



# The Parliamentarian

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CPA

COMMONWEALTH  
PARLIAMENTARY  
ASSOCIATION

## REFLECTING ON TWO YEARS OF COVID-19: HOW HAVE COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTS DELIVERED PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY DURING THE PANDEMIC?

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learnt by Parliaments and  
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To register for the CPA Parliamentary Academy, please email [hq.sec@cpahq.org](mailto:hq.sec@cpahq.org) or fill out a 'Contact Us' form on our website. More information can be found on our website: [www.cpahq.org/parliamentary-academy](http://www.cpahq.org/parliamentary-academy)



## Calendar of Forthcoming Events

Updated as at 7 March 2022

### 2022

#### March

8 March 2022	International Women's Day
14 March 2022	Commonwealth Day - main theme ' <i>Delivering a Common Future</i> '
14 to 25 March 2022	Commission on the Status of Women, New York, USA
14 March 2022	Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians online panel: Gender and Climate Change: Interactions and Opportunities for Progress
20 to 24 March 2022	144 <sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly, Indonesia
23 to 25 March 2022	51 <sup>st</sup> CPA British Islands and Mediterranean Regional Conference, Isle of Man

#### April

4 to 8 April 2022	'Backbencher to an Effective Minister: From Campaigning to Governing': Professional Development Course with the Civil Service College
9 to 10 April 2022	Mid-Year CPA Executive Committee meeting, Assam, India
11 to 12 April 2022	8 <sup>th</sup> CPA India Regional Conference, Assam, India (hosted by the CPA India Region)

#### May

22 to 26 May 2022	CPA Parliamentary Academy: Advanced Parliamentary Development Residency Course, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia
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#### June

2 to 5 June 2022	The Queen's Platinum Jubilee Central Weekend 2022
w/c 20 June 2022	Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), Kigali, Rwanda
30 June 2022	International Day of Parliamentarism / World Parliament Day (IPU initiative)

#### July

16 to 22 July 2022	58 <sup>th</sup> CPA Canadian Regional Conference, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Canada
28 July to 8 Aug 2022	Commonwealth Games, Birmingham, England, UK

#### August

20 to 26 August 2022	65 <sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada
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The CPA calendar fosters the exchange of events and activities between CPA Regions and Branches. For further information on any events, please contact the CPA Branch concerned or the CPA Headquarters Secretariat via [hq.sec@cpahq.org](mailto:hq.sec@cpahq.org) or visit [www.cpahq.org](http://www.cpahq.org). CPA Branch Secretaries are asked to send notices of all events to the CPA Headquarters in advance of the publication deadline to ensure the calendar is accurate.

### Parliamentary Conversations in the Commonwealth

A new CPA podcast that gives a voice to Parliamentarians, civil society experts and activists across the Commonwealth to discuss common democratic challenges and share their ideas on what can be done to solve them.

Listen now to new episodes on all major podcast platforms or visit [www.cpahq.org/knowledge-centre/cpa-podcast](http://www.cpahq.org/knowledge-centre/cpa-podcast)

## PARLIAMENTARY CONVERSATIONS IN THE COMMONWEALTH





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Mr Jeffrey Hyland, Editor  
*The Parliamentarian*,  
Commonwealth Parliamentary  
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# REFLECTING ON TWO YEARS OF COVID-19: HOW HAVE COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTS DELIVERED PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY DURING THE PANDEMIC?

## What lessons have been learnt by Parliaments and Parliamentarians? How can Parliaments and Parliamentarians have an impact on the COVID-19 recovery?

Two years ago, *The Parliamentarian* published a special issue reporting on the worldwide pandemic of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) that was engulfing the world and how Commonwealth Parliaments were initially responding to one of the greatest global challenges in recent history.

According to global data, there have been an estimated 446 million cases of COVID-19 and a staggering six million deaths. The response across the Commonwealth has resulted in an estimated 1.4 billion people fully or partially vaccinated out of a total population of 2.6 billion.

Since the start of the pandemic Commonwealth Parliaments have responded to the international situation regarding Coronavirus in many different ways, ensuring that they were able to continue to deliver parliamentary democracy while keeping their Members of Parliament, parliamentary staff and the public safe.

This issue of *The Parliamentarian* reflects on some of the ways that CPA Branches have responded to the pandemic and asks what lessons have been learnt by Parliaments and Parliamentarians during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The **Acting Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee, Hon. Ian Liddell-Grainger, MP** (United Kingdom) reflects on two years of the COVID-19 pandemic and writes about the work of the CPA in learning and development across Commonwealth Parliaments in his *View* article.

The **Acting CPA Small Branches Chairperson, Joy Burch, MLA** (Australian Capital Territory) explores the methods for optimising parliamentary functions during the COVID-19 pandemic without jeopardising the Executive's capacity to respond effectively using the example of the Australian Capital Territory.

**“Since the start of the pandemic Commonwealth Parliaments have responded to the international situation regarding Coronavirus in many different ways, ensuring that they were able to continue to deliver parliamentary democracy while keeping their Members of Parliament, parliamentary staff and the public safe.”**

The **CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg** in his *View* article highlights the need for different ways of working to ‘deliver our common future’ as a result of the global pandemic.

In this issue, the **CPA President, Hon. Anthony Rota, MP**, Speaker of the House of Commons writes about the Parliament of Canada's response to COVID-19 and the setting-up of hybrid sittings.

The Speaker of the 17<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha, **Hon. Shri Om Birla, MP** writes about the experiences of the Parliament of India in delivering parliamentary democracy in the times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Chair of the UK House of Commons Procedure Committee, **Rt Hon. Karen Bradley, MP**, looks back over the last two years to look at the lessons learned in legislating in the UK Parliament during the pandemic.

Former Member of the Legislative Assembly of Victoria, **Professor Hon. Dr Ken Coghill** looks at how the Federation system in Australia responded to the management of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Ms Bisma Rahman Zafar** from the National Assembly of Pakistan reflects on two years of the COVID-19 pandemic and the parliamentary response in Pakistan.

**Katamba Mohammed** writes about how the Parliament of Uganda is now returning to pre-pandemic numbers and the measures that were implemented to ensure the functioning of the Parliament.

This issue of *The Parliamentarian* also examines a wide range of other topics and issues.

In her *View* article for this issue, the **Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP), Hon. Shandana Gulzar Khan, MNA** (Pakistan) writes about trade in the Commonwealth and its impact on sustainable development and gender equality.

The first Speaker of the St Helena Legislative Council to be elected under the new Ministerial system of Government, **Hon. Cyril Gunnell, MLC** writes about the St Helena's evolving systems.

The two Presiding Officers of the New South Wales Parliament, **Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox, MLC**, President of the Legislative Council, and **Hon. Jonathan O'Dea, MP**, Speaker of the Legislative





## CPA PATRON'S PLATINUM JUBILEE BEGINS WITH ACCESSION DAY

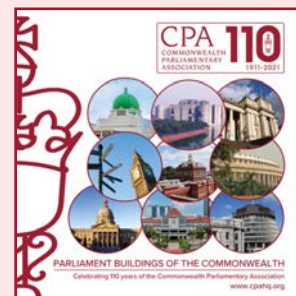
As the Platinum Jubilee began on 6 February 2022, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association congratulated its Patron, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II on her remarkable achievements over 70 years. Accession Day marks 70 years since The Queen acceded to the throne on the death of her father King George VI. The Queen has visited almost every Parliament building in the Commonwealth during her reign. Queen Elizabeth II has been Patron of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association since 1989 and has supported the organisation for many years. The Queen recently congratulated the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association on its 110<sup>th</sup> anniversary and as CPA Patron her letter was published in the new CPA book showcasing over 180 Parliament buildings around the Commonwealth

and giving an insight into their varied histories.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association is a membership of 180 Commonwealth Parliaments at national, state, provincial & territorial level with around 17,000 Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff across nine Regions and 54 countries.



Above: The visit of HM Queen Elizabeth II to Yellowknife, in the Northwest Territories, Canada in August 1994 when she officially opened the Legislative Assembly. The Queen is pictured with Jeannie Marie-Jewell, who served as the first female Speaker in the history of the Northwest Territories Legislature.



Assembly write about the appointment of the first Aboriginal Liaison Officer at the Parliament of New South Wales and its impact on community relations.

**Dr Leandri Hattingh** writes about a new CPA mental health toolkit that highlights the unique mental health challenges facing Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff and the measures that can be undertaken to provide support.

**Mr Aaron Mwewa** is the Deputy Chief Hansard Editor at the National Assembly of Zambia and provides a case study from Sweden for gender equality in Parliaments.

In this issue of *The Parliamentarian*, we are pleased to publish a series of articles by youth activists and youth Parliamentarians from across the Commonwealth as part of our *Commonwealth Youth Voices*.

From the CPA British Islands and Mediterranean Region, **Aaron Santos** (Gibraltar) writes about Gibraltar's relationship with the Commonwealth; **Adriana Lopez** (Gibraltar) highlights the role of young people in politics; **Brett John** (Wales) speaks about acting today for a better tomorrow for youth; and **Khadijah Khatun** (United Kingdom) shares a case study from the UK Parliament on the creation of workplace equality networks (WENs).

From the CPA Caribbean, Americas and the Atlantic Region, **Chaneil C. Imhoff** (Antigua and Barbuda) writes about promoting women in politics as vital for global growth; **Dominique Noralez** (Belize) focuses on the 'glass cliff' of political leadership in the Caribbean and women's representation in politics; **Bryanna Hadaway** (St Vincent and the Grenadines) examines the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and girls; and **Ade O'Neal**

(Barbados) looks at redefining the Commonwealth advantage to have an impact on sustainable development.

Finally, from the CPA Asia Region, **Mr Shehzad Saeed** writes about the role of Parliaments in enhancing trade and connectivity with examples from the National Assembly of Pakistan.

This issue of *The Parliamentarian* features a wide range of news and reports from CPA, CWP and Commonwealth activities including: delegation visits from Jamaica and Guernsey; new dates for the CHOGM 2022 in Rwanda; CWP events in Saint Lucia and Pakistan; a wide range of events held for International Day of persons with disabilities. This issue also reports on the devastating fire at the Parliament of South Africa and the Commonwealth tributes paid to the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

The *Parliamentary Report* and *Third Reading* section in this issue includes parliamentary and legislative news from Canada Federal; British Columbia; Trinidad and Tobago; India; New Zealand; the United Kingdom; Uganda and Australia Federal. We also feature a book review by a former Minister and Member of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago on a new autobiography of a political journalist and campaigner.

We look forward to hearing your feedback and comments on this issue of *The Parliamentarian*, on the issues affecting Parliamentarians across the Commonwealth and to receiving your future contributions to this publication.

Jeffrey Hyland  
Editor, *The Parliamentarian*  
editor@cpahq.org



**Acting Chairperson of the  
CPA Executive Committee,  
Hon. Ian Liddell-Grainger, MP,  
Member of the Parliament of  
the United Kingdom**

# REFLECTING ON TWO YEARS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT ACROSS COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTS

**The *Acting* CPA Chairperson reflects on the theme for this  
issue of *The Parliamentarian*.**

As we enter the first half of 2022 and reflect on another year of the COVID-19 pandemic that has affected every part of the Commonwealth, I must first and foremost say that my thoughts and prayers are with all those who have lost their lives, lost their loved ones, and are still enduring the ongoing effects of the pandemic. While we could not have predicted the unprecedented scale of the virus, I am most comforted by the resilience of communities and the solidarity demonstrated across the Commonwealth.

A core element of the CPA's mandate in promoting and strengthening parliamentary democracy and good governance is mutual learning and the sharing of best practices. At the start of the pandemic, the CPA Headquarters Secretariat were very proactive in developing the *CPA Toolkit for Commonwealth Parliaments and Legislatures on the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Pandemic and Delivering Parliamentary Democracy*. This timely toolkit brought together a wealth of experiences and recommendations from a variety of national and subnational Parliaments across the globe, synthesising measures to ensure the continuation of parliamentary operations. This form of learning and development proved immensely beneficial in jurisdictions adopting new initiatives with the information and resources gained from these toolkits invaluable.

Past issues of *The Parliamentarian* are also an excellent source of information in reflecting how Commonwealth Parliaments have been learning and developing over the two years. In 2020, the CPA dedicated an issue to sharing best practices of responses to the COVID-19 pandemic across the Commonwealth. Subsequent issues have also focussed on the ability of Parliamentarians and Parliaments to adapt to changing circumstances, adopting novel methods to conduct parliamentary business. The continuation of the parliamentary process during the pandemic has been vital to

ensuring that democracy continues, effective responses can be made, and that scrutiny of the Executive endures.

The CPA has, throughout this time of crisis, maintained a constant focus on innovation and transformation when looking at what we offer to our membership, and we have been part of this incredible surge in the digitalisation and virtual nature of processes taking place across the Commonwealth. A further medium in which Members have contributed to shared learning of best practices, are via the CPA Regional Conferences. We have learnt from one another on the very positive use of technology and our programmes and governance have mirrored this development. I have been able to participate in CPA Regional Conferences in Nigeria, Northern Ireland and Western Australia with virtual, in-person and hybrid participation. These CPA Regional Conferences are another forum to promote shared learning and best practices among Members and I very much hope that those Regions who were forced to postpone in 2020/2021 and have not yet held one, will look to holding these soon. The CPA has now also held three International CPA Executive Committee meetings entirely virtually and has also enabled the Coordinating Committee to regularly convene its meetings. Nevertheless, despite these emerging modalities, the face-to-face element and physical interaction cannot be replaced. As such it is very exciting that two years later, we are planning to hold the upcoming CPA International Executive Committee meeting in the CPA India Region, hosted by the CPA Assam Branch, taking place from 9 to 10 April 2022 and I look forward to meeting parliamentary colleagues in Guwahati.

Furthermore, it is extremely promising to see that new dates for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) have been scheduled for the week of 20 June 2022 in Kigali, Rwanda. The message of the CHOGM theme, '*Delivering a Common Future*' is clear in expressing that it is our commonalities and successful ability to assemble in times of need that prove together we are stronger, and collectively we have been and are continuing to overcome the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. Learning and development through international dialogue is crucial in discussing our priorities as a global family and how we can build a better future for all; I hope that this spirit of collaboration extends far past the lifetime of COVID-19 and

**"The continuation of the parliamentary  
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## CPA POST-ELECTION SEMINAR FOR THE PARLIAMENT OF THE BAHAMAS PROVIDES EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICE AND GOOD GOVERNANCE IN COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTS

From 15 to 17 December 2021, a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Post-Election Seminar was held for newly elected and returning Members of Parliament in The Bahamas. The Prime Minister of The Bahamas, Hon. Philip E. Davis opened the CPA Post-Election Seminar which provides examples of best practice and good governance in Commonwealth Parliaments. The Acting CPA Chairperson, Hon. Ian Liddell-Grainger also attended the hybrid seminar along with Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff from Ontario, Turks and Caicos, Trinidad and Tobago

A general election in The Bahamas took place on 16 September 2021. The election was called on 16 August 2021 by then Prime Minister Dr Hubert Minnis, eight months ahead

of the date that elections in the country were constitutionally mandated to take place. A total of 39 Members – 32 men and 7 women – were elected to the House of Assembly of The Bahamas, which is the lower house in the bicameral Parliament.



continues for many years to come as we pursue our shared goals.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the CPA Parliamentary Academy: A Centre for Excellence for Commonwealth Parliamentarians, was successfully launched in May 2021. The courses strengthen the capacity of Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff, enhancing knowledge and understanding of the democratic governance process. I have been delighted to see such a strong number of registrants for the Academy and having initially published 9 bespoke courses, the CPA Parliamentary Academy is further expanding its range. In 2022, we will further launch three network specific courses, a course aimed specifically at Speakers and Presiding Officers of Parliament and a course on Parliaments' implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. In addition to this, the CPA will deliver two residency-based courses for Parliamentarians, with the first being hosted by the Parliament of New South Wales and the CPA New South Wales Branch. I am most encouraged that Members acknowledge the expertise the CPA offers for their learning and development.

I am also delighted to see the CPA's latest publication is a toolkit promoting positive mental health. The new CPA Mental Health Toolkit for Commonwealth Parliaments provides guidance and advice for

Parliaments and Legislatures on responses to mental health issues experienced by Members of Parliament and parliamentary staff.

Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff face long working hours, intense public scrutiny and online abuse via social media and these stresses have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has also increased risk factors such as financial insecurity, and disrupted protective factors such as social connection, access to physical exercise, and daily routine, triggering a global decline in overall mental health. Featuring guidance on several elements of effective mental health promotion, the CPA toolkit sets out options for implementing screening processes, initiatives to address common workplace issues, organisational support systems and self-help resources. I am delighted that the publication also features relevant case studies from more than 20 Commonwealth jurisdictions, demonstrating one of the CPA's key objectives and successes, sharing best practice amongst its membership.

