRI LANKA PARLIAMENT

Office on Missing Persons (Establishment, Administration and Discharge of Functions) Bill, a Government Bill, was passed by the Parliament of Sri Lanka unanimously on 11 August 2016 and Speaker, Hon. Karu Jayasuriya endorsed its certificate on 23 August 2016. The Act is titled ‘Office on Missing Persons (Establishment, Administration and Discharge of Functions) Bill’, will hopefully herald, a new era of peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka.

The Foreign Minister adding to his speech commented that seven years after the end of the brutal war and the defeat and the demise of LTTE terror, Sri Lanka is now ready to win the peace and heal the scars of conflict, sorrow and pain: “this Bill is the first step in healing our own nation and its people so that we could face the challenges of the future as a united nation; unity in diversity”. He further stated that sixty years after independence, two youth insurrections and a 26-year-old war later, Sri Lanka is now ready to commence the healing process of our wounded and fractured nation. Against such a backdrop, this Bill would be the first step in healing our own nation and its people so that we could face the challenges of the future as a united nation; unity in diversity.

Hon. Bimal Rathnayaka, MP, representing the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, reminded the House of several occasions of missing persons in the history of Sri Lanka and emphasized that their support is extended to this Bill subjected to amendments to be made, as this Bill can make a huge difference in the process of reconciliation. He further expressed his expectation that justice will be done to the families with grievances whose members went missing, through this Act.

The Act mandates to establish an Office on Missing Persons consisting of seven Members who shall be appointed by the President on the recommendation of the Constitutional Council. Such recommendation shall also consist of more than one person with previous experience in fact finding or investigation, human rights law, international humanitarian law, humanitarian response, or possess other qualifications relevant to the carrying out of the functions of the OMP. In addition to the General Powers, OMP has been vested with following Powers of Investigation by this Act:

a. to receive, from any relative of a missing person, or any other person or organization, complaints relating to missing persons
b. to initiate an inquiry and/or investigation into the whereabouts and/or circumstances of disappearance of a missing person pursuant to a complaint
c. to take all necessary steps to investigate cases of missing persons
d. to apply to the appropriate Magistrate’s Court having territorial jurisdiction, for an order of court to carry out an excavation and/or exhumation of suspected grave sites

Another aspect of the OMP Act is observed to:–

• Search and trace missing persons;
• Provide assistance to relatives of missing persons;
• Set up of a database of missing persons, and
• Set out the procedures and guidelines applicable to the powers and functions assigned to the OMP.

In the process of reconciliation, the OMP has been vested with a broad mandate. The primary is to search for and trace missing persons and identify appropriate mechanisms for the same, and clarify the circumstances in which such persons went missing. The OMP Act is observed to:

• to receive, from any relative of a missing person, or any other person or organization, complaints relating to missing persons;
• to initiate an inquiry and/or investigation into the whereabouts and/or circumstances of disappearance of a missing person pursuant to a complaint;
• to take all necessary steps to investigate cases of missing persons;
• to apply to the appropriate Magistrate’s Court having territorial jurisdiction, for an order of court to carry out an excavation and/or exhumation of suspected grave sites;
• to refer, after due consultation with the complainant, to the police or any other relevant law enforcement authority all cases of missing persons that have been brought before the OMP; and
• to make an application to the Magistrate having territorial jurisdiction, for the issuance of a search warrant.

The Act mandates to:–

a. to ensure that the composition of the OMP reflects the pluralistic nature of the Sri Lankan society; and
b. ensuring that the Members of the OMP shall be persons with previous experience in fact finding or investigation, human rights law, international humanitarian law, humanitarian response, or possess other qualifications relevant to the carrying out of the functions of the OMP.

e. to request assistance necessary for the achievement of its mandates from any entity.

f. to authorize in writing a specified officer of the OMP to enter without warrant, at any time any place of detention, police station, prison or any other place in which any persons is suspected to be detained.

g. to make an application to the Magistrate having territorial jurisdiction, for the issue of a search warrant.

This Bill is the first step in healing our own nation and its people so that we could face the challenges of the future as a united nation; unity in diversity!”

The Act includes provisions to:

• to make recommendations to relevant authorities towards reducing the incidents of ‘missing persons’ within the meaning of the Act;
• to protect the rights and interests of missing persons and their relatives as provided for in the Act;
• to identify proper avenues of redress to which such missing persons or their relatives may have recourse.

This Act enabled the establishment of the Office on Missing Persons (OMP) with a range of powers in terms of addressing the cases of missing persons including those missing as victims of abduction, persons missing in action or otherwise missing in connection with armed conflicts, political unrest and civil disturbances as an independent entity. Further, the Act includes provisions to:

• Search and trace missing persons;
• Provide assistance to relatives of missing persons;
• Set up of a database of missing persons, and
• Set out the procedures and guidelines applicable to the powers and functions assigned to the OMP.

The OMP Act is observed to be a significant juncture in the country’s journey towards reconciliation which sets out the procedures and guidelines applicable to the powers and functions assigned to the OMP.

The OMP Act is observed to:

• While there is a broad mandate. The primary is to search for and trace missing persons and identify appropriate mechanisms for the same, and clarify the circumstances in which such persons went missing.
Legislation in the Fall Session

During the fall session, six government Bills received Royal Assent. This brought to 15 the total number of government Bills passed during the Liberal government’s first year. Six of these were supply Bills.

During the fall session, the government introduced 16 pieces of legislation in the House and three in the Senate, bringing to 41 the total for the government’s first year.

Among the Bills that passed during the fall session were Bill C-2, which made changes to the marginal tax rates for personal income, and Bill C-26, which increases Canada Pension Plan benefits by as much as 50%.

Committee reports

On 1 December 2016, the all-party House of Commons Special Committee on Electoral Reform tabled its report on electoral reform. The Committee had been asked to study voting systems that could replace the current first-past-the-post system, as well as mandatory voting and online voting. Its report did not recommend a specific alternative voting system, but instead recommended a method for evaluating alternative voting systems.

The report also recommended that a referendum be held on whether Canadians prefer the current voting system or an alternative system. As for mandatory voting and online voting, it recommended that they not be implemented at this time.

The Committee noted that those who wanted change were overwhelming in favour of proportional representation. In a supplementary report, however, the Liberal Members of the Committee said the recommendations in the report were “rushed” and “too radical to impose at this time.”

Following the tabling of the report, the report, the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Hon. Maryam Monsef, MP, criticized the Committee for failing to recommend a specific alternative voting system; she subsequently apologized. In January 2017, she was replaced as Minister of Democratic Institutions by Hon. Karina Gould, MP.

