



President NSW Legislative Council

CPC - Opening Ceremony

Word Count: 1172

- Good morning.
- It is with immense pride that I welcome you all to Sydney, proudly on Gadigal land, for the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.
- Thank you Matthew for such a heartfelt and profound Welcome to Country. I also acknowledge and pay my respect to the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today, and extend those respects to their elders past and present.
- This land always was and always will be Aboriginal land.
- Can I begin by thanking the incredible Sydney Children's Choir for their beautiful renditions of the two Anthems – they were truly mesmerizing – as well as Reverend Christopher Waterhouse for his opening prayer and good wishes for our deliberations this week.



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- As we gather here in this vibrant city, we are not merely convening a conference; we are carrying forward a legacy that has spanned over a century.
- This assembly, representing the breadth of our Commonwealth's parliamentary community, stands united in a shared purpose - to uphold and advance the ideals of democracy, human rights, and good governance.
- Founded in 1911, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association has grown and evolved alongside the Commonwealth itself, adapting to the ever-changing landscape of global politics and fostering a spirit of cooperation that binds our diverse nations.
- Throughout its history, the CPA has remained steadfast in its commitment to bringing parliamentarians together from all corners of the world, transcending differences of culture, language and tradition, to promote the highest standards of democratic governance.



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- This year's Conference theme is Engage, Empower, Sustain: Charting the Course for Resilient Democracy'. We chose this theme very specifically, for at this moment in time, the very notion of democracy is being challenged in a way we have never seen before.
- Whether it be through foreign interference, rising disinformation and discord online, polarisation, or declining reserves of public trust, we are witnessing an erosion of the democratic ideals we hold so dear. And it is unfortunate, but it is a fact, that none of our nations are immune to these rising threats.
- So this week, we gather here not just as parliamentarians, clerks or officers, but as custodians of an enduring legacy, one that stretches across continents and generations.



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- We are bound by the timeless principles that are underpinned by our Commonwealth Charter – namely the commitment to the development of free and democratic societies and the promotion of peace and prosperity to improve the lives of all the people of the Commonwealth.
- We recognise that the strength of our societies lies in the openness of our institutions, the inclusiveness of our processes and the equality of opportunity for all.
- And this week we affirm our dedication to foster open dialogue, to learn from one another so that we can collectively strive to strengthen our respective Parliaments.
- Our Parliaments whose decisions shape the lives of millions and millions of people around the globe.



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- New South Wales, with its rich history and diverse communities, provides a fitting backdrop for our deliberations. We have the opportunity to reflect on the past but also to look forward, toward the future we are collectively shaping through our actions and decisions.
- In an ever-changing world, it is vital, now more than ever, that we come together to exchange knowledge, share best practices, and strengthen the bonds of friendship that lie at the heart of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. We are tasked not only with addressing the challenges of today but with preparing for the opportunities of tomorrow.
- To that end, this year as CPA President, I had the unique opportunity to attend the Commonwealth Youth Parliament in Wellington. The quality of both the delegates and the debates was incredibly high. That's why, for the very first time, we invited the 2024 Commonwealth Youth Parliamentarians to attend this conference as observers and I am delighted that a number of them have done so – from as far afield as Jersey and Gibraltar. Please take the opportunity to engage with them throughout the week.



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- Ladies and gentlemen, the CPA's mission has always been to foster dialogue and learning across its nine regions: Africa, Asia, Australia, the British Islands and Mediterranean, Canada, the Caribbean, the Americas and Atlantic, India, the Pacific, and South East Asia.
- The exchange of knowledge and best practices across these diverse regions enriches our understanding of democracy's many forms and strengthens the foundations of good governance worldwide.
- Whether we are debating climate action, advocating for greater equality, exploring ways to modernise our democratic institutions or ensuring equitable development and sustainable growth, our collective efforts here in Sydney will help shape the legacy we leave for future generations.
- As we begin the work ahead, let us remember that the Commonwealth is more than a collection of nations; it is a community of ideals and aspirations.



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- We have a unique opportunity this week. An opportunity to inspire each other, to ignite new ideas, and to forge lasting partnerships that will carry our work far beyond this Conference.
- Let us embrace the spirit of collaboration and mutual respect that has brought us together.
- Let us engage in thoughtful dialogue, listen with open minds, and contribute with passion and purpose.
- Because the voices in this room carry the power to make a profound impact, not just in our parliaments, but across the world.
- I look forward to the enriching discussions, the shared insights, and the friendships that will undoubtedly grow stronger throughout this week.



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- Ladies and gentlemen, as some of you may be aware, this year, we are celebrating the Bicentenary of the New South Wales Legislative Council - Australia's very first legislature.
- Working out how to appropriately acknowledge the Bicentenary, to sum up a history that has been incredibly successful but also - at times - complex and challenging, has been a difficult task.
- From its humble beginnings through to the robust and representative institution we see today, this year we've tried to reflect honestly on the Legislative's Council's past, to celebrate all that we have achieved and to imagine a future with a strong and vibrant parliament truly representing the society that surrounds it.
- We have celebrated this momentous occasion through a range of events across New South Wales over the past twelve months – seminars, conferences, art exhibitions, regional youth forums, public speaking competitions and so much more.



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- In order to capture the themes of *Reflect, Celebrate, Imagine*, we also commissioned a three-movement composition from the extraordinarily talented students at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music.
- And I am delighted that we are able to now share the third movement of this piece, *Acknowledgement of Country*, composed by Tullia Cairns, and performed by students of the Con, for you today.
- This piece serves as an acknowledgement to the Gadigal people, the traditional custodians of the land on which this work is being performed.
- Through incorporating calls from native wildlife and imagery responding to the landscape, the composer seeks to honour the land and all that inhabits it.
- Thank you, and welcome to Sydney. Let us make this conference one to remember.