In reflecting on two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, the means with which Commonwealth Parliaments have delivered parliamentary democracy during that time and the lessons that have been learnt by Parliaments and Parliamentarians, I look forward to seeing what 2022 brings.

### 'From Backbencher to Minister': Professional development programme for new Government Ministers

The programme is designed to equip new Ministers with the skills and tools to perform their roles more effectively.

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Next course dates: 4 - 8 April 2022

Location: London, UK (virtual formats also available)

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Commonwealth Women  
Parliamentarians (CWP)  
Chairperson, Hon. Shandana  
Gulzar Khan, MNA, National  
Assembly of Pakistan

## TRADE IN THE COMMONWEALTH: CONNECTIVITY, SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND GENDER EQUALITY

The Commonwealth has more than 2.4 billion people in 54 countries, including members of the G7, the G20, Least Developed Countries (LDC) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS). This large Commonwealth also faces major development challenges starting with a youth bulge, achieving the SDGs and the climate-related challenges faced by Small Island Developing States. One in three young men and women, aged 15 to 21 years old live in a Commonwealth country, and neither the number of jobs available nor the quality of the livelihood opportunities are enough, sustainable or humane. Population growth is high and unable to match the change in demographics and numbers. In addition, COVID-19 has taken a huge toll on the number and quality of jobs available, in particular in the services sector.<sup>1</sup>

The failure to achieve the UN's (previous) Millennium Development Goals adds a lot of pressure on the UN, its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and on member states to ensure we 'leave no one behind'. Along with rapid climate change and the accompanying risks faced by the Small Island Developing States who require urgent financing, these problems are also exacerbated due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its

impact on global supply chains. The restrictions on cash flow, supply shortages and soaring container costs have caused record inflation, forcing governments in the middle of their development agendas to divert government resources to providing cheap food and reducing energy costs. In the background, poorly thought-out mercantilist business processes, combined with automation and slow manufacturing growth pose major challenges to job-intensive development strategies, mainly for the developing world and a large part of the Commonwealth.

Data from the World Bank's *World Development Indicators* show that across the Commonwealth, some 12 million additional jobs were created each year between 2003 and 2016. However, to keep up with the new entrants to the labour market, 17.5 million jobs a year – or 50,000 jobs every day – must be created. Of all the Commonwealth countries, the need for more jobs is greatest in India, where 7.4 million more jobs will be needed each year. India is followed by Nigeria (2.3 million), Pakistan (1.8 million) and Bangladesh (1.0 million). Together, Commonwealth countries need to create three in every five jobs in the world, as other areas, such as Japan, China and Europe, see their labour force shrink. Job creation must be stepped up by 50% to meet this demand, and the promotion of trade and investment is central to creating quality jobs.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the toughest challenges to trade links in the Commonwealth are coming from outside the Commonwealth network - for instance as a result of the spillovers of the race between China and the United States as the next growth engine of the world, restructuring global trade post COVID-19, new age free trade agreements that fail to take into account the SDGs or the gender pay gap; these are all serious economic problems on the horizon.

In terms of the overall importance of trade, intra-Commonwealth trade is particularly important for the least developed and most vulnerable member states; between 2013 and 2016, the Commonwealth was responsible for 26% of the total goods exports for LDC countries – up from 21% in 2006. For small, vulnerable economies (SVEs), this figure currently stands at 34%. Trade in goods within the Commonwealth directly supports an estimated 32.5 million jobs in its members' economies. Employment

**“Perhaps the toughest challenges to trade links in the Commonwealth are coming from outside the Commonwealth network - for instance as a result of the spillovers of the race between China and the United States as the next growth engine of the world, restructuring global trade post COVID-19, new age free trade agreements that fail to take into account the SDGs or the gender pay gap; these are all serious economic problems on the horizon.”**



generated through trade within the Commonwealth represents around 3.7% of the total, with variations among countries.<sup>3</sup>

This brings us to the big question: is 'business as usual' the panacea for a fragmented world post COVID-19? We face a difficult business climate and international trade channels, coming together to create tsunamis of uncertainty that have witnessed sharp hikes to our bread basket from unstable supply and demand. Outputs seem to be shrinking, sector jobs and industry job losses due to COVID-19 restrictions are giving rise to hunger and want. In turn, this set of economic woes are exacerbating the already existing inequalities, especially within the Commonwealth. In particular, the crunch of many overlapping issues and the subsequent vulnerabilities of women in trade and business has taken a hit along with progress already made on all of the SDGs, in particular on gender equality and SDG5.

Two solutions as have been presented by various thinkers on this issue are presented here for consideration. Firstly, Commonwealth jurisdictions can align themselves in conformity with the SDGs in their entirety and provide a solution for SDG5.

On the former, the SDGs have the potential to use better and more trade. 'Free and fair for all' but stressing the fair part, as a 'means of implementation' – an instrument that can be used to achieve the SDGs. The SDGs are actually elaborated in market terms by the *Addis Ababa Action Agenda* and its focus on improving market access for developing countries. The World Trade Organisation's *Doha Development Agenda* also promotes negotiations and duty-free, quota-free (DFQF) market access for LDCs.<sup>4</sup>

One key point, achieving the SDGs is largely a shift of focus to a decent livelihood growth in services, trade and delivery. Improving health and educational budgets, outputs and outcomes, will contribute to bettering regional inequalities. This can be done by providing support to 'backbone' industries such as transport, information technology and communications. Eradicating poverty will in turn depend on choices that the countries of the Commonwealth wish to make in directing investments in sectors such as health, education, and digital connectivity for the masses.

SDG5 on gender equality provides us with a point of illustration. COVID-19 has put women employees, entrepreneurs and stay-at-home carers at the frontline of this struggle. Post-pandemic, the world, in particular the Commonwealth, needs multi-faceted strategies to deal with general degradation in economic conditions at both the domestic and international level.

One tool that can be used are free trade agreements (FTAs) that can play an instrumental role in 'building back better' in the post-COVID-19 world. *"Through FTAs, countries can encourage their trade partners to create laws and procedures that can allow women to participate in trade and commerce. This is not a new realization. In the recent years, we have witnessed a sharp increase in the number of FTAs mainstreaming gender considerations".*<sup>5</sup>

Some of the most compelling reasons to do this are the business facts; with 30% of the female workforce employed in service-based industries, women are experiencing a serious loss of employment in service sectors such as tourism and hospitality.

Secondly, women working in informal sectors such as street vendors, subsistence farmers, seasonal workers and domestic workers are increasingly at risk as they continue to venture out

to work or they are losing their livelihood due to the continuing lockdowns.

Thirdly, the economic activities of women that own or work in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are at risk as the pandemic is forcing many SMEs to close or scale down their operations.

Fourthly, the existing digital disparities between women and men have been heightened during this time. This implies that working remotely or in an online-mode is either not an option for some women with no access to laptops, smart-phones and internet or they have to face a steep learning curve to switch to working online. This growing disparity also implies that women cannot take advantage of the booming digital trade transformation that provides new avenues for the economic empowerment of women.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, due to concerns over the COVID-19 pandemic, women's access to both available cash and medical services, including family planning, have been made more difficult. The 300% rise in gender-based violence, also known as the 'shadow pandemic', has further harmed our ability to achieve any measure of fairness or achieving SDG5.

A revival of international trade in the Commonwealth is an important tool for equitable recovery and achieving the SDGs as well as making the Commonwealth as vibrant as the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), an important economic and trading bloc. COVID-19 also provides the opportunity to 'build back better' should politicians be able to resist pressure from entrenched business mafias and grow in an inclusive manner.

The world economy will continue to suffer if women, who make up half of the world's working-age population, are excluded from the focus on 'building back better'. Digital and regional connectivity as well as inclusive growth must recognise this, and include women at the heart of the COVID-19 response. Placing women at the centre of economies will lead to a more rapid recovery; this recovery will put us back on track to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals as well.<sup>7</sup>

*This View article is dedicated to the memory of the late Hon. Emilia Mojowa Lifaka (1959-2021), former Chairperson of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.*



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<sup>1</sup> 'Opportunities for Commonwealth development. Creating jobs, sharing prosperity and increasing resilience' by Moizza Binat Sarwar, Maximiliano Mendez-Parra, Dirk Willem te Velde, Emily Wilkinson and Hanna Nomm

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<sup>3</sup> 'Opportunities for Commonwealth development. Creating jobs, sharing prosperity and increasing resilience' by Moizza Binat Sarwar, Maximiliano Mendez-Parra, Dirk Willem te Velde, Emily Wilkinson and Hanna Nomm

<sup>4</sup> 'Trade and the SDGs: Making Means of Implementation a Reality' by Bernard Hoekman

<sup>5</sup> 'Mainstreaming Gender Considerations in Free Trade Agreements: Building Back Better in the post-COVID-19 world' by Dr Amrita Bahri

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> The author would like to pay special tribute to Dr Amrita Bahri for her help and insights on gender-sensitive FTAs.



Acting Chairperson of the CPA Small Branches, Joy Burch, MLA, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of the Australian Capital Territory

# LAW IN THE TIME OF CORONA: OPTIMISING PARLIAMENTARY FUNCTIONS DURING LONG-TERM CRISES

The *Acting* CPA Small Branches Chairperson explores the methods for optimising parliamentary functions without jeopardising the Executive's capacity to respond effectively using the example of the Australian Capital Territory.

In the wake of crises, it's common for Legislatures to temporarily yield greater power to Executive governments to allow their response to be fast and impactful. While this works for short-term emergencies, it is unsustainable to maintain this imbalance of power over longer-term crises, such as pandemics.

As the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association reflects on two years of the COVID-19 pandemic in this edition of *The Parliamentarian*, this article seeks to explore the methods for optimising parliamentary functions without jeopardising the Executive's capacity to respond effectively during long-term crises. This is illustrated through the experiences of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory in managing the imbalance of power during the pandemic. Through this, I aim to make the case for the importance of adaptability and creativity in ensuring the core functions of Parliaments endure throughout persistent crises.

### Why do these challenges arise?

Before progressing, it's valuable to reflect briefly on what it is about long-term emergencies that lead to challenges arising.

The source of the issue lays largely in the distinction between response and recovery. In a short-term crisis, the actual incident begins and ends quickly. Its immediate impact is obvious and static, which enables a prompt and distinct shift from response to recovery. This importantly allows a reset of the temporary increase in authority yielded by Legislatures to Executives so they

can respond to emergencies, restoring the balance of power. By contrast, incidents in long-term crises are drawn out over weeks, months, or years and their immediate impact evolve continuously. The fluidity and extended nature of these emergencies blur the line between response and recovery, often requiring them to occur simultaneously. It is from blurring that challenges arise, as the absence of a distinct end to the response period makes it unclear when to restore the pre-crisis balance of power.

### Executive overreach

The rationale behind yielding increased authority to Executive governments during long-term crises is to empower them to respond to an immediate incident effectively. For Parliaments, this sometimes includes relaxing the rigidity of the Executive/Legislative divide and complying with government directions issued as part of the crisis response. Though an exercise in solidarity, it presents the risk of being seen as institutional acquiescence and opening the doors to governments overreaching the separation of powers and imposing on the Legislature. Though this may seem alarmist, the extended nature of long-term crises and inevitable 'crisis fatigue' means such imposition could innocuously manifest over time without anyone noticing.<sup>1</sup>

Unchecked, such overreach can evolve into 'Executive aggrandisement', where governments concurrently consolidate their increased authority and weaken its checks and balances.<sup>2</sup> The main casualty in this is parliamentary scrutiny and oversight, which can be discretely curtailed by closing the Legislature or limiting its operations. This is especially concerning as research indicates that decisions to take these measures appear unrelated to the severity of crises.<sup>3</sup> Parliaments therefore require responsive measures which allow them to function effectively during crises while limiting cause for overreach or aggrandisement to occur.

### Preserving Parliaments' capacity to sit

One important way to preserve this is by preserving the capacity for the Legislature to sit during emergencies. While business continuity plans are common for modern Parliaments, these often cater to the short-term where sitting might be unsafe. What became clear as the Coronavirus pandemic set in was that a different set of challenges were presented.

**"In the wake of crises, it's common for Legislatures to temporarily yield greater power to Executive governments to allow their response to be fast and impactful. While this works for short-term emergencies, it is unsustainable to maintain this imbalance of power over longer-term crises, such as pandemics."**



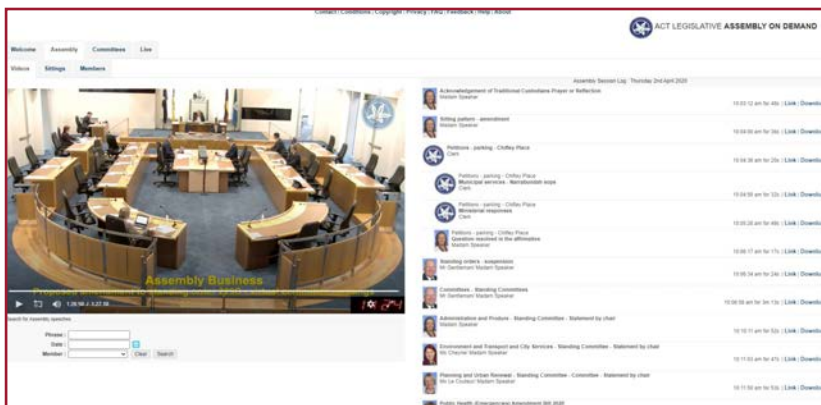


Figure 1: A screenshot of the Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly chamber during question time on 2 April 2020. Note the Assistant Clerk sitting alone at the Table, with the Clerk sitting in the top-left corner of the chamber.<sup>5</sup>

The most visible evidence of this came when our Assembly in the Australian Capital Territory sat during the first wave of the Coronavirus in 2020. For a period, the Assembly agreed that only 13 Members would occupy the chamber (thus ensuring adequate physical distancing requirements were met), and that during Question Time, only Ministers who had to answer questions were present in the chamber. Later, when all 25 Members were permitted in the chamber at once and in order to maintain physical distancing, we utilised the public galleries to seat some MLAs and installed a temporary podium from which those Members could speak.

Physical changes to the layout of the Assembly chamber were made to adapt to the conditions of the crisis. Two new crossbenches were commissioned, and a pair of tables were retrofitted to increase the number of seats available on the floor. When it became clear that the pandemic would persist, microphones were added to the new desks and the temporary podium was removed. An acrylic divider was also installed between the clerks-at-the-table.

These changes allowed all Members to participate in sittings at even the most restrictive level of physical distancing. Measures such as these are an effective way to strengthen a Legislature's operations during a long-term crisis while limiting opportunities for Executive overreach or aggrandisement.

Figure 2: The new layout as of 23 July 2020. Note the new curved cross benches and extended leaders' table. Not visible is the acrylic divider between the clerks-at-the-table.<sup>6</sup>



## Conducting proceedings using non-traditional mediums

For Parliaments that are unable to reformat their chambers, conducting proceedings using non-traditional mediums is a functional alternative with similar results. Access to new digital technologies is making it easier for Legislatures to ensure they can perform their core functions during long-term crises without having to meet physically – either in part or at all. While many hands have been wrung over the implications of digitising Parliaments, the COVID-19 pandemic has again shown us the value of embracing non-traditional technologies.

As we were able to reformat our chamber, our Assembly hasn't had to use remote voting or conduct sittings with mixed or full virtual participation, though many others have.<sup>7</sup> However, our Committees shifted to conducting virtual meetings and hearings with support staff coordinating them from within the Assembly building. What this did was optimise the capacity of Standing Committees to continue to scrutinise non-pandemic-related actions of the government. Only through being able to adapt our procedures was this achieved, which highlights how valuable institutional flexibility is. It is entirely possible for Legislatures to have robust procedures and traditions without the use of prescriptive rules which restrict its responsiveness during crises.<sup>8</sup>

## Legislating by delegation

Governments rely on an increased legislative power delegated to them during crises by Legislatures. These so-called 'emergency powers' allow the Executive to make and amend regulations and direction outside of the parliamentary legislative process to aid their crisis response. While this is proportional to the brevity of the delegation during short-term crises, the existence of a second legislative stream outside of a Parliament during extended emergencies is conflicting.

A University of Melbourne report notes that this conflict stems from the passage of stringent delegated crisis legislation without deliberation, especially when the Parliament is able to sit.<sup>9</sup> Parliaments therefore need to be creative in using the tools they have available to provide increased scrutiny of these measures which, by reason of the crisis and prior delegation, are not being passed in the Legislature.

## Using Committees to provide ongoing scrutiny

Establishing a specialist Committee is the quintessential way to provide this scrutiny. During the pandemic, the Assembly established two Select Committees into the Territory's response. The first Committee was established on 2 April 2020 and over its life, has held 21 hearings, produced four interim reports, and made 40 recommendations. The second Committee was established on 16 September 2021 during the first sitting after the ACT entered its second lockdown on 13 August.