On 1 February 2017, Minister Gould released her mandate letter from the Prime Minister, Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau, MP, in which he said that because a consensus on a new electoral system had not emerged, he was not asking her to change the electoral system. The opposition parties criticized the Prime Minister for abandoning his commitment to bring about a change.

Other House of Commons Committee reports that were tabled during late 2016 include:

- Protecting the Privacy of Canadians: Review of the Privacy Act (Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics);
- Genetically Modified Animals for Human Consumption (Agriculture and Agri-Food);
- Interim Report on Media Study: The Impact of Digital Technology (Canadian Heritage);
- After the Warm Welcome: Ensuring that Syrian Refugees Succeed (Citizenship and Immigration);
- Creating the Conditions for Economic Growth: Tools for People, Businesses and Communities (Finance);
- Supporting Peace and Development in Guatemala and Colombia for the Long-Term (Foreign Affairs and International Development);
- Report and Recommendations on the Opioid Crisis in Canada (Health);
- Toward a New Action Plan for Official Languages and Building New Momentum for Immigration in Francophone Minority Communities (Official Languages); and
- Reaching Out: Improving Service Delivery to Canadian Veterans (Veterans Affairs).

Senate committee reports included:

- Interim Report: Outbreak of Bovine Tuberculosis in Alberta (Agriculture and Forestry);
- Finding Refuge in Canada: A Syrian Resettlement Story (Human Rights);
- Deployment: Prioritizing commitments at home and abroad (National Security and Defence);
- Dementia in Canada: A National Strategy for Dementia-friendly Communities (Social Affairs, Science and Technology); and
- Pipelines for Oil: Protecting our Economy, Respecting our Environment (Transport and Communications).

Emergency debate on Refugee Travel

On 31 January 2017, the House of Commons held an emergency debate on the United States’ decision regarding refugee travel.

The Senate

To accommodate the increased number of non-affiliated senators, who do make up a caucus as currently defined by the Rules of the Senate, the Senate adopted in December a motion under which non-affiliated senators were given proportional representation on Senate committees. The Senate also adopted a motion that would allow the recently formed Independent Senators Group (ISG) to receive funding. The media subsequently reported that the ISG had been allocated funding with which to establish a Secretariat.


On 21 January 2017, Quebec Senator Hon. Josée Vermette left the Conservative caucus to sit as a non-affiliated senator.

Non-affiliated New Brunswick Senator Hon. John Wallace resigned on 1 February 2017. In doing so, he kept the pledge he made to then-prime minister Stephen Harper to serve only an eight-year term.

In February 2017, media reported that Harvey Max Chochinov, who in October had been chosen for appointment to the Senate, had turned down the appointment.

On 8 February 2017, the standings in the Senate were 39 Conservatives, 34 non-affiliated (Independent Senators Group, 8) other non-affiliated and 19 Liberals; there were five vacancies.

Changes to the Cabinet

On 10 January 2017, Prime Minister Trudeau made the following changes to his cabinet:

- Hon. Chrystia Freeland, MP, became Minister of Foreign Affairs. Previously the Minister of International Trade, she will continue to be responsible for relations with the United States, including trade relations.
- Hon. François-Philippe Champagne, MP, became Minister of International Trade. He had been Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance.
- Hon. Patricia A. Hajdu, MP, became Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour. She had been the Minister of Status of Women.
- Hon. Maryam Monsef, MP, who had been Minister of Democratic Institutions, became Minister of Status of Women.
- Hon. Karina Gould, MP, became Minister of Democratic Institutions. She had been Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development.
- Hon. Ahmed D. Hussen, MP, became Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship. He is the first Canadian MP of Somali descent.
- Hon. Stéphane Dion, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, left Cabinet and announced that he was leaving politics.
- Hon. John McCallum, the former Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, left Cabinet to become Canada’s Ambassador to China.
- Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk, MP, the former Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, left Cabinet but will continue to serve as an MP.

Plebiscite on electoral reform in Prince Edward Island

In late October and early November 2016, voters in the province of Prince Edward Island, including 16- and 17-year-olds, cast ballots in a non-binding plebiscite on changing the province’s electoral system. They were asked to rank five different electoral systems by order of preference. The mixed-member proportional representation system came out on top with 52% of the votes, while the current first-past-the-post system came second with nearly 43% of the votes.

However, given that voter turnout was only 36%, Premier Wade MacLauchlan said it was doubtful whether the plebiscite constituted a clear expression of the will of the population and he did not commit to making any changes immediately.

Electoral system: a modern and inclusive tool [Image 628x42 to 1157x383]

In a territorial election on 7 November 2016, the Liberal Party defeated the Yukon Party, which had held power for 14 years. The Liberals won 11 of the 19 seats in the Legislative Assembly (up from one seat in the previous legislature), the Yukon Party took six seats (down from 13) and the New Democratic Party took two seats (down from six).

The main issues in the election were relations with First Nations, resource development and the environment. Liberal leader Sandy Silver became premier.
Between September and December 2016, the National Assembly of Québec passed 12 public bills (8 unanimously).

**Public administration**

Bill 87, An Act to facilitate the disclosure of wrongdoing relating to public bodies, was passed unanimously on 9 December 2016. The purpose of the Bill is to establish a protection regime to protect ‘whistleblowers’ in the public and parapublic sectors against reprisals.

The Act implements Recommendation III of the report of the Commission d’enquête sur l’octroi et la gestion des contrats dans l’industrie de la construction (Translation: “The Commissioners therefore recommend that the Government improve the protection regime for whistleblowers in order to guarantee:

- the protection of their identity, regardless of the authority to which they make a disclosure;
- assist them in the disclosure process; and
- provide financial support, if necessary.”)

The Act provides that anyone may make a disclosure regarding any ‘wrongdoing’ to the Public Protector (Québec Ombudsman) or to the Minister of Families (if the wrongdoing occurred in a childcare centre, subsidized private day care centre or home childcare-coordinating offices). Employees of a public body may also make disclosures regarding a wrongdoing to a designated person within each public or parapublic sector entity. Under section 4, ‘wrongdoing’ means any act that constitutes or consists in a contravention of a Québec or federal law, a breach of standards of ethics or professional conduct, a misuse of public funds or gross mismanagement. However, sections 5 excludes situations where someone makes a disclosure “for personal purposes rather than in the public interest”, such as a disclosure pertaining solely to a condition of employment or whose purpose is to question the merits of the policies of the Government or a public body. In such cases, the Public Protector will stop processing the disclosure (s. 12).