In addition to performing the Parliament's scrutiny function for the delegated crisis legislation, these Committees also invited public submissions and heard from individuals and community and industry groups

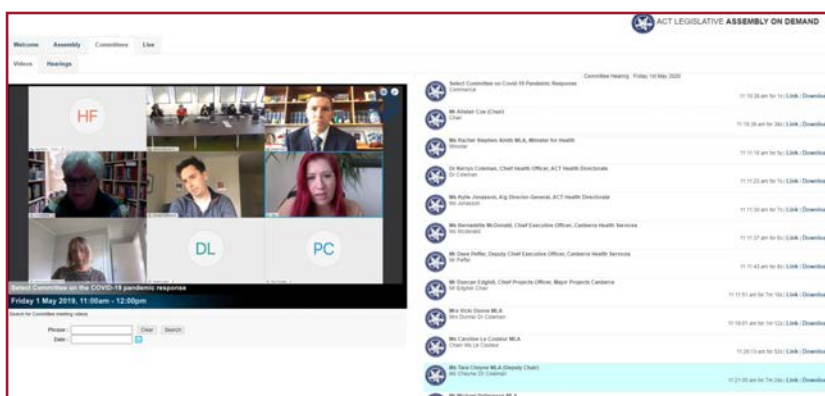


Figure 3: A screenshot of a public hearing of the Select Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic Response held on Friday 1 May 2020.<sup>11</sup>

about the impact of the government's response. For the most part, the pandemic response Committees have enjoyed a robust but collaborative relationship with the Executive, notwithstanding a difference in technical advice which initially saw a stand-off over the Committee's preferred videoconference platform.<sup>12</sup> The innate flexibility and collaborative nature of Committees allows Parliaments to maintain thorough oversight of delegated legislation without jeopardising an Executive's crisis response.

## Limitations

It is important to acknowledge that there can be limitations to this scrutiny depending on the type of delegation that Legislatures provide. In the ACT, health declarations made under the *Public Health Act 1997* are notifiable instruments, rather than disallowable. Though the Assembly can debate them in motions in the chamber or summon the Minister responsible to appear before a Committee, it lacks the easy recourse to amend or veto that is available with disallowable instruments.

There is no ‘silver bullet’ solution that perfectly balances the Executive’s need to be efficient when responding to crises and the Legislature’s need to provide oversight. That which works well for one branch is unlikely to satisfy the other. However, it is important we as Parliamentarians continue to explore possible solutions to ensure the appropriate balance between informed decision-making and democratic legitimacy.

### Technocratic accountability

Long-term crises such as communicable disease outbreaks, fiscal collapses, and extended civil unrest are characteristically technical. As such, it is common for relevant Ministers and specialist public officials to be empowered to lead the technical response. Understandably, there is increased public and political interest in expert-led and informed decision-making during such emergencies.<sup>13</sup> As a former health professional, I greatly value the expertise many have contributed to shaping the ACT's response to the present Coronavirus pandemic. The challenge that Parliaments face is how to hold Ministers and expert officials accountable for the decisions they make in response to extended crises without hampering their capacity to do so effectively.

### Regular reporting of decisions

Requiring regular reports to the Legislature of decisions and their rational is one way by which accountability can achieved without

unnecessary impediment. In his critique of Australian pandemic responses, Monash University's Eric Windholz stresses that: *What is needed is a decision-making framework that ensures technocratic medical-scientific experts function within democratic and accountable governance structures, without losing the substantive and legitimising benefits that come from their prominent participation.*<sup>14</sup>

The logic behind this is simple. Those who are delegated increased legislative power by a Parliament during a crisis need to be held accountable for its use in a way which is comparable to if Parliament itself were exercising the same power. In order to achieve this, our Assembly legislated a requirement for a report to be presented in the chamber every month for as long as emergency powers were in use. This was added to the *Covid-19 Emergency Response Act 2020* by an opposition amendment, in recognition of the reality that “*significant decisions need significant scrutiny*.”<sup>45</sup> There have been 19 updates provided to the Assembly since the Act’s notification on 8 April 2020, delivered by Ministerial statement. These have been a valuable opportunity to record the rationale for why decisions have been made through Hansard and offer a regular opportunity for the Assembly to discuss the ongoing response in a robust, constructive way.

This practice has also continued to evolve. Recently, the first human rights consideration statement from the Chief Health Officer was presented to the Assembly by the Health Minister as part of their regular update.<sup>16</sup> This developed out of observations by the pandemic response Committee that health directions didn't require statements addressing their compatibility with the *Human Rights Act 2004* (ACT) in the same way that legislation presented in the Assembly would normally. This has helped establish a good precedent for accountability in future long-term emergencies. It's yet another example of how institutional flexibility (tempered with some persistence) can help optimise parliamentary functions – such as accountability – during extended crises.

This article is an extract from the paper presented by the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of the Australian Capital Territory to delegates at the 2021 CPA Australia and Pacific Regional Conference hosted by the Parliament of Western Australia in November 2021 on the theme of 'Parliaments, People and Pandemics'.

“The logic behind this is simple. Those who are delegated increased legislative power by a Parliament during a crisis need to be held accountable for its use in a way which is comparable to if Parliament itself were exercising the same power. In order to achieve this, our Assembly legislated a requirement for a report to be presented in the chamber every month for as long as emergency powers were in use.”





## COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARIANS AND GLOBAL EXPERTS SHARE STRATEGIES ON COMMON DEMOCRATIC CHALLENGES AT SERIES OF VIRTUAL CPC WORKSHOPS

In 2021, almost 500 Commonwealth Parliamentarians, parliamentary staff and international experts from a wide range of organisations examined some of the most pressing, universal challenges faced by democracies worldwide in a series of virtual workshops. The 'Virtual CPC Workshop' series, hosted by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), brought together elected representatives, parliamentary officials, international organisations and leading academics for two sets of workshops at the beginning and end of the year. The Virtual CPC Workshops were held as a prelude to the 65<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC), to be held in Halifax, Canada in August 2022.

Topics examined included: climate change; International Humanitarian Law (IHL); democracy and social media; disability representation; disability rights; representation and diversity in democracy; parliamentary responses to countering terrorism and violent extremism; and youth activism. The Virtual CPC Workshops were held ahead of the next Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC). Every day across the Commonwealth, Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff grapple with legislation, debates and constituency issues related to these cross-cutting themes. The workshops offered participants an opportunity to consider the issues at hand in greater depth, informed by presentations from world-leading experts, and discuss concrete actions that legislators can take to lead international, national and local action on these issues. Representatives from the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross, Accountability Lab, Global Equality Caucus and the UK think tank Demos were amongst a host of expert panellists speaking at the workshops. By facilitating knowledge sharing between Parliamentarians and international organisations, the CPA is working to bolster connections between Parliaments and civil society and ensure that the actions of those in public office are informed by the latest data and research. The CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg said, "At the CPA, we recognise that many issues are universal to Parliamentarians in every corner of the Commonwealth. We are committed to facilitating ongoing dialogue between legislators, parliamentary officials and international experts to find solutions to these common democratic challenges. This series of workshops showed that the specialist knowledge of academics and NGOs will always be an invaluable resource for our elected representatives, particularly on complex topics such as International Humanitarian Law and climate change."

Resources and videos of the Virtual CPC Workshops are available at [www.cpahq.org](http://www.cpahq.org) and on the CPA's YouTube channel.



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<sup>9</sup> Pritam Dey and Julian Murphy, *Accountable lawmaking: Delegated legislation and parliamentary oversight during the pandemic* (Melbourne: University of Melbourne School of Government, 2021)

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Secretary-General of the  
Commonwealth Parliamentary  
Association, Stephen Twigg

## GLOBAL PANDEMIC HIGHLIGHTS NEED FOR DIFFERENT WAYS OF WORKING TO 'DELIVER OUR COMMON FUTURE'

'Delivering a Common Future' is the theme for Commonwealth Day on March 14<sup>th</sup> and for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) due to be held in Rwanda in June this year. It is a powerful message as we seek to learn the lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the citizens and institutions of the Commonwealth. The pandemic has reminded us that we live in an inter-connected world community in which we have a shared responsibility to address common challenges.

2022 marks the Platinum Jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Patron of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. As we celebrate Her Majesty's seventy years of service, there will be a particular focus this year on the important role of service in communities across the Commonwealth. During the pandemic, we have been reminded of the invaluable contribution made by all those working in the health and care

sectors as well as other key workers and volunteers who have ensured that communities and families have been supported.

For the CPA, 2022 will be a very busy year as we begin the implementation of our new Strategic Plan with a diverse range of activities which focus on our strategic priorities. We also look forward to our first 'in person' CPA Executive Committee and Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference meetings since 2019 in Assam, India and Nova Scotia, Canada respectively. We will take every opportunity to enable mutual learning including lessons from the past two years.

Globally, the pandemic has highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of health systems. Unequal access to vaccines remains a key challenge and is one of the issues addressed in the Memorandum of Understanding signed in February 2022 between the Commonwealth Secretariat and the World Health Organisation. Parliaments and Parliamentarians have a vital role to play in promoting universal health coverage both within their own jurisdictions and internationally.

A similar challenge applies to education where children and young people across the world have seen significant disruption over the past two years. There will be opportunities in 2022 and 2023 for Governments and Parliaments to build upon the commitments made at the Global Education Summit in London in June 2021. Once again, Parliamentarians have an important responsibility to hold governments to account on these commitments as well as ensuring that necessary legislation and budget measures are put in place.

At CHOGM, the Commonwealth Heads of Government will address some of these key challenges and the CPA will be working with partner organisations to encourage CHOGM to reaffirm the importance of good governance, human rights and engagement with civil society throughout the Commonwealth.

The launch of the new CPA Parliamentary Academy in 2021 was a key milestone in the CPA's history as we explore new

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and innovative ways of providing support to Parliaments and Parliamentarians. Feedback so far has been very positive, and I look forward to joining some of the early Academy participants at the first CPA Parliamentary Academy Residency in May 2022. I am grateful to the Parliament of New South Wales for kindly hosting the Residency.

The idea of the online CPA Parliamentary Academy was conceived before the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated restrictions on travel and in-person meetings. Events of the past two years have demonstrated powerfully both the necessity for such resources and the commitment throughout the CPA to adapt our traditional ways of working to meet the needs of our membership.

The CPA's membership includes around 180 Branches and around 17,000 Parliamentarians as well as parliamentary staff. With regular elections, there is a significant rate of turnover amongst our membership. The combination of this scale and turnover provides a significant set of challenges when it comes to communications both between CPA Members and, perhaps especially, between the CPA Headquarters and our membership across the Commonwealth.

This Journal of Commonwealth Parliaments, *The Parliamentarian*, is an important source of news and views for the CPA membership. I am truly indebted to the many who contribute to the quarterly publication and to the hard work and professionalism of our Editor, Jeffrey Hyland. I am also conscious, however, that not all our Members get to see *The Parliamentarian* on a regular basis. I am determined to address this as part of a wider look at CPA's communications and our digital outreach.

In the past year, we have launched several innovations designed to improve communication – our new website, a new podcast series and a regular direct email to our members, *The CPA Order Paper*. Recently, I had the honour of meeting a delegation from the Lagos State House of Assembly who were

visiting London. We discussed what difference the CPA can make internationally, regionally and at a country or sub-national level. I mentioned *The CPA Order Paper* and encouraged the Members present to sign up to it. I was delighted afterwards, when one of the Members showed me his telephone with the email containing *The CPA Order Paper*. I am keen that we maximise the numbers of our Members receiving and reading both *The Parliamentarian* and *The CPA Order Paper* as well as visiting our website.

Having said all that, communication is not just about CPA Headquarters providing information. It is about learning from the diverse range of activities and initiatives being undertaken throughout the CPA's membership and it is about enabling our Members to learn from and communicate with each other. This is one of the important functions of our three CPA Networks – the CPA Small Branches, the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) and the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPWD). These Networks serve to connect Parliamentarians so that they can learn from each other as well as providing platforms for their voices and common interests to be heard throughout the CPA.

This year, I look forward to meeting CPA Members in person as we increase the number of physical events being held. Equally, we will continue to engage virtually with our Members and others – drawing upon the lessons learned from the past two years. The exact mix of physical and virtual activities will depend on a range of factors including how the pandemic itself develops and the preferences of our membership.

I know that our member Parliaments are themselves considering what lessons can be learned for their own future activities. The virtual element, for example, can be a very useful tool to enable Parliaments to engage more widely when seeking evidence from citizens and others. The CPA will provide a range of opportunities for our Members to learn from each other as they look to meet the challenges of the rest of this decade.

## CPA SECRETARY-GENERAL UNDERTAKES FIRST VISIT TO CPA INDIA REGION AHEAD OF CPA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING IN ASSAM

The Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Stephen Twigg met with the Speaker of the Lok Sabha and CPA India Region Chairperson, Hon. Shri Om Birla at the Parliament of India to discuss the ongoing support and professional development opportunities that the CPA provides to Parliamentarians across the CPA India Region as well as the importance of India within the Commonwealth.

The Speaker of the Assam Legislative Assembly, Hon. Biswajit Daimary, MLA also joined the meeting to discuss the forthcoming CPA Executive Committee meeting due to be hosted in Guwahati, Assam in April 2022.

The CPA Secretary-General held a positive meeting with Hon. Sunita Duggal MP, the CPA India Region representative for the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians to discuss the CWP 2022 workplan and the priorities for the coming year including the promotion of women in leadership positions, the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls (including the impact on their education) and the maternity provisions for women Parliamentarians.



## NEW DATE ANNOUNCED FOR COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING 2022



The President of the Republic of Rwanda, His Excellency Paul Kagame, and the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Rt Hon. Patricia Scotland, have announced the week of 20 June 2022 as the new date agreed with member countries for the postponed Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). CHOGM was due to have been held in Kigali in June 2020 but has been postponed twice due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. CHOGM is customarily held every two years and is the Commonwealth's highest consultative and policy-making gathering. Commonwealth leaders selected Rwanda as host for their next summit when they met in London in 2018.

The Commonwealth Secretary-General said: *"I am delighted that the Commonwealth family can finally be reunited, four years on from our last CHOGM in London. Our meetings in Rwanda will give us a real opportunity to reaffirm the values that bind the Commonwealth together and focus on vital issues, including the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, tackling climate change and poverty, boosting trade and promoting sustainable development - all issues that can only be dealt with decisively through multilateral cooperation and mutual support."*

*This will be the first CHOGM to be held in Africa for over a decade and I would like to commend the Government and people of Rwanda for their outstanding commitment and dedication to delivering an exemplary CHOGM in Kigali."*

## COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARIANS FROM AFRICA AND UK ADDRESS TRADE, GENDER AND SECURITY ISSUES AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC

Members of Parliament from Legislatures across the CPA Africa Region as well as the UK Parliament came together for a workshop organised by the CPA UK Branch and hosted by the CPA Ghana Branch in Accra, Ghana from 24 to 26 January 2022.

The workshop gave Members a valuable opportunity to explore how Parliaments can address the interconnected themes of trade, gender, and security when unexpected external events occur, and to consider the impact of these themes on policy, scrutiny and the effectiveness of democratic institutions. The workshop also examined the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic on these themes. The COVID-19 pandemic has created a variety of challenges for Parliaments throughout the world and has raised the question of how legislators can best support effective, balanced, and fair responses to national crises.

The CPA Vice-President, Rt Hon. Alban Sumana Kingsford Bagbin, MP, Speaker of the Parliament of Ghana, said: *"I was delighted to welcome to Ghana, Parliamentarians from across Africa and the UK for this very important and timely workshop on trade, security and gender. As we begin 2022, I believe this is a great opportunity to strengthen our bonds, as we learn from one another and face up to modern challenges."*

Amongst the CPA Branches represented on the programme were Ghana, Nigeria, Seychelles, Cameroon, Mozambique, Malawi, Zambia, Kenya, Sierra Leone and The Gambia.

In addition, a delegation of UK Parliamentarians also attended the workshop to explore the challenges and opportunities within the Africa Regional context and ways in which trade and security ties can be strengthened. Hon. Stephen Doughty MP, head of the



UK delegation, said: *"In a volatile and uncertain world, it's more important than ever to build relationships between democracies and Parliamentarians across the Commonwealth. We all face significant challenges in the areas of trade and security, and making sure gender equality and the rights of women and girls are a key part of our debates about policies and actions in these areas. Coming together to develop ideas and share perspectives, is crucial to strengthening our democratic institutions, international friendships and dialogue, especially within the Commonwealth family."*

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## CWP CHAIR PROMOTES GENDER EQUALITY AT OXFAM PAKISTAN EVENT

The Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP), Hon. Shandana Gulzar Khan, MNA (Pakistan) spoke on the topics of gender sensitive budgets and financial inclusivity for women at an event themed on 'Promoting shared knowledge for continued actions to support gender justice and equality'. The event was organised by Human Resource Development Network (HRDN) of Pakistan and Oxfam Pakistan.