**Energy and resources**

On 10 December 2016, the National Assembly passed Bill 106, An Act to implement the 2030 Energy Policy and to amend various legislative provisions, by a majority vote. The Act comprises four chapters and over 400 sections. This Act establishes, in its first chapter, a new government agency: Transition énergétique Québec. This agency’s mission is to support energy transition, innovation and efficiency in Québec and coordinate the implementation of the measures necessary to achieve the energy targets defined by the Government. The targets to be achieved by 2030 include: enhancing energy efficiency by 15%; reducing the amount of petroleum products consumed by 40%; eliminating the use of thermal coal; increasing overall renewable energy output by 59%; and increasing bioenergy production by 50%.

The second chapter of the Act to implement the 2030 Energy Policy modifies the governance of the Régie de l’énergie, a regulatory body authorized to set electricity and natural gas rates. These modifications promote the use of mediation as part of the consumer complaint examination procedures. Chapters 1, 3 and 4 of the Act to implement the 2030 Energy policy include other modifications.

The third chapter authorizes Hydro-Québec, the state-owned enterprise that produces and distributes electricity in Québec, to grant financial assistance to public transit authorities and Hydro-Québec will also help finance Montérégie’s electric network project presented by the Commission de développement du placement de Québec, which manages the pension funds of public and parapublic sector employees.

In its fourth chapter, the Act also enacts the Petroleum Resources Act, whose purpose is to provide a legal framework for the exploration for and development of petroleum and natural gas. In its 14th Action Plan or Hydrocarbons, the Government indicated it was in favour of “limited and regulated” development of those resources that is compatible with its greenhouse gas emission reduction targets and ensuring the longevity of Québec’s petrochemical industry.

Section 55 of the Petroleum Resources Act grants companies holding a petroleum production or storage licence a “right of access to the territory” subject to that licence. Those companies may enter into an agreement with the owner of the land concerned. If no agreement can be reached, the company may resort to expropriation proceedings. Under an amendment to the introduction version of Bill 106, however, the Government’s prior authorization will be required for such expropriations, and the Government may set conditions for granting such an authorization.

Under other amendments to the Bill, regional county municipalities may determine, in their land use and development plans, which territories are incompatible with exploration for or the production or storage of hydrocarbons. Those modifications to local by-laws must, however, receive a favourable opinion from the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Land Occupancy as well as from the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources. Lastly, section 233 of the Petroleum Resources Act establishes an Energy Transition Fund into which the royalties determined by the Government for the production and storage of hydrocarbons are to be paid.

**Environment**

On 26 October 2016, the National Assembly unanimously passed Bill 104. An Act to increase the number of zero-emission motor vehicles in Québec in order to reduce greenhouse gas and other pollutant emissions.

The Act establishes a system of credits and charges applicable to the sale or lease in Québec, by motor vehicle manufacturers, of new motor vehicles. Almost all manufacturers are subject to the Act.

Under this system, the motor vehicle manufacturers concerned must accumulate a number of credits by selling or leasing new motor vehicles that are completely or partially electrically propelled or by acquiring credits from another motor vehicle manufacturer. Motor vehicle manufacturers that have not, by the end of a three-year period, acquired the number of credits prescribed by regulation must pay a charge to the Government (s.8). Québec is the first Canadian province to implement a zero-emission vehicle standard. It joins ten American States, including California and several Northeastern States that have seen the number of zero-emission vehicles rise and the price of such vehicles drop. The Québec government believes that adopting this system should cause zero-emission vehicle sales to increase to 15% of all vehicle sales in 2025.

Conversely, the Québec government believes that adopting this system should cause zero-emission vehicle sales to increase to 15% of all vehicle sales in 2025.

References


2. According to the Ministère de l’Énergie et des Ressources naturelles, sedimentary basins with favourable characteristics for hydrocarbons cover an area of more than 200,000 km2 along the St. Lawrence River. However, the department estimates that only a small proportion of the total resources can be extracted in a cost-effective manner.
PARLIAMENTARY NEWS FROM AUSTRALIAN STATES AND TERRITORIES

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

ACT Election returns more Members

ACT Election returns more Members and greater percentage of women.

The last sitting of the 8th Legislative Assembly of the Australian Capital Territory was held on 11 August 2016 and the Territory went to the polls on Saturday 15 October 2016 (the Assembly has fixed four year terms). It was the first time Territorians elected 25 Members of the Legislative Assembly, up from 17 MLAs. The make-up of the 9th Legislative Assembly is as follows:

- Australian Labor Party (ALP) - 12 MLAs
- Canberra Liberals - 11 MLAs
- ACT Greens - 2 MLAs

Of the 25 new MLAs elected, 13 were women, which comprises 52% of the Assembly’s Members – a first for the Legislative Assembly and one of the largest percentages for an Australian legislature.

NEW SOUTH WALES

Parliament’s first purpose-built education centre

The Parliament of New South Wales plays a vital role in educating primary and secondary school students on the topic of civics and citizenship, providing an understanding of modern democracy and how students can contribute in future years.

The Parliamentary Education and respective Chamber and Support Services teams currently deliver four- and role play programmes in the Legislative Chambers to around 8,000 primary and 3,000 secondary school students each year. These include mock sittings, mock committee hearings, seminars and debates. The programmes are a fundamental part of the school visit experience at the Parliament, but are currently offered on non-sitting days only, limiting the number of students who can attend. Funding has now been secured to construct a purpose-built education centre at Parliament House, which will provide a new facility for role-plays, seminars, debates and more, enabling the Parliament to offer important education programmes to more students than ever before. Construction is expected to begin towards the end of this financial year and will continue into 2018.

Update on twinning activities with the Solomon Islands and Bougainville

In October 2016 the Usher of the Black Rod from the Parliament of New South Wales travelled to Honiara to participate in a UNDP workshop for the Speaker and the Clerk of the National Parliament of the Solomon Islands.

At the end of October and early November 2016 the President of the Legislative Council, Hon. Don Harwin MLC, led a delegation of Members to the Solomon Islands, Port Moresby and Bougainville. The purpose of the visit was to undertake a needs assessment for future twinning activities following the end of ODA funding.

The delegation met and held discussions with the Presiding Officers of our twinned parliaments, Members, and senior officials of relevant public sector departments and agencies. The delegation also held insightful meetings with non-government bodies of civil society.

The discussions with Members were most valuable in that they will show what will probably be a more Member-to-Member focus for our twinning activities in the immediate future. The delegation also presented certificates to staff from the Parliament of the Solomon Islands and the Bougainville House of Representatives who had successfully completed the requirements of the customised Parliamentary Law Practice and Procedure course delivered in Honiara during 2016 with the support of the Parliament of New South Wales.

Votes of Members with the care of a child

In 2016, the President of the New South Wales Legislative Council, Hon. Don Harwin MLC referred to the Procedure Committee an inquiry into young children accompanying members into the House. The Committee subsequently tabled its report on 20 October 2016 after examining whether the prohibition of visitors on the floor of the chamber should be relaxed, so as to ensure that Members who have responsibility for the care of young children are not prevented from fully participating in the business of the House.

The Committee recommended the House vary the standing orders to provide the President with the discretion to have the vote of a Member caring for a child and seated in the President’s gallery counted in a division.

On 9 November 2016, the House agreed to a new standing order that implements this recommendation. The President also made a statement on the operation of the rule by stating that Members will need to advise the Chair each time they request to make use of the new provision.

In late November 2016, the Procedure Committee also commenced two new inquiries – one into the rules for Questions and the other into the rules for notices of motions.

Order for papers from a statutory body: Greyhound racing

In late 2015, the Legislative Council referred the production of documents from Greyhound Racing New South Wales (NSW) regarding greyhound racing welfare. In response, the Committee advised Greyhound Racing NSW, being an independent statutory body, was not subject to direction or control of the Government. No return of the order was received.

Legal advice subsequently obtained from Mr Brett Walker SC concluded that so-called ‘independent’ entities, groups or persons with public functions, such as Greyhound Racing NSW, are amenable to orders for papers addressed to them by the Council. Mr Walker noted that it was not clear that Greyhound Racing NSW is compelled to comply with the order “on pain of its responsible officers being in contempt of the Council.”

On 14 September 2016, the Council passed a further order for the production of documents on the same matter. The Council noted that Greyhound Racing NSW is ‘obliged’ to provide requested papers and also called on the Minister for Racing, which was a Member, to provide the papers to the Council.

On 8 November 2016, the Standing Order 238 was adopted as follows: A Member may raise a point of order to direct or control the business of the House. The Standing Order 23A has been amended to ensure the Committee can act on any report which the Standing Committee or the President of the Legislative Council recommends to the House.

NORTHERN TERRITORY

2016 Northern Territory Legislative Assembly Elections

The Northern Territory General Election was held on Saturday, 27 August 2016. The Australian Labor Party won 18 seats and the Country Liberals won 2, with the Independent Members also elected. Of the 25 Members of the 13th Northern Territory Legislative Assembly, 12 are women. Additionally, the new Labor Government appointed the largest female majority Cabinet in Australian history, with 5 women appointed to an 8 person Ministry.

The Northern Territory Legislative Assembly continues a trend of strong Indigenous representation – in every election since the Assembly’s establishment in 1974, at least one Indigenous member has been elected – with 6 Indigenous Members elected in 2016.

Standing Orders

The introduction of Standing Order 23A, Speaking in a Language other than English, provides that a Member must provide an oral English translation prior to speaking in the other language. Additionally, the Member must also table a written translation and provide the original text of the speech in the other language for incorporation into the Parliamentary Record.

On 24 November 2016, Hon. Yingiya Mark Guyula, MLA, the Member for Nhulunbuy, gave notice of a motion on use of language in the Legislative Assembly as follows:

1. That this Assembly remove all words in Standing Order 23A and replace with the following: A Member may rise to speak in any language other than English so long as an oral translation is provided in the English language by the same Member immediately prior to or after the words spoken in the language other than English.

2. That a new Standing Order 23B be adopted as follows: A Member may request the Standing Committee or the President of the Legislative Assembly to provide interpretation from the English language into the first language of the Member and from the first language of the Member into English. The interpreter will only be present for the purposes of interpreting and not for any other purpose and must vacate the floor when not undertaking those duties.

QUEENSLAND

Changes in Ministry

On 2 November 2016, the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries, Hon. Leanne Donaldson MP made a ministerial statement advising the Legislative Assembly of Queensland that rates areares owed in respect of her family home had been paid that day. On 3 November 2016, the Minister made a personal explanation advising the House that she had inadvertently omitted listing her mortgage on the Members’ Register of Interests and that in 2014, prior to her becoming a Member, she had taken a loan on her mortgage repayments for a short time.

Later in the evening the Minister advised following Question Time that day, she had become aware that her vehicle registration had not been paid by the due date the previous week, and although she had taken 4 immediate steps to rectify the issue, she had driven the vehicle the day after the registration had expired. The Minister advised that as this did not meet the high standards set by the Premier for all Members of the government, she had decided to resign from Cabinet.

On 8 November 2016, the Leader of the House advised that the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services and Minister for Corrective Services, Hon. William Byrne MP, had also been appointed as the Acting Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries until further notice.

On 29 November 2016, the Premier tabled the gazette notice regarding the appointment of Hon. William Byrne MP as Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Economic Development and Hon, Mark Ryan MP as Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services and Minister for Corrective Services.

Further the Premier announced the appointment of Ms Jennifer Howard MP as Assistant Minister of State assisting the Premier and Mr Glenn Butcher MP as Assistant Minister for Local Government and Infrastructure.
Motion to separate Queensland into two states

On 15 September 2016, Mr Robert Katter MP gave notice of a motion for debate that, the House support the separation of Queensland into two states in accordance with section 124 of the Commonwealth Constitution, the boundaries to be determined by an independent body such as the Redistribution Commission. In considering this motion was out of order, the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Queensland, Hon. Peter Wellington MP was of the view that the proposed motion, if agreed to, would not be effective consent by the Queensland Parliament within the meaning of section 124 because the territory to be separated from the state was not identified with any precision. The motion, if agreed to, would simply express an opinion of the House on the issue and was a matter for the House to determine. The motion was debated that evening and was not agreed to.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Bill 2016

The protection of children has been a priority of the Government for the full six-month period ending in early 2015 as part of a plan to modernise question time. The new sessional orders stated that government Members could no longer ask questions without notice. Instead, all Bills were introduced from a non-government Member, a Minister could seek the call to make a statement on new government initiatives, projects and achievements under their portfolio.