## CWP REGIONAL WORKSHOP TAKES PLACE IN SAINT LUCIA

The Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Regional representative, Hon. Valerie Woods, MP, Speaker of the National Assembly of Belize met with women MPs and Senators at the Parliament of Saint Lucia for the 'Strong Women, Strong Region' workshop promoting women in leadership and gender equality in the CPA's Small Branches in the Caribbean Region.

## CPA JAMAICA DELEGATION VISIT UK PARLIAMENT AND MEET WITH CPA SECRETARY-GENERAL

The Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Stephen Twigg and Deputy Secretary-General, Jarvis Matiya met with Commonwealth Parliamentarians from the Parliament of Jamaica during their visit to the United Kingdom. The delegation of nine MPs and Senators was led by head of delegation Ms Tamika Davis MP and were undertaking a programme exploring parliamentary procedure organised by the CPA UK Branch. The Members of Parliament from Jamaica discussed the role of Jamaica in the Commonwealth and the professional development support that the CPA provides for Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff.



## CPA GUERNSEY DELEGATION MEET CPA SECRETARY-GENERAL IN LONDON

The Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Stephen Twigg and Head of Programmes, Matthew Salik met with Commonwealth Parliamentarians from the States Assembly of Guernsey during their visit to the UK Parliament. The delegation of ten Deputies and three Clerks was led by head of delegation and Deputy Bailiff, Jessica Roland, and the delegation were undertaking a programme exploring parliamentary procedure organised by the CPA UK Branch.

The CPA Secretary-General discussed with Deputies the role of Guernsey in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association as a CPA Small Branch and the wide range of professional development support that the CPA provides for Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff.



## COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARIANS AND HUMAN RIGHTS LEADERS JOIN WORKSHOP TO MARK INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and the Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (CFNHRI) co-hosted a virtual workshop on protecting and promoting disability rights to mark International Day of Persons with Disabilities 2021.

The workshop, titled *'How NHRIs and Parliaments can protect and promote disability rights,'* took place on 2 December 2021 and brought together Commonwealth Parliamentarians, national human rights commissioners, civil society leaders and activists. The focus of discussion was the many opportunities for collaboration between Parliaments and national human rights institutions in the effort to defend disability rights, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The CPA works through its Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) network to encourage Commonwealth Parliaments and Parliamentarians to enable effective and full participation of persons with disabilities at all levels. The CFNHRI is a member-led network of human rights institutions, ombudsmen, and public defenders. It is working towards a Commonwealth where human rights are respected, protected and enjoyed.

The CPwD Chairperson, Hon. Dennitah Ghata, HSC MP (Kenya), in her opening remarks at the workshop, said: *"Members of Parliament have a responsibility to ensure that draft legislation is in conformity with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. We have a responsibility to work with National Human Rights Institutions to ensure government decisions comply with international human rights treaties. And we must liaise with civil society organisations to implement relevant laws and legislation to protect disability rights."*

International Day of Persons with Disabilities is marked every year on 3 December. It was established by the United Nations in 1992 to promote the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities in all spheres of society and development, and to increase awareness of the situation of persons with disabilities in every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life.



## FIJI PARLIAMENT HOLDS FIRST OPEN DAY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The Parliament of Fiji hosted its first ever open day for persons with disabilities on 3 December 2021 which coincided with International Day for Persons with Disabilities. His Excellency Hon. Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, the Speaker of the Parliament of Fiji opened the event and the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) Regional Champion, Hon. Viam Pillay, MP gave the keynote address to more than 40 participants from both Parliament and the local community.

The aim of the event was to achieve greater awareness and engagement for persons with disabilities in Fiji and was organised in partnership with two key national actors, namely, the Fiji Association of the Deaf (FAD) and the Fiji Disabled People's Federation (FDPF) recognising that partnerships with civil society organisations (CSOs) and relevant stakeholders provides the impetus for greater awareness and success.

The event provided an opportunity for MPs, advocates and key actors to connect and discuss key issues related to persons with disabilities as well as providing stakeholders with information on the role of Parliament and encourage persons with disabilities to actively participate in the legislative policy making process. The event also created an ideal opportunity for Parliament to become more inclusive, accessible and representative of all Fijians including marginalised groups such as persons with disabilities.



A key highlight of the event was the handing over ceremony of newly purchased high-end headphones to the Fiji Association of the Deaf. The equipment will be used by the sign language interpreters for the Parliament and Standing Committee sittings.

The Fijian Parliament and CPA Fiji Branch thanked the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association for the funding of this event through the CPwD Regional Funds.

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## COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARIANS WITH DISABILITIES HIGHLIGHT EQUAL PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS AT GLOBAL DISABILITY SUMMIT



The Chairperson of the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) network, Hon. Dennitah Ghati, HSC MP (Kenya) spoke about increasing equal participation at an online panel event examining the barriers persons with disabilities face in electoral and parliamentary engagement in the Commonwealth.

The event was held on 17 February 2022 as an official side-event to the second Global Disability Summit 2022, which was hosted virtually by the International Disability Alliance (IDA), the Government of Norway, and the Government of Ghana. The CPwD online panel event was hosted in

partnership with Sightsavers and examined how barriers preventing participation by persons with disabilities can be overcome. Guest speakers included Richard Rieser, General Secretary of the Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum and Joseph Oye, Country Director, Sightsavers Cameroon.

In addition, the CPA Deputy Secretary-General, Jarvis Matiya spoke about the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities network at a Global Disability Summit side-event hosted by the Commonwealth Children's and Youth Disability Network (CCYDN).

## COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARIANS WITH DISABILITIES CHAIRPERSON RECOGNISED WITH AWARD FOR LEGISLATIVE WORK ON DISABILITY IN KENYA

The Chairperson of the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD), Hon. Dennitah Ghati, HSC MP (Kenya) has been recognised with an award for championing the interests of people with disabilities in the National Assembly of Kenya. Hon. Dennitah Ghati, HSC MP was recognised for a motion that she proposed in the National Assembly of Kenya urging the government to provide assistive devices and medical items free of charge to people with disabilities as well as providing replacement items when they become worn-out.

The Mzalendo Trust, a parliamentary monitoring organisation in Kenya, made awards to 12 Senators and Members of the National Assembly of Kenya in recognition of their 'outstanding performance in championing public interest issues in Parliament'. The awards were announced at The People's Shujaaz Awards ceremony, which was held in Nairobi. Many of the legislators were recognised for sponsoring different pieces of legislation and seeking statements in Parliament in many different areas including education, health, welfare, food security, water and sanitation, and children's and youth affairs. Other areas highlighted were the environment and natural resources, energy, COVID-19 responsiveness and devolution.

A statement from the award's organisers said that "The People's Shujaaz Awards aims at helping shine a light on some of the outstanding Parliamentarians who champion public interest issues on the floor of the House. The aim of these awards is to encourage Members of Parliament who keep striving to ensure issues of great public interest are debated on the floor of Parliament." Members of the public were able to vote in the awards online and via SMS.



## COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTS IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND PAKISTAN MARK INTERNATIONAL DISABILITIES DAY

Different Parliaments across the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's membership of 180 Legislatures took part in International Day of Persons with Disabilities 2021 and showed their support for people with disabilities and equality for all.



For example, the Northern Ireland Assembly

held their first ever Disabled People's Parliament on International Disabilities Day and participants spoke in the chamber after being welcomed to the Parliament building by the Northern Ireland Assembly Speaker, Hon. Alex Maskey.

The Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan, Hon. Asad Qaiser hosted a special event to mark International Day of Persons with Disabilities that aimed to promote the rights of persons with disabilities and their equal participation in all aspects of life in Pakistan.





### HUGE FIRE CAUSES DEVASTATION AT THE SOUTH AFRICAN PARLIAMENT

A devastating fire at the Parliament of South Africa has caused major damage to the parliamentary complex in Cape Town, South Africa. The fire first started on 2 January 2022 and quickly spread across the complex before taking hold in the National Assembly building.

The Parliament Building in Cape Town consists of three main sections, with the original building completed in 1884, with later editions added in the 1920s, and again in the 1980s. The newest addition currently houses the National Assembly, while the original building houses the National Council of Provinces. The Parliament Building has been declared a National Heritage Site by the South African Heritage Resources Agency with Grade 1 status.

Firefighters battled the fire over several days, with the fire restarting on 3 January and completely destroying the roof and main chamber of the National Assembly building. Water and smoke damage extended across the complex.

The Presiding Officers of the South African Parliament, Hon. Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula, Speaker of the National Assembly and Hon. Amos Masondo, Chairperson of the National Council of the Provinces paid tribute to the over 300 firefighters who worked shifts to fight the fire.

Despite extensive damage to the complex buildings, many important works of art and heritage were reportedly intact. The



Images: Parliament of South Africa

South African Parliament has an extensive collection of artworks. The first artworks were acquired during the early 1920s and today the Parliament has close to 4,000 items of artistic and heritage value. Some pieces date as far back as the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the collection covers a range of artworks including drawings, paintings and sculpture.

Of particular concern was the valuable Keiskamma Tapestry, which is 120m (394ft) long and documents South Africa's history that was made by women from a community initiative in Hamburg, Eastern Cape, but later reports confirmed that the tapestry was intact.

Another concern was the parliamentary mace of the National Assembly dating from 2004, which was feared to be damaged in the fire, however it was recovered from the ashes without any damage.

The Parliament of South Africa was preparing for the State of the Nation Address by the President of South Africa and the subsequent parliamentary debates in both Houses at the time of the fire and the ceremony and debates were moved to Cape Town City Hall on 10 February 2022.

On 10 January 2022, it was announced that sittings of the National Assembly of South Africa, including the Budget Speech, would take place temporarily in the Good Hope Chamber. The Good Hope Chamber is one of the oldest meeting rooms within the precincts of Parliament and was originally the meeting place of the Parliament of the Cape of Good Hope from 1854 to 1885. The building was severely damaged by fire in 1892 and rebuilt as a music hall in around 1900 before being purchased by the Government in 1916. The chamber has a seating capacity for 170 people and allows for 70 people to be accommodated under COVID-19 regulations.

A suspect has been arrested on suspicion of arson and theft in relation to the incident.



Images: Parliament of South Africa

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## COMMONWEALTH LEADERS AND PARLIAMENTARIANS PAY TRIBUTE TO SOUTH AFRICA'S ARCHBISHOP DESMOND TUTU

Following the death of 90-year-old Archbishop Desmond Tutu in Cape Town on 26 December 2021, Commonwealth leaders have paid tribute to the man who helped to end apartheid in South Africa and was a leading supporter of the Commonwealth and human rights champion.

Tributes were led by the Patron of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Queen Elizabeth II, Head of the Commonwealth, who said in a message of condolence: *"I am joined by the whole Royal Family in being deeply saddened by the news of the death of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a man who tirelessly championed human rights in South Africa and across the world. I remember with fondness my meetings with him and his great warmth and humour. Archbishop Tutu's loss will be felt by the people of South Africa, and by so many people in Great Britain, Northern Ireland and across the Commonwealth where he was held in such high affection and esteem."*

HRH The Prince of Wales highlighted Desmond Tutu's *"bravery in speaking out against the evil of apartheid and highlighting the threat of climate change."*

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said it was *"another chapter of bereavement in our nation's farewell to a generation of outstanding South Africans who have bequeathed us a liberated South Africa."*

The South African Parliament's Presiding Officers, the Speaker of the National Assembly, Hon. Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula and the Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces, Hon. Amos Masondo, in a joint statement, paid tribute to the immense contribution that Desmond Tutu made to the struggle against apartheid and the creation of the new democratic dispensation: *"Archbishop Tutu diligently served the country and had remained faithful to his calling of service to the people. He fought hard for the liberation and freedom of the country and has, through his humble nature, inspired all of us and led with great wisdom and passion worthy of emulation."*

Born in 1931, Desmond Tutu became the first black Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town in 1986 and was a driving force to end



Image: Commonwealth Secretariat

the policy of racial segregation and discrimination in South Africa from 1948 until the early 1990s. On 9 May 1994, Desmond Tutu introduced South Africa's first democratically elected President, Mr Nelson Mandela, from the same balcony at the City Hall in Cape Town, where Mr Mandela had delivered his first speech as a free man on 11 February 1990.

Desmond Tutu's work led to him receiving numerous doctorates and academic awards from all over the world, including a Nobel Peace Prize. He retired from public life in 2010 but continued with his charity work through the Desmond and Leah Tutu Legacy Foundation. He is survived by his wife Leah and their four children.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Rt Rev Justin Welby described Desmond Tutu as *"a man of words and action. He was the rainbow leader. He didn't stick with one group. He defended the rights of LGBT people in the constitution. He defended the rights of former enemies."*

The Commonwealth Secretary-General, Rt Hon. Patricia Scotland, QC said on his passing: *"Today we lost an icon of justice and peace. The Commonwealth and the whole world mourn the passing of Archbishop Desmond Tutu. All who met him saw his hunger for justice and his compassion for people. My condolences to his family and the entire people of South Africa."*

The UN Secretary-General, António Guterres highlighted Archbishop Desmond Tutu's 'unwavering voice for the voiceless' saying: *"Archbishop Tutu was a towering global figure for peace and an inspiration to generations across the world. During the darkest days of apartheid, he was a shining beacon for social justice, freedom and non-violent resistance. Although Archbishop Tutu's passing leaves a huge void on the global stage, and in our hearts, we will be forever inspired by his example to continue the fight for a better world for all."*

Archbishop Desmond Tutu's state funeral was held in at St George's Cathedral in Cape Town on 1 January 2022.

Left: Archbishop Desmond Tutu meets the CPA Patron, Queen Elizabeth II and the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Don McKinnon at the Commonwealth Day service at Westminster Abbey in 2004.



Image: Commonwealth Secretariat



## THE HOUSE OF COMMONS OF CANADA'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19: STEP-BY-STEP

On 13 March 2020, the Canadian House of Commons adopted a motion to adjourn until Monday 20 April. On the surface, this may not appear particularly remarkable. However, this would be the first step of a long journey - one that continues, and from which we are still learning and growing. The global COVID-19 pandemic has caused great hardship, but the resilience, commitment, and ingenuity of Canada's House of Commons is something for which I am deeply grateful.

It quickly became apparent that the disruption to the regular proceedings of the House would not be brief. Forging the way ahead, members of the House of Commons were already devising ways for the House to convene and for constituents across the country to remain connected to their representatives.

In the two years that followed the March 2020 adjournment, members of all parties, with the support of the House Administration, navigated the trials and tribulations of formulating and implementing a hybrid Parliament system so that all 338 Members could attend sittings by videoconference as needed, participate in the decision-making process by using electronic voting application, and continue to serve their constituents and all Canadians amid this pandemic. The collaboration between all those involved has been extraordinary, and Canadians can be proud of their Parliamentarians.

### The many steps

Reflecting on those first months and the unknowns that lay before us, I marvel at the work we have done since the outbreak of the pandemic. On 24 March 2020, the House was recalled and empowered two Standing Committees - Health and Finance - to meet by teleconference or videoconference to receive evidence in relation to COVID-19.

On 11 April, the House of Commons was recalled again and by motion added more Committees to the list permitted to meet. One of these Committees, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs (PROC) was instructed to study ways in which Members could fulfill their parliamentary duties while the House stood adjourned. The recall of the House was something that had only happened 12 times since Confederation, but it would be recalled six more times through the summer to pass emergency legislation to support Canadians during the pandemic until Parliament was prorogued on 18 August.

On 20 April, the House agreed by unanimous consent to create a special Committee mandated to examine the national response to COVID-19: COVI. The motion creating this special Committee also established that it would be composed of every Member of Parliament and be chaired by the Speaker. Members attending proceedings of this special Committee received authorization from the House to do so by videoconference. In this critical time, COVI offered an important forum for the opposition to put questions to the government - a vital part of the democratic process. It also provided the Administration's technical teams with valuable opportunities to plan, test, and refine the machinations of supporting large virtual sittings.

Meanwhile, I appeared before PROC four times to inform its discussions and decision-making. During my appearances, I reaffirmed that the House Administration remained committed to providing all necessary operational support for Members to sit and hold meetings in a format of their choosing and in a way that would respect health and safety protocols, while maintaining their parliamentary rights and privileges.

PROC worked carefully to assess the requirements that would enable Parliament to sit safely. Any adopted model would need



**Hon. Anthony Rota, MP** is the 37<sup>th</sup> Speaker of the House of Commons in the Parliament of Canada and the current CPA President as the host of the upcoming 65<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference. In April 2020, he was also appointed Chair of the Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic (COVI). He is the Member for the electoral district of Nipissing-Timiskaming and other previous parliamentary roles have included Chair of the Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs of the Standing Committee on National Defence as well as Assistant Deputy Speaker and Assistant Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole. Prior to his election in 2004, he worked in the field of international technology transfer and in the financial and real estate sector.





Image credit: Parliament of Canada/Bernard Thibodeau

to uphold the rights, immunities and privileges of the House and its Members while allowing for simultaneous interpretation in both English and French. Some changes would have to be made to the Standing Orders to adapt to remote participation. Ultimately, PROC presented two reports to the House: on 20 May and 21 July respectively.

PROC highlighted the imperative that Members demonstrate patience and understanding as the Administration worked to expand and improve the technical capacities of the House. By mid-August most Committees had received authorization to hold meetings by videoconference and by the end of September, only six months after the beginning of the pandemic, all were of their normal pre-pandemic level of activities. Adjustments did, however, have to be made to Committees' usual meeting times to compensate for the fact that Members may find themselves participating from any of Canada's five time zones.

The Second Session of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Parliament was opened on 23 September 2020. The House resumed its typical sitting schedule for the first time since March. That day, the House adopted, by

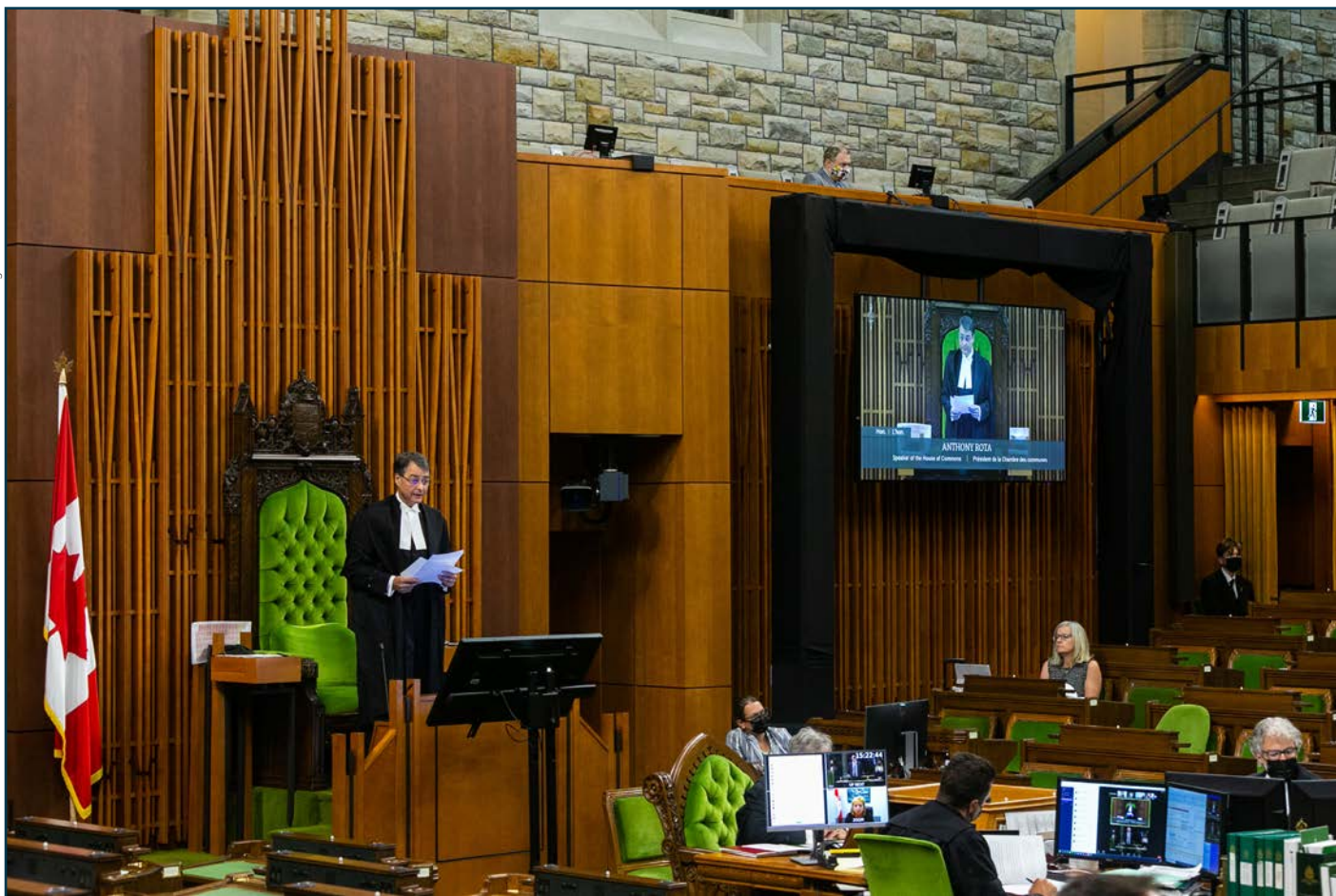
**Above: The Speaker of the House of Commons of Canada, Hon. Anthony Rota, MP presides over a 'hybrid' parliamentary sitting in the main chamber.**

unanimous consent, a special order to allow for the continuance of parliamentary proceedings while respecting public health guidelines until 11 December 2020. Specifically, the provisions stated that Members could participate in person or by videoconference, virtual participation counted for quorum, and documents could be presented to the House physically or electronically.

Recorded divisions presented distinct challenges. Initially, voting occurred in the usual way for Members present in the House and by roll call for virtual participants, which required them to keep their camera on for the duration of the vote. While a typical recorded division takes approximately 10 minutes, such a vote in a hybrid setting required approximately 40 minutes. The House Administration undertook the task of developing a secure remote voting application; the solution was presented to the parties in December 2020.



Image credit: Parliament of Canada/Bernard Thibodeau



**Above: The Speaker during a Question Period in the House of Commons with Members and parliamentary staff observing social distancing.**

On 25 January 2021, the House adopted a new order, in effect until 23 June 2021, that had the same effects as the one from 23 September 2020 - with one important addition: the Administration was directed to begin an onboarding process for the electronic voting application and to conduct two rounds of testing.

One month later, the House Leaders indicated their satisfaction that the remote voting system was ready and the first vote employing the new tool occurred on 8 March 2021. Electronic voting reduced the duration of a recorded division in a hybrid format from approximately 40 minutes to 15, thus supporting a resurgence of efficiency in the democratic process.

The voting application notifies Members on their House of Commons-managed devices that the division bells are ringing and directs them to sign into the application using their parliamentary

credentials. Once the voting period opens, Members can view the motion's details and cast their vote. Facial recognition technology is used to confirm a Member's identity. Once submitted, Members have the option to change their vote before the expiry of the 10-minute voting period. Once the voting period has ended, Members can raise a point of order to vote by videoconference if they had technical difficulties with the application.

The pandemic still very present, on 23 June 2021, the House adjourned for the summer. During adjournment, the 43<sup>rd</sup> Parliament was dissolved, and a general election was launched. Canadians, cast their votes on 20 September 2021, and the 44<sup>th</sup> Parliament opened on 22 November 2021. Without a special order to allow for hybrid sittings, and with public health guidelines that, at the time, did not require physical distancing, almost every Member attended the House in person for the first time in nearly two years.

On 25 November 2021, the House adopted a new special order again establishing provisions for Members to participate in person or by videoconference. The House Administration worked diligently



to onboard new Members to use the electronic voting application which was re-deployed on 8 December 2021.

The House of Commons and its Committees continued their business throughout the pandemic, but measures were adopted to ensure that Members of Parliament and staff worked in a safe environment. Beyond the initiatives related to the electronic voting application and videoconferences, the Board of Internal Economy made decisions to guide Members and their staff, as well as Administration personnel, in ensuring a safe work environment for everyone. For example, face masks and hand sanitizers were made widely available to Members and their staff, Committee travel was suspended and Parliament Hill was closed to visitors where only essential parliamentary activities were allowed.

#### The lessons learned

I have been privileged with the opportunity to gain special insight into the role of the Speaker in ways my predecessors have not. Members' participation by videoconference and physically with personal protective equipment (PPE) presented new challenges in maintaining the House rules of order and decorum. From concerns regarding the neutrality of videoconference backgrounds and masks to attire when attending remotely from home, I had to remind Members on a number of occasions that their remote participation was equal to those participating in person and that the same rules applied.

**“I continue to be impressed by Parliamentarians’ determination to meet the challenges before them to ensure the continuation of the democratic process. It is with these efforts that Parliaments can have an impact on the COVID-19 recovery, providing a forum for debates to continue, for solutions to be proposed, for questions to be asked and for the government to be held accountable for its decisions. Members of Parliament can lead by example, set aside differences, and come together to pass important legislation on an urgent basis when required.”**

Furthermore, any number of technical difficulties arising from the hybrid nature of sittings interrupted the proceedings. Navigating the features of Zoom, the regular use of appropriate audio equipment and internet connection have all presented a steep learning curve. It is important that Members use House-approved headsets with proper microphone positioning to ensure sound quality, which allows the interpreters to work safely without risk to their hearing. It is also important they participate from an area with a stable connection.

Ultimately, Parliamentarians learned the importance of patience and collaboration. We witnessed our capacities as colleagues - beyond party lines - to come together, collaborate, and put solutions into action.

#### My reflection

I continue to be impressed by Parliamentarians’ determination to meet the challenges before them to ensure the continuation of the democratic process. It is with these efforts that Parliaments can have an impact on the COVID-19 recovery, providing a forum for debates to continue, for solutions to be proposed, for questions to be asked and for the government to be held accountable for its decisions. Members of Parliament can lead by example, set aside differences, and come together to pass important legislation on an urgent basis when required.

Furthermore, they can demonstrate their humanity and humility to the nation. By showing flexibility with new procedures and technologies, and remaining responsive to their constituents, Parliamentarians show the country that our important work continues, regardless of the challenges we face.

These are only a few thoughts in relation to the House of Commons of Canada’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the course of the pandemic, I had an opportunity to share my experience and to discuss with my counterparts as I too adjusted to the virtual context and held meetings by videoconference. The work of Members of Parliament at the international and interparliamentary level also adjusted to the current context and many activities of our Parliamentary Associations have been held virtually.

I look forward to opportunities to further discuss my experience as well as that of the House of Commons with fellow Parliamentarians as soon as public health guidelines permit, including the upcoming Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC).

It is with great pleasure that Canada prepares to welcome the 65<sup>th</sup> CPC in Halifax, Nova Scotia. I look forward to hosting and collaborating with Parliamentarians from across the Commonwealth to better our institutions and the millions of people they serve. I hope to see you all in August!





## PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY IN THE TIMES OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: EXPERIENCES IN THE PARLIAMENT OF INDIA

The challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic have no parallel in the history of mankind. It is more than two years that the world is grappling with the multiple crises the pandemic has caused with almost no respite. With the looming threat of a reversal of the decades-old developmental efforts in all spheres of human endeavours, it needs all our focus for a resolute global response in tackling the pandemic. The key for this is solidarity and effective collaboration within the comity of nations.

India has always been at the forefront in the call for joint global action for any crisis in the world. Even during the ongoing pandemic, India immediately offered support in the form of vaccines, medical equipment and medicines to the affected countries. India's call for 'One Earth One Health' approach underlines our continuing commitment to bring succour in these trying times for the greater cause of humanity.

We have all witnessed that the pandemic has also brought challenges to the functioning of our democratic institutions, including our Parliaments. This crisis, taken as an opportunity, has brought various Parliaments together in close co-operation to address the challenges and devise appropriate strategies. During this turbulent time, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association has commendably brought out the '*COVID-19 Delivering Parliamentary Democracy: CPA Toolkit for Commonwealth Parliament*'. The IPU also conducted a study on '*Parliaments in a time of Pandemic*' and offers practical information and parliamentary responses to the global pandemic. These initiatives have been extremely useful and appreciated all over the world.

### Fighting the COVID-19 pandemic in India: Major initiatives of the Government of India

In India, the first case of COVID-19 infection was reported on 30 January 2020. Soon afterwards, the Government of India took

preventive measures starting with progressive tightening of international travel, the issuing of advisories, quarantine facilities, contact tracing, social distancing, etc. After the countrywide '*Janata Curfew*' on 22 March 2020, the Prime Minister of India announced a nationwide lockdown on 24 March for 21 days. The lockdowns were periodically extended till 31 May 2020 and thereafter, restrictions were lifted in phases, until the later part of the year.

The Government of India announced a relief package to the tune of Rs.1700 billion for the poor. The *Taxation and Other Laws (Relaxation of Certain Provisions) Ordinance, 2020* was promulgated on 31 March 2020 to provide an extension of time limits and waivers of penalties. Steps like relief to borrowers in repayment of loans and short-term credit to Indian States were also taken by the Reserve Bank of India. The *Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund (PM CARES Fund)* was instituted. The Government decided to put the 'Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme' on hold for two years, from 2020-21 to 2021-22.

On 12 May 2020, the Prime Minister announced a massive economic package, amounting to Rs.20,000 billion - about 10% of India's GDP. He gave a clarion call for *Aatma Nirbhar Bharat* or Self-Reliant India Movement outlining five pillars - economy, infrastructure, system, vibrant demography and demand. The total stimulus by the Government and Reserve Bank of India till November 2020 to tide over the COVID-19 pandemic was Rs.29,870 billion. In the fight against COVID-19, ICT tools were widely used, including the *Aarogya Setu App* for contact tracing; Geofencing technology for enforcing strict vigilance on COVID-19 suspects in quarantine; *MyGov Portal* and *National Health Portal of India* for providing updates and authentic information.

Later, during the second COVID-19 wave, the Government adopted a five-point strategy - *test, trace, treat, public compliance*



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Above: The Parliament of India.

and vaccinate. The first three elements were already in place; and India then entered into the decisive 'Vaccination Phase'. On 16 January 2021, the Prime Minister launched the world's largest vaccination campaign; with two Made-in-India vaccines - *Covishield* and *Covaxin*. Up to 21 February 2022, the vaccination coverage in India had crossed 1.75 billion vaccines. India has also used its vaccine production and delivery capacity to help humanity. From January to November 2021, India supplied over 72 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines to 94 countries and 2 UN entities in the form of grants, commercial exports or through COVAX (COVAX is co-led by CEPI, Gavi and WHO, alongside key delivery partner UNICEF to deliver global equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines).

#### **Fighting the COVID-19 pandemic: Initiatives in the Parliament of India**

The Parliament of India actively supported the Government of India's efforts to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. Our Parliament's capacity to continue functioning during the pandemic testifies the strength and durability of our democratic system. Taking early preventive measures, on 17 March 2020, I convened a meeting of senior officials of various agencies to review the situation on the ground and measures were taken in the Parliament House Estate and the surrounding areas. The Budget Session of Parliament was concluded on 23 March 2020, nearly two weeks ahead of the scheduled time after a consensus across party lines. On 21 April 2020, I held a video conference with the Presiding Officers of the State/UT Legislatures to discuss, among others, the COVID-19 pandemic situation. It was





incidentally the first such conference in the history of our Parliament. Consequently, a COVID-19 Control Rooms Grid was set up in the Lok Sabha Secretariat as well as in 23 State Legislatures to coordinate efforts of Parliamentarians/Legislators for the relief and rehabilitation of affected people.

Similarly, a year later on 19 April 2021, at the peak of the second COVID-19 wave, a virtual meeting of the All India Presiding Officers'

Conference (AIPOC) and other Leaders was held on the 'Prevailing COVID-19 Situation - Role and Responsibility of Public Representatives'. In the Conference, emphasising on the vaccination programme, I urged Presiding Officers to share their best practices with each other so that a standard procedure could be developed. We followed up on 22 June 2021, where we discussed the working of State Legislatures, including the legislative response to tackle the menace of COVID-19.

To complement the efforts of the Government, some important initiatives were taken by the Parliament of India. An Amendment was made to the *Salary, Allowances and Pension of Members of Parliament Act, 1954* which provided for a 30% reduction in the salary of Members of Parliament for a period of one year. Also, a 30% reduction was made to the sumptuary allowance paid to Ministers for a year from 1 April 2020. Officers and staff of the Lok Sabha Secretariat also contributed one day's salary amounting to approximately Rs.4.5 million to the PM CARES Fund. The *Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897* was amended to include the protection of healthcare personnel combating epidemic diseases. The Information and Communication Centre (ICC) set up on 14 November 2019 came as a great help. During the lockdown in 2020, more than 15,000 calls were made to the Members conveying important information.

#### **Holding sessions of Parliament during the COVID-19 pandemic: Adopting necessary measures and new procedures**

Adequate arrangements were made to ensure that the Monsoon Session of 2020 was held in a smooth manner complying with all the COVID-19 health and safety guidelines. Consultations were held with the Rajya Sabha (Upper House) Secretariat, medical experts and other agencies in this regard.