The wording ‘new initiatives, projects and achievements’ was subject to many points of order during Ministers’ statements. The Opposition frequently took points of order stating that a Minister wasn’t speaking about new information or about their own government business. For example, Ministers often used statements to talk about federal government decisions affecting their portfolio, which was only in order if they talked specifically about a new project or initiative to deal with that external event. The rules for Ministers’ Statements were changed in June 2016 after the Standing Orders Committee reported on its inquiry into hours of sitting and operation of the House. The Committee’s majority report did not recommend changes to Ministers’ Statements, but a minority report from government Members recommended defining the topic of statements as ‘about matters related to the Government’s business’. The Government returned to the House on the last sitting day of 8 December 2016 after completing the full six-month suspension. The suspension of the Leader of the Government for the full six months created associated problems for the House, including who would respond to questions asked of his portfolio during question time and whether he was permitted to attend Joint Sittings.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Committee reports

On 17 November 2016, the Education and Health Standing Committee of the Legislative Assembly of Western Australia tabled its report, ‘Leavings from the message stick: The report of the Inquiry into Aboriginal youth suicide in remote areas’. The Committee’s inquiry covered the period from 1 July 1999 to 30 June 2016. A total of 1151 youth suicides were reported over this period. The report was committed to by the Western Australian Parliament with the recommendations of the Inquiry. The Parliament reconvened on 5 September 2017 and the report was tabled on 11 March 2017.

Council Bills Ruled Out of Order by the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly

In a somewhat controversial end to the Parliament of Western Australia, in the final sitting weeks of the session, the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly ruled out of order two Bills that had been introduced in and passed by the Legislative Council. One of these bills, the School Boarding Facilities Legislation Amendment and Repeal Bill 2015, was a high profile Government Bill, whilst the other Bill (the Constitution and Electoral Amendment Bill 2015) was a small Bill proposed by a Member of the National Party, which had the Government’s support.

Both Bills were ruled out of order on the grounds that they involved an appropriation of public funds and, as such, should have received a certificate from the Governor and been introduced in the Legislative Assembly, pursuant to s46 of the Constitution Acts Amendment Act 1899. The President of the Legislative Council told a legal opinion from the Attorney-General’s office that, as a matter of law, the School Boarding Facilities Legislation Amendment and Repeal Bill 2015 did not have any appropriation from the Consolidated Account. The senior counsel also suggested that, despite the previous understanding of the wording of s46, the matter was capable of determination by a court. The prospect of court action attracted some media attention, however, the President of the Legislative Council publicly stated that legal action was unlikely to be resorted to in order to resolve the impasse.

The School Boarding Facilities Legislation Amendment and Repeal Bill 2015 was retained in the School Boarding Facilities Legislation Amendment and Repeal Bill 2016 and introduced in the Assembly with a Governor’s certificate. The new Bill was passed in the Council by means of a suspension of those standing orders relating to the “same question” rule.
During debate in the Senate, Labor Senator Louise Pratt commented that the Prime Minister and the government knew that this legislation was unpopular; it is not a vote winner; and its basis is completely unfounded and unjustified. It is, in fact, a political witch-hunt.” Senator Pratt noted that “the government has established an $80 million political witch-hunt royal commission in an attempt to justify it unsuccessfully. The royal commission report weakened, rather than strengthened, the case for the re-establishment of the ABC.”

Senator Pratt commented that “the government has been incorrect about the re-establishment of the ABC and that re-establishment in this legislation is completely and utterly unnecessary. As we know, we already have a building industry regulator in place and therefore the choice before this parliament today is not whether to establish a regulator, because we already have one—the fair work building commission which already has coercive powers. In its last annual report the PWBC had 154 investigations and used its coercive powers on 14 occasions. So, clearly, we have a regulator, and it is working. There is, in my view, no need to replace it, particularly when we know exactly what the legislation before us will do—we have seen it before.”

Independent Senator Nick Xenophon commented that “the opposition and others have tried to label the Heydon royal commission— which was not perfect—as a political witch-hunt but its finding and the large body of evidence presented and the evidence in numerous court proceedings cannot be lightly dismissed, neither can the process of royal commissions. They certainly raise the question of whether our existing legislative framework is strong enough to properly address these issues.”

Counter-Terrorism Legislation Amendment Act (No.1) 2016

This legislation further strengthens Australia’s national security laws and counter-terrorism framework. The Attorney-General Senator George Brandis commented that “Australians currently face the most significant threat from terrorists in our nation’s history. The Australian Government continues to work diligently towards combating the threat we face from terror groups and individuals, both overseas and at home. Sadly, by any measure, the threat we face has only risen.”

Senator Brandis noted that “around 110 Australians are currently fighting or engaged with terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq. At least 58, and potentially as many as 86, Australians are believed to have been killed in the conflict, while approximately 40 Australians have returned to Australia after traveling to Syria or Iraq and joining groups involved in the conflict. Some of these returnees remain a significant security concern. There are about 200 people in Australia being investigated for supporting individuals and groups in Syria or Iraq, including through funding and facilitation, or are seeking to travel.”

Senator Brandis reported that the National Terrorism Threat Level for Australia is Probable. This means there is credible intelligence that indicates that individuals or groups have developed both the intent and capability to conduct a terrorist attack in Australia. Some of the key measures in the legislation include enabling control orders to be imposed on persons from 14 years of age; imposing an obligation on a person subject to a requirement to wear a tracking device to maintain the tracking device in good operational order and create offences for interfering with the operation of a tracking device; establishing regimes to monitor the compliance of individuals subject to a control order through search warrants, surveillance device warrants and telecommunications interception warrants and enabling the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation to furnish security assessments directly to states and territories.

In addition to the need for control orders to be imposed on persons from 14 years of age, Senator Brandis commented that “recent experiences, including law enforcement operations, has shown that young persons can pose a significant risk to national security through their involvement in planning, supporting, and executing terrorist acts. Regrettably, recent events demonstrate the necessity of our law enforcement agencies being able to access the full suite of measures in relation to young persons.”

Senator Brandis noted that “the Government has implemented Recommendation 5 of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security, where Labor members and senators closely scrutinised the Bill and heard evidence from security agencies and a range of experts and community groups. We achieved 20 substantial recommendations for improvements to the Bill. In keeping with the government we pursued these improvements on which we have achieved agreement.”
MEMBERS’ TRAVEL SCRUTINIZED IN AUSTRALIA FEDERAL PARLIAMENT

Travel entitlements under scrutiny again

The Minister for Health and Aged Care, Hon. Susan Ley, MP, has resigned after significant public scrutiny of her travel claims. It was alleged that Minister Ley, while using tax payer funded travel entitlements, purchased an apartment on the Queensland Gold Coast. Ms Ley is the member for a New South Wales regional electorate. On 8 January 2017, the Shadow Minister for Health and Medicare, Hon. Catherine King, MP, commented that “what appears to have occurred in this case is that we’ve got a Minister who has gone to Brisbane to make an announcement that frankly could have been made anywhere - it wasn’t a Brisbane-specific announcement. She’s then used Comcar - so taxpayer-funded cars to drive to the Gold Coast, and accommodation to stay on the Gold Coast, and made a purchase of an apartment.” Ms King noted that the Minister needs to explain whether she has used her entitlements correctly and if not then she should resign.