On the eve of the Fourth Session, held from 14 to 23 September 2020, elaborate safety measures were taken by adopting the appropriate Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). To ensure social distancing, seats were allotted to Alliances/Parties in both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha Chambers/Galleries and Members sat only in marked seats. Arrangements were made for the two Houses to run in two separate shifts. Audio and video





systems between the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha Chambers and their Galleries were integrated and synchronised along with an interpretation facility. LED screens were also placed in the Rajya Sabha Chamber and the Galleries of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. Polycarbonate sheets were installed between rows and seats in the Lok Sabha Chamber to create a physical barrier between the seats. Sensor-based sanitizer dispensing machines and water dispensers along with disposable paper glasses were provided at appropriate places.

Arrangements were made for Members to undergo COVID-19 test (RT-PCR Test) before attending the Parliamentary session and also for all of the Officers and staff of the Lok Sabha Secretariat and allied agencies. An Orientation/awareness programme on COVID-19 was held on 13 and 14 September 2020. Later, vaccines were provided to Members of Parliament and the Officers and staff of the Secretariat in accordance with the prioritisation as guided by the National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for COVID-19 (NEGVAC).

During the Parliamentary sessions, a number of statements were made by the Minister of Health and Family Welfare about the COVID-19 situation in the country. Two discussions under Rule 193 were held on the COVID-19 situation in the country - on 20 September 2020 and on 2 December 2021. On 5 February 2021, on behalf of the House, I congratulated the scientists and doctors for their sincere efforts in making the indigenous COVID-19 vaccine. Besides the elaborate arrangements, it was largely due to the support and cooperation of the Members of Parliament that the sessions of the House, as well as the meetings of the Parliamentary Committees, could be carried out seamlessly during the COVID-19 times with high productivity.

**“The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare all our vulnerabilities even when we are purportedly at the pinnacle of development in cutting edge scientific and other disciplines. It is a clarion call for all stakeholders, including Parliaments and Parliamentarians, that we need to come together to ensure a just and equitable order and to evolve a development model which is sustainable. If this advice is heeded to, the pandemic could be turned into an opportunity.”**

#### Procedural innovations

Rules 2 and 384 of the *Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business* in Lok Sabha had to be relaxed during the Fourth Session. Both Houses decided to do away with the Starred Questions and Private Members' Business and have only an abbreviated Zero Hour. All these developments made the sessions of both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha a distinctive one.

#### Harnessing digital technology

The COVID-19 pandemic has hastened the extensive use of digital technology in the Parliament of India. We have taken measures like the online issuing of summons through the Member's Portal, a new responsive Members' Portal compliant for viewing across various electronic devices, etc. In addition, all of the parliamentary papers for a particular day's session were also made accessible electronically through the 'Today's Papers' Tab on the Members' Portal. A Mobile Attendance Application 'Attendance Register' was developed for marking the attendance of Members of Parliament during the Fourth Session.

Through the use of ICT, we could hold, as well as attend, many Parliamentary meetings in virtual mode including the Fifth World Conference of the Speakers of Parliament in August 2020; the Sixth BRICS Parliamentary Forum in October 2020; the 206th Session of the Governing Council of the IPU in November 2020; the 81st All India Presiding Officers Conference (AIPOC) in September 2021 and the World COVID-19 and Critical Care Conference on 9 October 2021, among others. From May 2020 to May 2021, about two dozen Parliamentary delegations participated virtually in high-level inter-parliamentary events. In addition, various online programmes were also held for the benefit of Members of Parliament under the aegis of the Parliamentary Research and Training Institute for Democracies (PRIDE) during the COVID-19 times.

#### Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare all our vulnerabilities even when we are purportedly at the pinnacle of development in cutting edge scientific and other disciplines. It is a clarion call for all stakeholders, including Parliaments and Parliamentarians, that we need to come together to ensure a just and equitable order and to evolve a development model which is sustainable. If this advice is heeded to, the pandemic could be turned into an opportunity.

India has always believed in values of integration and unity, *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* which means the entire world is one family and is committed to extend support towards every effort made to mitigate the effects of this pandemic towards humanity and for charting out the way forward.



## DELIVERING DEMOCRACY: LESSONS LEARNED IN LEGISLATING IN THE UK PARLIAMENT THROUGH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Chair of the UK House of Commons Procedure Committee looks back over the last two years.

The House of Commons is at the very heart of the UK's political and democratic life. But it is far more than just a collection of buildings – it is a living, breathing, vibrant community where decisions are made that impact upon the whole nation. And, of course, its inhabitants are more than just Parliamentarians. This community includes researchers, caterers, cleaners, engineers, security guards and so much more, each of whom play vital roles in ensuring that Members of Parliament can carry out their democratic duties. At its peak there can be well over 3,000 people in and around the UK Parliamentary Estate at any one time.

So just as it was for the rest of the United Kingdom and around the Commonwealth, the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic was a shock to the system like no other. It was Thursday 23 January 2020, shortly before 11.30 am, when the word “Coronavirus” was first recorded in Hansard as being spoken in the House of Commons chamber. Two months later the first lockdown announcement was made in the UK, and the House passed emergency legislation as the nation adapted to the rapidly deepening public health crisis.

As legislation was passed to facilitate the UK's transformation in the face of COVID-19, there was a rapid response to allow the legislators to adapt too. The House responded with a period of technological innovation and adaptation – the likes of which it hadn't experienced before in its 700-year history. In the ensuing months, the House of Commons pushed the limits of technological and procedural viability to ensure that it could continue to sit and carry out its essential functions – from holding debates and passing laws to scrutinising the Executive.

As we reach the two-year anniversary of lockdown – a time span that feels both like a lifetime and the blink of an eye – it is a useful opportunity to reflect on how the UK Parliament adapted to the

challenges of the pandemic, and the lessons that can be learned for the future.

The UK House of Commons Chamber is a surprisingly small space. When I've taken constituents on tours it's often the first thing they notice. At key moments – including during many of the preceding three years as my colleagues tackled the many issues related to Brexit – the green benches can be packed to the rafters. The sudden handbrake turn towards ensuring the Chamber was safe and COVID-secure – while also ensuring it could scrutinise an issue of such national importance – was therefore a huge logistical and procedural challenge.

The House has repeatedly shown resilience and a capacity to endure through disaster and crisis: its chamber was destroyed by fire in 1834 and reduced to rubble in 1941, and yet it found ways in which its Members could continue to meet and conduct its business. There was agreement across the House, and between the UK Government and Parliament that the priority must be to scrutinise the Executive during these unprecedented times. As Chair of the Procedure Committee, my concern has been to press for the necessary modifications to the procedure and practice of the House to be made in a way which is best for the House and all its Members, and crucially, for Members to have their say.

As we entered the late spring of 2020, COVID-19 brought many institutions across the globe to a standstill, but the House of Commons rose to the challenge to innovate. To outsiders the House may sometimes be seen as a traditional ‘small-c’ conservative institution, but the reality is that, while respecting its procedures and traditions, the House of Commons can show an immense capacity to adapt. Following endorsement by the Procedure Committee, the House agreed temporary Orders which ensured that hybrid proceedings,



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Image credit: UK Parliament/Jessica Taylor

in which Members could participate virtually or physically, could take place. History was made when, on 22 April 2020, less than a month after the country went into lockdown, the first virtual question session took place. Marco Longhi MP secured his place in history as the first Member to ask a question remotely, while Simon Hart MP became the first ever Secretary of State for Wales to answer questions while in Wales. That same day, Members across the country zoomed into the Chamber to question the First Secretary of State, Rt Hon. Dominic Raab, MP, at the first 'virtual PMQs', with the UK Prime Minister unable to participate while he recovered from COVID-19 himself.

From the procedural expertise of the Clerks to the technical know-how of the Broadcasting team and the Parliamentary Digital Service, colleagues across the UK Parliament have delivered some of the greatest innovations our democratic system has ever seen. Creating the hybrid House of Commons was akin to creating a giant TV studio broadcast, similar to an election night broadcast, with hundreds of MP 'guests' joining in remotely from all over the country. But the establishment of a remote contribution hub, a Virtual Chamber Administration Team (or VCAT), and the introduction of published

**Above: A 'hybrid' Prime Minister's Questions in the UK House of Commons sees a limited number of Members of Parliament sitting 'socially distanced' in the chamber as well as those joining via video link.**

'call lists' (which set out a list of speakers and their estimated contribution time), allowed the Speaker and House administration to manage question sessions efficiently and effectively. Live feeds ensured Members across the country, from the Cornish coasts to the highlands of Scotland, could participate in proceedings via video link. In 'normal' times, this is something that could be implemented after months, maybe even years, of planning. In the surreal times of Spring 2020, all this was set up in a matter of weeks.

Despite a few all-too-relatable technical glitches – from Members of Parliament on mute to WiFi dropouts – the adaptation was a huge success and ensured effective scrutiny could continue remotely. Hybrid participation initially covered scrutiny business such as questions, urgent questions and ministerial statements, before being rolled out to include many other types of Chamber procedure



Image credit: UK Parliament/Jessica Taylor



**Above: The Speaker of the UK House of Commons, Rt Hon. Sir Lindsay Hoyle, MP conducts business in the chamber as the UK Prime Minister, Rt Hon. Boris Johnson, MP joins via video link.**

following a motion passed by the House on 30 December 2020. It ensured that the Chamber could remain as COVID-secure as possible, with social distancing rules mandating that only a maximum of 50 Members could be in the Chamber at any one time.

Although the Chamber is often seen as the main ‘public’ face of the House of Commons, it is really important to note the vital work carried out by Select Committees and here, too, virtual proceedings became a key part of their work. Witnesses had been able to give evidence remotely to Select Committees long before the pandemic but it was a relatively rare occurrence. What changed was that Members were now also able to participate virtually and joined remotely from all parts of the country – and sometimes beyond. I should point out in fact that Committees were trailblazers here, with some form of hybrid

participation beginning even before the Chamber itself adapted to the change.

A key element of any Parliament is, of course, the ability for Members to vote, and it’s fair to say that this has not been without controversy over the course of the pandemic. The UK Parliament’s Digital Service had its own ‘Blue Peter moment’ where experimental work was rapidly turned into a system which could be put into place, and worked successfully before being brought to an abrupt end. After a short hiatus where a lengthy and broadly unpopular queuing system was used, we then moved to the system of using security passes to vote. This system has remained in place even while other pandemic measures have ceased and is now here to stay.

Following the summer recess of 2021, all COVID-19 measures were scrapped, including the dismantling of the video screens in the Chamber, and the House now has some semblance of ‘normality’ again – recent events have seen the House return to being the political pressure cooker of the nation, but it’s impossible to go





## SPECIAL REPORT: PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

through such a period of upheaval without there being some lasting impact.

The one key take-away is quite simply a recognition - or perhaps confirmation of what we already knew - of the amazing capability for innovation and adaptability that exists within the UK Parliament and the House of Commons. The development of virtual proceedings shows that if ever such an emergency were to happen again there is huge knowledge of how to ensure the House of Commons business can carry on. The use of some form of hybrid proceedings by Select Committees is an excellent way of ensuring we can diversify the range of witnesses who can give evidence, ensuring that contributions are not limited to those who can come to London in person. While there did not appear to be an appetite for wholly remote voting, the system of using our passes to vote is a welcome development that seems likely to stay.

Beyond the main Chamber and the Committee rooms, the lessons learned over the pandemic are likewise likely to have a lasting impact. I know there have been informal meetings between Parliaments and Legislatures across the Commonwealth to share knowledge and best practice. It has also given greater flexibility to the way in which Members of Parliament can interact with constituents, although I

should be clear that as far as I'm concerned, there is no substitute for meeting people face-to-face.

Nobody could have anticipated the changes that had to be made to our lives and ways of working to see the UK House of Commons through the pandemic. But for me, the past two years have shown the herculean work that both Members of Parliament and House staff are capable of to ensure that we can carry out our essential duties of representing our constituents, scrutinising legislation and holding the Government to account. Adapting to the challenges of the pandemic was always about ensuring we can continue to deliver democracy, and I pay tribute to all those who made that happen.

The UK Parliament has published a booklet on virtual proceedings that is available to download via [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk).





## COMPLEXITY: EVOLVING PANDEMIC MEETS FEDERATION

### COVID-19 RESPONSES IN THE PARLIAMENTS OF AUSTRALIA

The pandemic has thrown parliamentary powers into sharp relief, especially where powers are dispersed as in federations. This article discusses the effects of federation, focussing on the Commonwealth of Australia. The founding fathers of Australia's federal parliamentary democracy, now 120 years old, could not have foreseen the likes of the COVID-19 pandemic much less the technologically sophisticated era in which it emerged.

As one would expect, the drafters of the constitution were men of their time and place (yes, all men). They were the leaders of their respective six colonies who saw federation as benefitting the home jurisdiction to which each owed his support. Most particularly, the leaders insisted that, upon their colonies becoming the states of the Commonwealth of Australia, those states would retain primary legislative authority except for those limited policy areas to be exercised by the Australian Government or concurrently with the states. The Constitution provides for the transfer of powers between one or more States and the Federal Government by legislation and agreements.

However, none of the Leaders had experience of a pandemic. In the decades before Federation, Australia had had cases of smallpox but in small numbers and mostly confined to port areas. Spanish Flu would come 20 years after Federation. There was nothing to alert the authors of Federation to the need for powers to deal with an infection spreading across the continent rapidly and unpredictably. Nor could they have foreseen the scientific advances that could reduce the disease's risks and effects.

When the pandemic emerged, the Australian Federal Parliament and Government had human biosecurity emergency legislation but did not have general powers to over-ride the States on matters reserved for the States' legislative authority. The closest approximation to such a power is the Federal Government's right to make grants subject to conditions that it imposes on the recipient State or States. Offering a grant is nothing like the authority of an Act of Parliament!

The two self-governing territories – the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory – are each created by Federal legislation. Although the Territories' legislation can be over-ridden by the Australian Federal Parliament on any matter, in practice they function much like the six States.

#### Complex Federal System

This dispersal of legislative powers, practice over 120 years, judicial interpretation and constitutional development has led to a complex national system. For example, hospitals are regulated by States' and Territories' laws but are funded by the Federal Government under national agreement; universities are created under state laws and funded by the Federal Government which uses its financial influence to regulate them. Major airports operate under Federal powers including Federal quarantine controls and associated officials but are otherwise privatised.

Australia's federal system leads to a mix of legislative provisions for dealing with emergencies generally and the pandemic in particular.

Early in the pandemic, there was confused disembarkation when a cruise ship with many COVID-19 infected passengers reached an Australian port. Should State or Federal Government officials have imposed quarantine controls? A State official boarded the vessel, but port quarantine is a Federal responsibility. The State official was claimed to have followed national guidelines. It was not clear who should have done what. Passengers walked off into the community spreading the illness. Federal and State governments blamed each other for the infection's spread. The State Government instituted an inquiry into the incident which found that (State) health authorities made "serious mistakes" in allowing about 2,650 passengers to disembark when the ship docked.<sup>1</sup>

Not only do the responsibilities, powers and practices of the Federal Government differ from those of the States and Territories,



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Image credit: AUSPIC/Australian Parliament



Above: The Serjeant-at-Arms in the Australian House of Representatives follows COVID-19 protocols.

so do the States and Territories differ from each other. Thus while hospitals in each State or Territory are administered by their respective Governments, that is highly centralised in some (e.g. Victoria) whereas some others have much more decentralised administrations within regions of their states.

Yet further complication is the 144 Aboriginal health services operated autonomously by First Nation communities, under the leadership of NACCHO – the National Aboriginal

Community Controlled Health Organisation.<sup>2</sup>

The federation has developed ways dealing with coordination between the Federal Government, States and Territories. There have been long-standing portfolio-based meetings of Ministers (Ministerial Councils), supported by senior public servants (Standing Committees). Since the 1980s there has been a similar heads of government body – the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), recently re-named National Cabinet.

The re-naming was a direct consequence of the pandemic. Very early after the governments became aware of the imminent risks of the disease spreading to Australia and across internal borders, the Australian Prime Minister convened an ad hoc meeting with the heads of State and Territory governments. That meeting concluded that a more fast moving and responsive forum than COAG was needed and agreed to the term National Cabinet (legislation later re-named COAG as the National Cabinet and provided for Ministerial Councils.)

Meetings of National Cabinet are convened and chaired by the Prime Minister. They have been virtual, and each is followed by a statement by the Prime Minister.

### States of Emergency

The need to invoke emergency powers revealed major differences between jurisdictions. Remarkably, the Federal Government had no general legislative authority to impose emergency powers. However, the actions needed to prevent the spread of the infection within Australia and to deal with cases fell within State and Territory powers, so that there were no suggestions that Federal powers were necessary beyond existing quarantine arrangements.

The latter included the power for the Governor-General to declare that a human biosecurity emergency exists. Such a declaration on 20

March 2020 gave “the Minister for Health expansive powers to issue directions and set requirements in order to combat the outbreak.”

The powers can be used to “either combat the listed **human disease** (in this case, COVID-19) or to implement WHO recommendations in relation to that disease, the Minister may make a direction or set a requirement to ensure that action takes place.”

The Health Minister first exercised his biosecurity emergency powers under section 477 on 18 March 2020. The *Biosecurity (Human Biosecurity Emergency) (Human Coronavirus with Pandemic Potential) (Emergency Requirements) Determination 2020* banned international cruise ships from entering Australian ports before 15 April 2020.<sup>3</sup> That ban was still in force in early 2022.

It was not until passage of the *National Emergency Declaration Act* in late 2020 that the Federal Government had general powers to: ‘... make a declaration, called a national emergency declaration, in certain circumstances, including if the Prime Minister is satisfied that an emergency (whether occurring in or outside Australia) is causing harm that is nationally significant in Australia or in an Australian offshore area.

If a national emergency declaration is in force, a Minister may determine that certain provisions of Federal laws are modified in specified ways if certain conditions are satisfied”.

The Act provides that “(t)his Act does not exclude or limit the operation of a law of a State or Territory that is capable of operating concurrently with this Act.”<sup>4</sup> It is clear that Emergency Declarations are not intended to over-ride State or Territory powers except “if a state or territory is incapacitated or overwhelmed by the emergency events in question”.<sup>5</sup>

Human Biosecurity Emergency Declarations and National Emergency Declarations respectively made under the Acts are exempted from disallowance by either House of Parliament. The effect is that the accountability of the Executive is severely limited compared with the provisions that are standard in most legislation.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast, South Africa is operating under a National State of the Disaster, administered through “Metropolitan Disaster Management Centres that coordinate local events and support the provincial and national disaster management centres”.<sup>7</sup>

Australian States and Territories are each different;<sup>8</sup> each includes emergency powers that can be invoked by Ministers or senior officials, as follows:

**Australian Capital Territory:** The Health Minister can make an Emergency Declaration under the *ACT Public Health Act 1997* (ACT) and can extend the Emergency Declaration for further 90-day periods.<sup>9</sup> There do not appear to be provisions restricting the Legislature from disallowance of orders.

**New South Wales:** The *Public Health Act 2010* (NSW) creates the power to deal with public health risks, without a State of Emergency. The Minister can take action and give directions to deal with the risk and consequences of the risk. The Minister can make directions to: reduce or



Above: The Parliament of Victoria in Melbourne, Australia.

remove the risk to public health in an area; segregate or isolate people within the State; and prevent, limit access to any part of the State. Orders expire after 90 days and may be re-made.<sup>10</sup> There do not appear to be provisions restricting either House from disallowance of orders.

**Northern Territory:** The Health Minister can declare an Emergency Declaration under the *Public and Environmental Health Act 2011* (NT). A Declaration empowers the Chief Health Officer to take action and give directions necessary to alleviate the public health risk posed to the community by COVID-19. The Health Minister may extend the Emergency Declaration for 90-day periods.<sup>11</sup> There do not appear to be provisions restricting the Legislature from disallowance of orders.

**Queensland:** The Queensland Chief Health Officer can declare a Public Health Emergency under the *Public Health Act 2005* (QLD) (the Act) to assist in containing or responding to the spread of COVID-19. This applies for up to 90 days and further periods of 90 days can be declared.<sup>12</sup> There do not appear to be provisions restricting the Parliament from disallowance of orders.

**South Australia:** The *Emergency Management Act 2004* (SA) and the *South Australian Public Health Act 2011* (SA) allow a Major Emergency declaration or a Public Health Emergency declaration respectively to be made for 28 days. The State Co-ordinator (and Authorised Officers) is given broad powers to manage and co-ordinate the response to, and recovery from, the outbreak of COVID-19. Note that neither Act gives authority to a member of the Executive. The Governor can extend an Emergency Declaration for 28 days.<sup>13</sup> There do not appear to be provisions restricting either House from disallowance of orders.

**Tasmania:** The island State's law allows Emergency Declarations to be made under both the *Public Health Act 1997* (Tas) and the *Emergency Act 2006* (Tas). A Public Health Emergency empowers the Director of Public Health and can be extended indefinitely. A State of Emergency allows the State Controller to exercise special powers in the *Emergency Management Act* and can be extended

for 12-week periods. Again, no member of the Executive is given authority.<sup>14</sup> There do not appear to be provisions restricting either House from disallowance of orders.

**Victoria:** Victoria's legislative provisions were re-made in late 2021. The Minister stated that the *Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment (Pandemic Management) Act 2021* (Vic) was developed to support the response to current COVID-19 outbreaks and to any future pandemic diseases. The Premier is responsible for making a pandemic declaration. The Act ensures that it is the Minister who exercises the Executive powers (e.g., making an order) and receives expert advice. An Independent Pandemic Management Advisory Committee provides advice, which is published. The Minister will be required to publish an explanation of any rights in Victoria's Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities that are or may be limited by a pandemic order and is accountable to a Parliamentary Committee chaired by a non-government MP to scrutinise the Government's implementation of the Act.<sup>15</sup> The Pandemic Declaration Accountability and Oversight Committee can initiate disallowance of part or all of an order but that can be overridden by the Governor in Council i.e., the Government.<sup>16</sup>

**Western Australia:** A State of Emergency can be declared under the *WA Emergency Management Act 2005*. A Public Health State of Emergency can also be declared under the *Public Health Act 2016* (WA). These declarations allow for the exercise of certain emergency powers. The Minister for Health must extend the Declaration every 14 days.<sup>17</sup> The rigorous use of these powers have been particularly effective in limiting spread in the vast State. There do not appear to be provisions restricting either House from disallowance of orders.

Note the huge disparity between the duration of declarations – 14 days in WA, around 90 days for several others.

#### Accountability for Emergency Powers

The wide range of provisions create emergency powers ranging from limited and seemingly mildly intrusive into human rights, to having the potential to severely restrict personal activities including:

- enter and, if necessary, break into any land, building, structure or vehicle (using such force as is necessary)
- take possession of, protect or assume control over any land, body of water, building, structure, vehicle or other thing
- segregate or isolate people in an area
- prevent or permit access to an area
- control the movement of a vehicle(s)
- requiring certain premises to open, close or limit access
- restricting contact between people
- evacuate people from any area
- issuing directions to public authorities
- direct a person to remain isolated or segregated from other people or to take other measures to prevent the transmission of a disease or condition to people





- direct a person to undergo medical observation, examination or treatment
- require any person to give information
- direct any person to assist in exercising any power related to the Major Emergency
- providing any other directions the Chief Health Officer thinks are necessary to protect public health

Some State and Territory provisions include as few as two of the more general of those powers listed above, whilst other jurisdictions include an extensive selection of emergency powers. That gives rise to accountability for the use of these powers by Ministers and senior officials – a key role for the Parliament. Here we find great diversity. The Federal Parliament for example quickly set up a Senate Committee chaired by a senior Opposition Senator, which has held many public hearings and been effective in holding Government to account. The most recent is established by the new Victorian Act (above) and whilst it can initiate disallowance of a pandemic Order etc, that can be overturned. Committees in other jurisdictions include some that have used pre-existing structures and terms of reference, to new special-purpose Committees. Orders or like legal instruments made under the emergency powers can be disallowed, notwithstanding concern about other legislation in which subordinate legal instruments have been exempted from standard disallowance provisions.

The Committees are:

- Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 (Federal Parliament);
- Select Committee on the COVID-19 pandemic response (ACT);
- Legislative Assembly Public Accounts Committee & Legislative Council Public Accountability Committee (NSW);
- Public Accounts Committee – Public hearings on COVID-19 and Territory finances (NT);
- Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee Inquiry into the Queensland Government's health response to COVID-19 (QLD);
- COVID-19 Response Committee (SA);
- Parliamentary Standing Committee of Public Accounts – Inquiry into the Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Tas);
- Pandemic Declaration Accountability and Oversight Committee (Vic);
- Procedure and Privileges Committee – Inquiry into the Legislative Assembly's response to the COVID-19 pandemic (WA).

There is another important lesson that could have affected control measures in early stages of the pandemic. It relates to one of the technical features of spread of the infection. It was claimed that, like some other pandemic diseases, COVID-19 was contagious i.e., spread by physical contact with surfaces (including hands) contaminated with the virus. It is now accepted that aerosol transmission (airborne virus particles breathed in) is the major means of spread. The pandemic

may have been curbed more effectively had the scientific evidence of aerosol transmission been accepted more readily.

### Federation is Different

Unitary parliamentary systems look so simple and effective! The empirical evidence of Australia's success in slowing the spread of COVID-19 suggests that there is more to it than the number of levels of government. An advantage of a federation with strong states is that the States and Territories can each innovate and learn from each other's diverse experiences.

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## REFLECTING ON TWO YEARS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND THE PARLIAMENTARY RESPONSE: A CASE OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF PAKISTAN

### Parliaments in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic

The facade of COVID-19 has presented everyone with the unprecedented challenges not only in terms of economic, social and health challenges but also for smooth functioning of democratic institutions all around the world.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected activities across the globe, Parliaments all over the world have also been adapting and implementing emergency health measures while carrying on with their core functions i.e., legislation, oversight, and representation. How Parliaments effectively carry out legislation, debate and question the actions of government during the pandemic is of paramount importance. Parliaments are subject to the same level of pandemic restrictions as any other organisation or institution. Yet, the role of Parliament in times of crisis becomes more crucial from passing Emergency Bills to allocating resources and scrutinising government actions.

Across the world, three different practices were adopted by Parliaments to continue their business amidst the pandemic:

- i) Parliaments continue to meet physically with restrictions.
- ii) Parliaments meet virtually using video conferencing tools like Zoom, Cisco, Web meetings and Google hangouts etc.
- iii) Parliaments did not meet at all or went into recess.

Cases where Parliaments continue to meet with restrictions may include fewer sittings of plenary sessions and Committees, as well as social distancing and attendance from only the essential parliamentary staff.

Secondly, some Parliaments continue to meet virtually and the technical infrastructure for remote meetings is widely used. But this is backed by several issues including the costs for technical training, security, technical errors, and authenticity etc. Some Parliaments such as the UK Parliament have taken an early recess after voting through various emergency measures. Whereas New Zealand have

changed their modus operandi by allowing only Special Committees at work rather than the whole House. An absence of technical capacity or political will may also prevent Parliament from sitting.

As extraordinary situation calls for extraordinary measures, some Parliaments have even made modifications in their rules for remote working or adopting quorum rules. Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic as a global emergency has worked as a wake-up call for Parliaments, as well as for Parliamentarians, to be more resilient in their retort to the crises to adapt to the ever-changing circumstances.

### Parliamentary response to the pandemic and the case of Pakistan

Where COVID-19 has severely disrupted economies in the world, it has equally given means for countries to respond to the challenges and threats posed by the pandemic. Pakistan is no exception. But despite the horrors of pandemic, Pakistan was ranked No. 1 on the global normalcy index by The Economist in 2021 as the country lifted most of its COVID-19 bans while effectively curbing the spread of the pandemic.<sup>1</sup>

2020 would always be tagged as the year of COVID-19 for disrupting people's lives and spreading uncertainty and vulnerability. During these daunting times, the Parliament of Pakistan, being the supreme democratic institute, remained undeterred and continued to be functional by taking up all important socio-economic issues of the public through its Standing Committees, House debates, Questions, Resolutions etc.

Keeping in view the COVID-19 pandemic situation in the country, the Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan after deep consultations with Parliamentary Leaders in the National Assembly formulated a joint approach to tackle the pandemic. For that matter, various initiatives were taken up that included

- i) Constitution of a Parliamentary Committee on Coronavirus. The Committee supervised significant policy initiatives to deliver relief



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With special thanks for the coordination of this article to Danish Ali Bhutto, Youth Representative for the CPA Asia Region on the Editorial Advisory Board for *The Parliamentarian*.



and ensure maximum outreach to the masses amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

ii) A Special Committee was also constituted to discuss ways to carryout virtual sessions to perform House business smoothly.

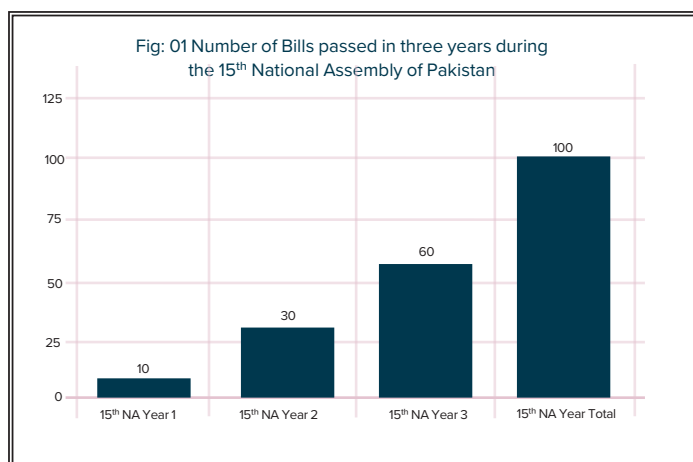
## House Business

The National Assembly of Pakistan effectively presented and passed two annual budgets for the country along with other House Business during 2021-22, by observing strict SOPs (standard operating procedures) for COVID-19 prevention. During 2020, almost 6,130 questions were raised on the floor of the House out of which 891 were answered. During the year 2020-21 numerous Motions and Resolutions were passed by the House on many issues including the COVID-19 pandemic and agriculture policies of the country.

The pandemic also exposed the extraordinary challenges faced by women Members of Parliament, but women Legislators in Pakistan continued to remain hands-on and assertive in their roles as law makers during 2020-21; a time when the novel Coronavirus, a global pandemic, had already upended global politics and the ways in which Legislatures function. Despite women's representation being only one fifth of the total number in the Parliament of Pakistan, women Legislators successfully deliberated upon raising matters of public interest by conducting one-third of the House Business.<sup>2</sup>

## Landmark Legislation

Legislative activity witnessed a sharp increase during 2021 as the Parliament passed 60 Bills (see Fig 1). This accounted for a 100% increase compared to 30 Bills passed during 2019. These two years marked the most crucial years for the Parliament of Pakistan as a total of 94 bills were passed by the National Assembly of Pakistan<sup>3</sup> during that period, out of which 93 Bills became Acts of Parliament.<sup>4</sup>



\*Source: Pakistan Institute for Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT)

The Parliament of Pakistan remained aware of the rights of marginalised segments of society in Pakistan, especially minorities and disabled persons during the pandemic. Since Pakistan is also party to various international treaties and conventions on human rights; *The ICT Right of Persons with Disability Act, 2020*<sup>5</sup> was passed by the Parliament of Pakistan in order to ensure the protection and inclusion of disabled persons in the community, which is also in accordance with the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Furthermore, the first ever Parliamentary Committee on Disabled Persons was constituted by the National Assembly of Pakistan to deliberate upon policies and further recognition of this neglected segment in our societies at large.

Protecting children from abuse, violence and abduction is not only obligatory but also envisioned in various national and international laws. Similarly, in recognition of provisions for Fundamental Rights in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, it is equally imperative to unclog ways to adopt legal provisions for the prevention, protection, and recovery of missing and abducted children in Pakistan. Considering it as matter of national concern, the Parliament of Pakistan passed the *Zainab Alert, Response and Recovery Act, 2020*. Following this, the Ministry of Human Rights of Pakistan also launched the *Zainab Alert application*<sup>6</sup> on Pakistan's citizen portal in October 2020. Through its alert mechanism, the said system will activate the State machinery at various district and regional levels for a robust response and recovery of missing children.

## Parliamentary Diplomacy

During recent years, Parliaments have dramatically extended their role in the field of parliamentary diplomacy and cementing relations with other Parliaments of the world. The National Assembly of Pakistan, while keeping up with its robust tradition of parliamentary diplomacy, amidst pandemic, actively participated (physically and virtually) in various bilateral and multilateral forums at national and international levels, projecting Pakistan's stance on a range of important contemporary issues.

The National Assembly of Pakistan has also taken several steps for cementing relations with Parliaments of other countries. The hosting of the Pakistan-Afghanistan Trade and Investment Forum in 2020 and the Parliamentary Association of Economic Cooperation Organization PAECO Conference in 2021 are both manifestations of the fact that the pursuit for parliamentary diplomacy is of paramount significance for National Assembly of Pakistan.

## Lessons Learnt

Since the pandemic played havoc with the traditional ways of working and communicating, many countries have embarked on taking stringent measures to curb the spread of the pandemic. The deployment of interventions like reducing the attendance of



Above: The Parliament of Pakistan.