Ms Ley responded that she “travelled to Brisbane on 9 May 2015 to make a major announcement about the availability of new medicines at a specialist breast cancer clinic and to meet with patients in Brisbane and on the Gold Coast.” Ms Ley noted that “while attending an auction...”

The Prime Minister noted that “once again, the model is the process that is used in the United Kingdom. We’re not slavishly bound to the United Kingdom model, I might add, but that is the very clear direction that we are focused on.”

Mr Turnbull concluded that “as politicians, backbenchers and Ministers, we should be as careful and as accountable with taxpayers’ money as we possibly can be. We are dealing with other people’s money. The Australian people are entitled to see that we are spending it wisely, appropriately, in accordance with the rules, but also in a manner that gets value for money. In other words, we’re spending it as though it was money from the business of our own. We should spend it with even more care and more attention than we would spend our own money. We are fiduciaries for the funds that we have - fiduciaries for the people of Australia.”

The Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Bill Shorten, MP, supported the need for reform of travel expenses, but insisted that reform must go further and look at the political donations system. In addition, he canvassed the need for a Federal Independent Commission against Corruption (ICAC). Mr Shorten stated that “no discussion about electoral reform and rebuilding the confidence of Australians in the political process can take place without having an open and honest discussion about a federal ICAC.”

Independent Senator Nick Xenophon has called for harsher penalties for breaches of entitlements rules. Senator Xenophon stated that “what dismays me about all this is back in 2015 I introduced a bill following the ‘chopper-gate’ scandal involving Bronwyn Bishop that would have led to more transparency, an independent watchdog, greater financial penalties, the public having a right to complain, and also monthly disclosures of pollies perks, yet that was rejected out of hand by the major parties.” Senator Xenophon said that “right now, the current rules are like being slapped with a wet piece of lettuce.”
The size of the UK Parliament’s House of Lords

The size of the upper house of the UK Parliament, the House of Lords, with a membership of over 800, has long been a source of criticism and sections of the UK press have not been slow to use the fact that the House is the second chamber in the world to seek to undermine its credibility. Peers are appointed for life and, although there is now a mechanism for members to retire, this is voluntary and still in its infancy. New lists of party political nominations have now become an almost annual feature, with many of the appointments proving controversial both within and outside the House.

Until relatively recently, the proposition that the size of the House was a problem was strongly contested, with the Government, keen to protect the Prime Minister’s power to appoint, maintaining that it was important to refresh the membership from time to time and that calls for a reduction in size failed to take into account the part-time nature of the House.

However, over the past year or so a consensus has gathered around the idea that action of some kind is necessary. This has partly been fueled by the press attention given to recent appointments and high profile support from within Parliament but the issue has also been brought into increasing focus by the knowledge that the House of Commons is to be reduced in size to 600, making failure to address the issue in the Lords less defensible. When the Lord Speaker, Lord Fowler, made the issue a key part of his election platform in the summer of 2016 it was clear where the balance of opinion lay.

Any reform to the composition of the House of Lords, particular by legislative means, is notoriously difficult to secure. Add to this the various issues which arise with almost any of the proposed solutions and the lack of consensus is not difficult to understand.

The options mooted have included age limits, term limits and a proportional reduction from each of the party groups, either on the basis of the total membership or on the basis of an election within each group. However there is no evidence of any correlation between age and the value of the contribution made to the House and age term limits could disproportionately affect different party groups. Contribution and attendance records also have their difficulties, especially for the Crossbench group where many members, appointed for their expertise in particular subjects, confine the majority of their contributions to these areas.

Any proposal likely to find favour would also need to ensure that the gender and regional balance of membership was not adversely affected. Finally any measures to reduce the size without a new understanding about the numbers coming into the House, or a cap on numbers risk making the entire endeavour futile.

UK international relations debate focuses on Commonwealth benefits

The House of Lords engaged in a debate on the ‘UK’s international relations in the light of Brexit, including its future engagement with the UN and the United States following a report from the House of Lords International Relations Committee on the priorities of the new UN Secretary-General.’ The UK Minister for the Commonwealth, Baroness Anelay spoke about the intergovernmental organisation’s ‘immense global reach’ and ‘huge potential to exert influence on issues of global importance.’

Emphasising that the Commonwealth could be instrumental in specific UN priorities such as boosting trade and addressing climate change, Baroness Berridge asked, “When will we, in the words of the noble Lord, Lord Howell, utilise this underutilised network?” She also urged that “the UK should look to encourage the UN and its Secretary-General to engage with religion and freedom of religion or belief.” The Conservative peer is the director of the Commonwealth Initiative for the Freedom of Religion or Belief - a project which supports Parliamentarians to speak out about the freedom of religion and belief. She joined other members of the House of Lords in highlighting the critical importance of the Commonwealth in international relations.

Other peers, including Baroness Deech also called for more focus on the Commonwealth from the UK Government.

Court dress and wigs in the House of Commons

Court dress and wigs have been worn by the Clerks at the Table in both Houses of the UK Parliament for several centuries, however from 20 February 2017, Clerks at the Table in the House of Commons have been wearing gowns over dark suits, with court dress and wigs reserved for use on formal occasions only.

This follows a decision taken by the House of Commons Commission. In a letter to the Procedure Committee, the Clerk of the House, David Natzler explained the arguments that had led him to put this proposal forward. The increase in the number of clerks undertaking roles at the Table was one practical factor, but the unhelpful image that court dress can convey was also stressed.

The Clerk explained that wigs could present “an unhelpfully forbidding image to Members who may not realise that part of the purpose of having Clerks at the Table is to advise all Members, not just the Chair; that the image they convey to those watching proceedings live or on television is of quaintness and of a chilling and antique formality, far removed from the desire of the House to present itself as a forum of open debate and scrutiny, reflective of the people we serve.”

The announcement by the Speaker of the House of Commons, Rt Hon. John Bercow, MP received a mixed reception from Members but Mr Speaker stressed his own support for the changes. It is unclear as yet whether the House of Lords will consider following suit.
Resignation of Prime Minister John Key

On 6 December 2016, at the behest of the leaders of the Labour Party and New Zealand First, the House held an urgent debate on the announcement of Rt Hon. John Key MP (National) to resign his post as the 38th Prime Minister of New Zealand.

Speaking to Mr Key’s character, then Deputy Prime Minister Rt Hon. Bill English MP (Leader, National) told the House that Mr Key had “always believed you get the best from people with confidence, not with divisiveness” and that “the way he has conducted his exit from his position illustrates the graciousness and the consideration that his resignation has shown every single day that I have worked with him.”

Mr David Seymour MP (Leader, ACT Party) echoed Mr English’s praise, describing Mr Key as “one of the most affable, unflappable people I have ever known. At certain times … I have said to myself: ‘That guy is the Prime Minister of New Zealand, dealing with very serious issues X, and doing it in a way that does not show a hint of being flapped under pressure, or of panic.’”

Hon. Annette King MP (Deputy Leader, Labour) opened her speech with an acknowledgment of the Prime Minister’s commitment and lengthy service: “[t]his is a time to thank him for his 8 years as Prime Minister of New Zealand … [Prime Ministers] work incredibly hard, they make a huge commitment to the country, and it takes a great toll on them and their families. I wish him well in his years ahead.”

However, Opposition Members were also critical of the Prime Minister’s record. Rt Hon. Winston Peters MP (Leader, New Zealand First) stated: “Eight years ago he campaigned on a four-point plan to solve what he called the housing affordability crisis. He talked of ‘the enormity of the problem’ and [said] it was the second-worst housing affordability problem in the whole wide world. … Eight years later the housing crisis has seriously worsened … a generation of New Zealanders is growing up and will never, ever own their homes.”

Ms Metiria Turei MP (Co-Leader, Green) said: “the first thing he did when he became Prime Minister was to give tax cuts to the rich … leaving working families who were subject to the harms caused by the global financial crisis right out of the picture.”

Prime Minister John Key’s resignation was effective from 1 December 2016. He was succeeded as Prime Minister and leader of the National Party by his deputy and Minister of Finance, Rt Hon. Bill English MP.
The Winter Session of the India Parliament that commenced on 16 November 2016 concluded on 16 December 2016. In this session, Parliament could not transact much of its business because of frequent interruptions and adjournments on the issue of demonetization of certain high currency value notes. Expressing her concern over the wastage of precious House time, Speaker Sumitra Mahajan, in her remarks on 16 December 2016, inter alia observed: “... In this session, we lost 59 hours 59 minutes of due to interruptions followed by forced adjournments, which does not augur well for all of us and also dents our image before the public as well. It is my fond hope that in the coming sessions, there would be no disruptions and we would all work better resulting in fruitful discussions and constructive deliberations...”

Showing his anguish over dismissions of proceedings, Chairman, Rajya Sabha, Shri Mohammad Hamid Ansari, in his valedictory remarks said: “... Regular and continuous disruptions characterized this Session. The symbolism of dignity protested so essential for orderly conduct of parliamentary proceedings was abandoned. This deprived Members of the opportunity to seek accountability of the Executive through questions and discussions on matters of public interest. The prohibition on slogans, showing posters and obstructing proceedings by leaving their assigned places was consistently ignored by all sections of the House.”

The Indian government cancelled the tender of the high denomination bank notes of Rs500 and Rs1000 issued by Reserve Bank of India (RBI) with effect from midnight on 8 November 2016. The government took this step with a view to curbing financing of terrorism through the proceeds of fake Indian currency notes and use of such funds for subversive activities such as espionage, smuggling of arms, drugs and other contraband into India, and for eliminating ‘black money’ which cast a long shadow of parallel economy on Indian real economy. A new series of bank notes of Rs100 and Rs2,000 denominations were introduced for circulation from 10 November 2016. People were allowed to deposit old high denomination bank notes into their bank accounts and/or in exchange in bank branches or issue offices of RBI till the close of business hours on 30 December 2016. Individuals were also allowed to exchange old high denomination bank notes of certain value in Post Offices.

When Parliament was convened in its winter session, opposition Members wanted a discussion on demonetization to highlight the inconveniences caused to general public. Opposition Members in Lok Sabha pressed for a discussion under the adjournment motion which provided for a vote. However, the demand for a discussion under the rule that allowed a vote was not accepted and the Lok Sabha remained in disagreement over the issue. The opposition Members wanted the Prime Minister to explain in Parliament his decision and its impact on the poor. A short discussion in Lok Sabha was started but was barely discussed. A debate in Rajya Sabha also remained inconclusive.

The Council of States (Rajya Sabha), on 16 November 2016, the first day of the session, raised a discussion on the issue. Many MPs had given notices for suspension of the day’s List of Business to start a discussion. As there was a general consensus in this regard and the Government was regarded for a discussion, a chairman of Rajya Sabha, Shri Mohammad Hamid Ansari, stood up on the day’s List of Business to take up the discussion immediately. The opposition Members insisted on the presence of the Prime Minister in the House during the discussion. The discussion remained inconclusive due to the disruptions of the proceedings.

Initiating the discussion, Shri Anand Sharma (INC) said that then the present high status of the high denomination notes was of no use due to non-availability of low denomination currency notes.

The Prime Minister of State (Independent Charge), Shri Piyush Goyal (BJP) submitted a statement that despite sufferings, a major section of population welcomed the step. Prof. Ram Gopal Yadav (JD-U) said that farmers had suffered a lot and an undreamed emergency prevailed in the country. The government should have ensured sufficient printing and supply of the new currency notes to minimize the sufferings of the common people.

Shri A. Naveenakarthikannan (AIADMK) thought demonetization created a lot of inconvenience to the people as they did not keep their money in bank accounts. Shri Sharad Yadav (JD-U) believed the measure created a flow to ‘black money’ within the country but would not be able to address black money deposited in foreign countries.

He demanded constitution of a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) which looks into the issue. Shri Sitaranam Yechury (CPM) said demonetizing 86% of currency in circulation had created an economic crisis in the country. A cashless economy was not possible as Indian economy was mostly based on cash transactions and the entire country was yet to have internet facilities. He also demanded a JPC to investigate the matter. Shri Kamarai Mayawati ( BSP) alleged the decision was taken without any proper preparation and a JPC should investigate the matter. Shri Pradip Patel (NCP) said while the intention was good the difficulties were not taken care of. There was lack of appropriate planning to ease out the resultant hardships.

Welcoming the decision, Shri Naresh Gupar (SAD) said the money coming back in to the banking system could be used to provide funds to the farmers, small businessmen, startups, and all those in need of bank finance. While not objecting to the step taken, Shri Derek O’Brien (AITC) said his party was against ‘black money’ and the step was deeply concerned about the hardships being faced by common people and small traders. He alleged that anyone who opposed government’s policy was not for ‘black money’ or was anti-national. Participating in the discussion on 1 December 2016, Shri A.U. Singh Deo (BJD) said the step had caused some difficulties but people largely welcomed it. Of course, a few people were facing a lot of hardships.

In his intervention, the Home Minister, Shri Rajnath Singh asserted that no one doubted the intention of the government as the decision was taken in the interest of the nation. Said the Speaker of the House enjoyed the power to decide the rule under which the issue could be discussed and the government was prepared for a discussion under any rule. He assured the House that the Prime Minister would be available during the discussion, and if necessary, would make interventions.

Therefore, the Speaker, Shri Om Birla in his address said the Prime Minister would be available during the discussion.

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The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill, 2016

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The Rights of Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 was enacted to give effect to the Proclamation on the Full Participation and Equality of the People with Disabilities in the Asian and Pacific Region. The Act defined Persons with Disabilities as those having not less than 40% disability and identified seven categories of disability: blindness, deafness, hearing impairment, locomotor disability, mental retardation, mental illness and leprosy-cured.

Over a period of time, the conceptual understanding of the rights of persons with disabilities was redefined and there had been worldwide change in approach to handling the issues concerning persons with disabilities. The United Nations adopted its Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities laying down the principles to be followed by the States Parties for empowerment of persons with disabilities. India signed the Convention and subsequently ratified it on 1 October 2007, coming into effect on 3 May 2008. This gave India an international obligation to comply with the provisions of the said Convention which required an entirely new legislation.

An Expert Committee was constituted under the chairmanship of the then Vice-Chancellor, Indian Institute of Cerebral Palsy, Kolkata submitted its report in 2011, suggesting a Draft Bill relating to the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The draft Bill was extensively debated upon at various levels involving State Governments and Union territories and various stakeholders. The new Bill contained extensive definitions of the types of disabilities to be included in the legislation. Chapter Two of the Act lays down ‘Rights and Entitlements’ which included:

- Section 3 pertains to equality and discrimination which vests upon the appropriate authority to ensure that the persons with disability enjoy the right to equality, life with dignity and respect for his or her integrity equally with others. It further stipulates that no person with disability be discriminated on the ground of disability, unless it is shown that the impugned act or omission is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim. Further no person shall be deprived of his or her personal liberty only on the ground of disability.
- Section 4 requires appropriate Government and authorities to take measures to ensure that women and children with disabilities enjoy their rights equally with others. Further, all children with disabilities have a right on an equal basis to freely express their views on all matters affecting them and provide them appropriate support keeping in view their age and disability.
- Section 6 provides for the appropriate Government to endeavour that the persons with disabilities enjoy the right to live in community. Such living arrangements should be planned with due regard to the physical needs of persons with disabilities.
- Section 9 stipulates that no child with a disability be separated from his or her parents on the ground of disability and only in exceptional cases, the appropriate Government may place the child in shelter homes, in cases where it is genuinely needed.

Other protections contained in the Bill included:
- Section 13 guarantees the right to freedom of association for persons with disabilities.
- Section 14 ensures that the Election Commission of India and State Election Commissions have been vested with the responsibility to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to voting.
- Section 15 requires the appropriate Government to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to Courts of Law, Tribunal, Authority, Commission or any other judicial or quasi-judicial body, where the need arises.
- Section 16 provides for the right to adequate remuneration for persons with disabilities.
- Section 17 provides that the appropriate Government has to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to any provisions of the law which are required to be made available to them.
- Section 18 provides for medical and other facilities to persons with disabilities.
- Section 19 provides for the right to participate in cultural and social life.
- Section 20 provides for the right to special education.
- Section 21 provides for the right to use public amenities.
- Section 22 provides for the right to enable the Government to undertake anti-poverty and development programmes.
- Section 23 provides for the right to protect cultural and identity.
- Section 24 provides for the right to live in community, dignity and security.

The Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha on 13 December 2016 and by the Rajya Sabha on 16 December 2016. The Bill as passed by both Houses of Parliament was assented to by the President of India on 27 December 2016.

The Taxation Laws (Second Amendment) Bill, 2016

The Bill seeks to amend the Income-Tax Act, 1961 and the Finance Act, 2016 in order to provide special incentives for thin capitalization. The Bill is being introduced in the Parliament with a view to accelerate the steps to be taken to bring forward the Bill to make some changes in the Act to ensure that defaulting assesses are subjected to tax at a higher rate and stringent penalty provision.

In the wake of declaring specified bank notes as not legal tender, there had been representations and suggestions from experts that instead of allowing people to find illegal ways of converting their ‘black money’ into black again, the Government should give them an opportunity to pay taxes with heavy penalty and allow them to come clean so that not only the Government gets additional revenue for undertaking activities for the welfare of the poor, but also the remaining part of the declared income legitimately comes into the formal economy. Thus, money coming from additional revenue as a result of the decision to ban Rs. 1000 and Rs. 500 notes could be utilised for welfare schemes for the poor.

In this amending legislation, an alternative scheme namely, the ‘Taxation and Investment Regime for Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana, 2017 (PMGKY)’ has been provided in the Bill. As per this scheme, any declarant under this regime shall be required to pay tax at 40% of the undiscovered income and penalty at 10% of the undiscovered income. Further, a surcharge to be called ‘Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan cess’ at 33% of tax had also been proposed to be levied. In addition to tax surcharge and penalty, the declarant would be required to deposit 25% of the undiscovered income in a Deposite Scheme to be notified by the Central Government in consultation with the Reserve Bank of India under the ‘Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Deposit Scheme, 2016’. This amount has been proposed to be utilised for the programmes of irrigation, housing, toilets, infrastructure, primary education, primary health, livelihood, etc. so that there is justice and equity.

The Bill was passed by Lok Sabha on 29 November 2016. This Bill, which was a money Bill, after its passage in Lok Sabha was transmitted to Rajya Sabha for its recommendation. The Bill, so transmitted to Rajya Sabha, was not returned to Lok Sabha within the period of fourteen days from the date of its receipt in Rajya Sabha Secretariat. The Bill was accordingly deemed to have been passed by both Houses of Parliament at the expiration of the said period (14 days) in the form in which it was passed by Lok Sabha under clause (5) of article 109 of the Constitution of India. The Bill received Presidential assent on 15 December 2016.
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