Members of Parliament during parliamentary session days, social distancing, limiting visitors in public and press galleries and the frequent disinfection in the wake of the global pandemic has affected the ways in which Parliaments perform. It is equally challenging for Parliamentarians to perform their roles effectively while adapting to the non-traditional ways of working.

Since Parliaments cannot abandon their core constitutional function of legislation, many Parliaments found it challenging to function with limited staff or switching to hybrid sessions or a completely digital form of working. The following lessons have been learnt during the pandemic to deal with these diverse future challenges:

- Parliaments need to be more resilient and sustainable in their roles. The global pandemic should be a wakeup call for Parliaments and Parliamentarians. Structural reforms and policies can prove to be beneficial in the line of defense against any calamity. Better run institutions take long term sustainability into consideration. Thus, there is a dire need to be resilient in response to the pandemic recovery.
- The period 2020-2021 has proven to be the roughest years as they exposed fault lines within systems and societies all over the world and taught lessons to those who failed to adapt to the ever-changing surroundings and reinvent themselves.

- Inclusive policies must be adopted to guarantee smooth transition and to leave no one behind.
- Since the pandemic also exposed a technology deficit, Parliaments must continue to ensure skill development and technical support to Parliamentarians for their effective participation and performance.
- Lastly, as Parliaments assess how they adapted to the pandemic, there is an opportunity for them to ensure preparation for the next major emergency. This can be achieved by sharing best practices with other Parliaments while strengthening their role as a supreme decision-making body.

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## PARLIAMENT OF UGANDA RETURNING TO PRE-PANDEMIC NUMBERS

The President of Uganda fulfilled his October 2021 promise to fully open up the economy, educational institutions, sports and entertainment as well as public transport following the COVID-19 pandemic. In his New Year 2022 message, President Museveni however called upon Ugandans to continue observing the standard operating procedures as given by the Ministry of Health and to immunise in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19. By the end of last year, a total of 11.4 million doses of the vaccine had been administered, with 3.8 million Ugandans having been fully vaccinated; while 10 million had received at least the first dose. In the same address, the President asked all those over 50 years to go get a booster jab.

It is two years since the first lockdown measures were instituted in Uganda, following other countries that did so ahead of us as the pandemic continued to spread westward causing devastation and death along the way. Just like all other countries and institutions, the Parliament of Uganda, and its operations and procedures, were not spared.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which, in Uganda was first discovered in a returning traveler in March 2020, hit when the 10<sup>th</sup> Parliament of Uganda was winding up. The 10<sup>th</sup> Parliament had only a year left to the general elections and its eventual prorogation. From then, despite the lockdown measures instituted, the Parliament of Uganda remained operational. Members of Parliament and parliamentary staff managed to move to the Parliament Building to sit in both Committees and the plenary. The numbers were however restricted as lists were drawn up by party whips of which Members would sit on

particular days, in order to maintain the social distancing measures that had been introduced.

*"When COVID-19 hit the country, like any other government department, the Parliament of Uganda was affected. The Ministry of Health was concerned about the seating arrangements in the Chamber, which they said were too small. However, the sittings were moved to an outside tent,"* said Plus Biribonwoha, the General Counsel to Parliament. He explained that these measures were introduced because the main Parliament Building attracted a large concentration of people and hence limitations and quotas had to be introduced.

The 10<sup>th</sup> Parliament of Uganda comprised 457 Members of Parliament, while the main Parliamentary Chamber was designed to sit only 84 Members when constructed in the 1960s.

In the same way, parliamentary staff were advised to work from home while the few that were able to come into the office were provided with group transport, as the driving of private personal vehicles was restricted. In addition, the business of the House and the Committees was restricted and, in many cases, concluded early to allow for Members and parliamentary staff to travel home before curfews that were set to start at 19.00 hours.

In the main Parliamentary Committees, there were fewer Members of Parliament, parliamentary staff, journalists and officials appearing before them in order to allow for the required social distancing. The Department of Communications and Parliamentary Affairs, which is charged with facilitating the media reporting from Parliament, was asked to reduce the numbers of journalists accessing the precincts of the Parliament Building.

In the same way, visitors to Parliament were restricted, as had been the case for all other non-legislators and staff.

Travel by Members of Parliament across the country, and internationally, was either restricted or stopped altogether, with several meetings or engagements going online.

The Parliament sitting in June 2020 amended its Rules of Procedure to provide for a virtual Parliament, as in *"conducting parliamentary business through a designated digital platform that enables Members of Parliament and staff to attend meetings remotely."* This was necessitated as the numbers of Members, parliamentary staff and other persons required in meetings would not allow for social distancing measures. However due to limitations in the necessary

Left: Members of the Parliament of Uganda during a 'socially-distanced' plenary sitting of the House.



**Katamba Mohammed** is the Principal Information Officer at the Parliament of Uganda.

## SPECIAL REPORT: PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



IT infrastructure, the Parliament of Uganda adopted a 'hybrid' virtual Parliament, with some Members present in the Chamber while others attended remotely.

In addition, Parliamentary sittings were moved to a giant tent erected in the Parliament Building's parking area, which would provide more space and limited need for use of air conditioning.

In January last year, the 11<sup>th</sup> Parliament of Uganda was voted into place bringing into office the biggest Legislature that the country has had since its independence, with 529 Members. As some COVID-19 measures were eased at the time and following the swearing-in of the new legislators, Parliamentary sittings were moved back into the chambers, but maintaining restrictions on numbers and social distancing.

Two years on, following the Presidential address and the reduction of restrictions, all these measures have been eased, with the numbers of Members, parliamentary staff, journalists and visitors going up and nearly returning to pre-COVID-19 days.

Numbers in Committees are up. Travel by Committees to carry out their oversight functions have resumed. In Committees, persons appearing before them are back up to original numbers.

Pius Biribonwoha, whose position is at the level of a Deputy Clerk, spoke about some of the continued guidelines given by the Speaker and the Parliamentary Commission intended to limit the spread of COVID-19 among members, staff and other persons. For example, in the Parliamentary Building and at the entry gates, hand sanitization and proper wearing of face masks are still emphasised. Everyone in the building, including during meetings and plenary, must have on a face mask.

Biribonwoha said that although the amendment to the Rules to allow for virtual attendance was meant to facilitate sittings during



Above: The Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Rt Hon. Anita Annet Among, chairs a sitting of the House.

lockdown periods, the arrangement may be maintained, but subject to the Speaker's guidance. "MPs may continue to present views of their constituencies while away from the station, but with prior permission and consent from the Speaker who would direct that the necessary arrangements are made by the Clerk and the department of ICT," he said.

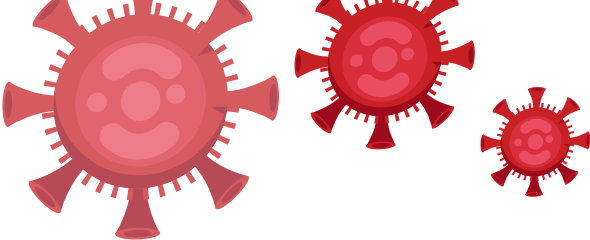
He also said that presentation of documents to Members in soft copy had started even before COVID-19 times as the Parliament of Uganda moved to reduce its use of printed paper to improve efficiency in Parliamentary proceedings.

"Sittings and numbers will depend on guidance from the Ministry of Health and the World Health Organisation on social distance requirements," he said. Parliamentary staff numbers have returned to normal, up from the previous 30%, adding that staff would only be required to work from home if they showed symptoms or tested positive for COVID-19.

Left: Members of the Uganda Parliament during a 'socially-distanced' sitting held in a large tent outside of the main Parliament building.



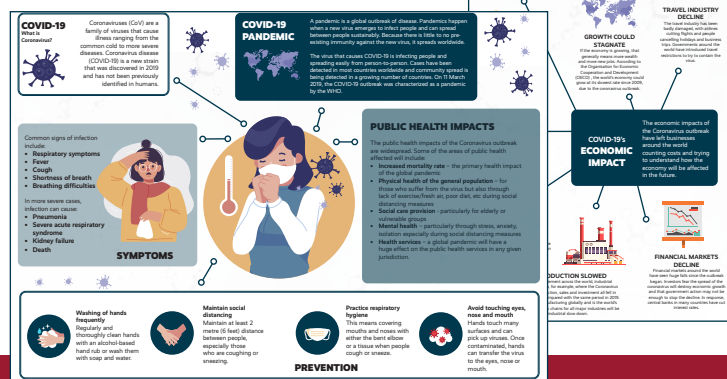
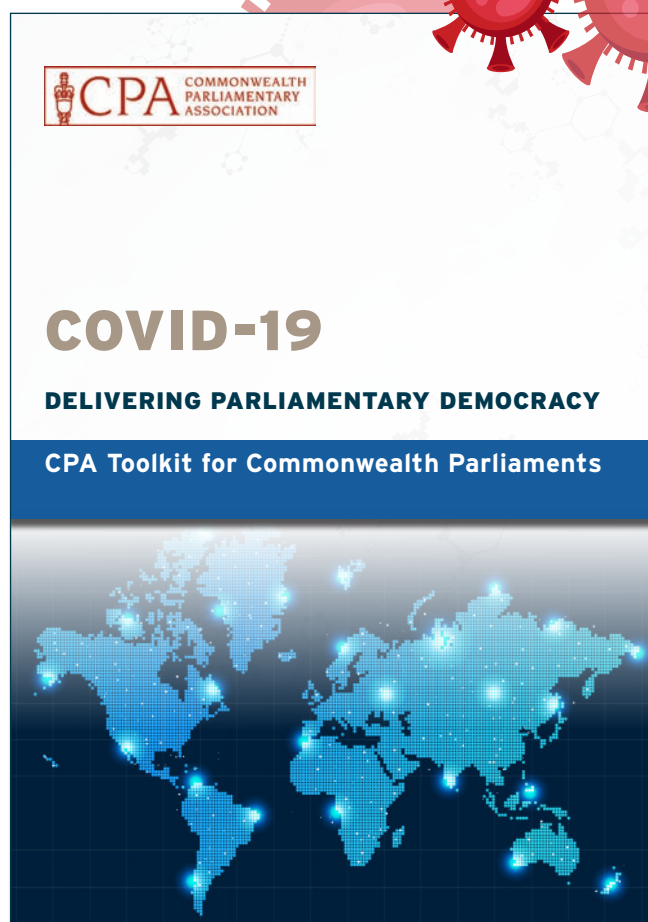
**“Two years on, following the reduction of restrictions, all these measures have been eased, with the numbers of Members, parliamentary staff, journalists and visitors going up and nearly returning to pre-COVID-19 days.”**



# CPA TOOLKIT FOR COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTS ON THE **COVID-19** **PANDEMIC** AND DELIVERING PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY

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The outbreak of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) and its spread to at least 180 countries has consequently plunged many Parliaments and Legislatures across the world into a state of emergency. Commonwealth Parliaments and Parliamentarians are grappling with many different issues both to implement the emergency health measures during this global pandemic while at the same time looking at new ways to conduct debates, scrutinise and pass legislation, hold parliamentary committees and question the actions of their governments.

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# A PEEP INTO ST HELENA'S EVOLVING SYSTEMS OF GOVERNMENT

St Helena now has a Ministerial form of Government and there have been many changes since 1834 when administration of the Island was transferred from the East India Company to His Majesty's Government.

The British Overseas Territory of St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha have a well-established political and legal system and a Governor who is appointed by Her Majesty's Government.

St Helena operated within a Committee system of governance for a number of years and previous attempts to move forward to a new system had failed. But in October 2021, resulting from a consultative poll, history was made when the General Electorate decided the new government would be Ministerial.

It has indeed been good for St Helena politics. Not only did the population decide it was time to move on to a new level of governance but, more women than ever before were proposed as candidates for election resulting in 41.6% of the required 12 Members being female. And also, at the inaugural meeting of the new Legislative Council, the first ever female Deputy Speaker, who is disabled, was also elected to the St Helena Legislature. The first Speaker to be elected under the new system was Hon. Cyril Gunnell, MLC.

Operating within a Ministerial system, the St Helena Legislature comprises of a Speaker, Deputy Speaker, 5 Ministers which includes the Chief Minister, seven Legislators who each represent a geographical area (i.e. constituencies) in formal Legislative Council meetings, and the Attorney-General who is a non-elected ex-officio Member.

The Chief Minister and four Ministers, together with the Governor and Attorney-General form the Executive Council (ExCo) - the highest decision-making body within the St Helena Government. Formal ExCo meetings continue to be chaired by the Governor as a neutral Chair. The Chief Secretary and Financial Secretary are

no longer members of ExCo but are likely to be invited to ExCo whenever necessary.

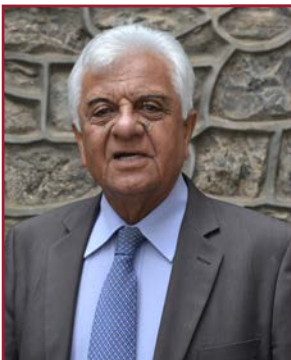
The role of the Legislative Council remains the same under the new system but there are no longer Council Committees.

## So how did it used to work?

A number of governance changes have taken place since the Island of St Helena was transferred from the East India Company to His Majesty's Government on 22 April 1834. The East India Company undertook to administer the Government for one year from this date in the name of the Crown, and all laws etc were to remain the same. I think it is worth recording some the changes here.

A public meeting in August 1884 amongst other things put forward a proposal that a council of Elected Members (five) should advise on revenue expenditure. In June 1929 an Executive Council was established by 'The St Helena Order in Council', to include the Senior Military Officer and Government Secretary as ex-officio Members. A new Constitution was introduced in February 1940, which included provision for an Advisory Council consisting of "six persons not holding any office under the Crown." It also set up an Executive Council comprising of the Governor, the Officer commanding the troops, the Government Secretary, the Colonial Treasurer and, "such other persons holding office under the Crown, whom the Crown shall appoint."

In June 1956, three unofficial Members were added to four Members of the Executive Council. The Advisory Council increased from six to ten, and provision was made for representation by the five districts of St Helena. The Advisory Council was elevated to Legislative Council in January 1967 to be fully elected plus two



**Hon. Cyril Gunnell, MLC** is the first Speaker of the St Helena Legislative Council to be elected under the new Ministerial system of Government in October 2021. He was first elected to the Legislative Council in 1991 and as a Member of the Executive Council for two four-year terms under the Committee system, chaired the Health and Social Welfare Committee and the Employment and Social Security Committee. He represented the Legislative Council overseas at various conferences including the Overseas Territories Consultative Council and EU Overseas Countries and Territories Forum. He also held the position of Chairman of the St Helena Public Accounts Committee for five years prior to his election as Speaker.



ex-officio Members (Government Secretary and Treasurer) and Elected Member numbers were increased from eight to 12.

There are no political parties in St Helena.

In 1987, Mr Walter Wallace from the UK Government's Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) reviewed the Constitution, and his report was published in December the same year. A change in the Constitution, in November 1988, allowed the Legislative Council to nominate those to sit on the Executive Council by making them Chairmen of Council Committees and also, to elect a Speaker to the exclusion of the Governor. The voting age for Islanders was lowered from aged 21 to 18.

In 1994, because the public felt that St Helena's Constitution was out of date, a request was made to the FCO for a complete review. This request was agreed but it would take ten years before there was widespread consultation in St Helena, and for proposals to be drawn up for a new Constitution.

However, in 2005, the proposal was rejected by the majority of people who participated in a consultative poll, and this mainly was due to the proposal calling for the establishment of Ministerial form of government. With the exception of introducing a Ministerial system, the core values that had been proposed were reworked into a new Constitution, which came into force on 1 September 2009.

Prior to the 2021 general election, the most recent election was held on 26 July 2017. The 12 Elected Members represented one constituency. Previous to this, there were two constituencies – the East and the West, and each constituency had six Elected Members. Before that there were eight constituencies. The four



Above: Members of the new St Helena Legislative Council.

most populated districts were Half Tree Hollow, Jamestown, Longwood and St Paul's. They sent two representatives to the Legislative Council. The remaining districts were Alarm Forest, Blue Hill, Levelwood and Sandy Bay and they sent one representative each.

The force of law comes with assent by the Governor (section 74 of the constitution). The Executive Council, presided over by the Governor (the Governor-in-Council), is responsible for formulation of government policy. The Governor must obtain, and act in accordance with, the advice of the Executive Council. The matters listed in section 44 of the Constitution are those where the Governor has special responsibilities.







# APPOINTMENT OF THE FIRST ABORIGINAL LIAISON OFFICER AT THE PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES

It has been 12 months since the Parliament of New South Wales employed its first Aboriginal Liaison Officer, to ensure the Parliament is better placed to engage with Aboriginal communities across New South Wales. This historic and deeply significant appointment, only the second to be made in Australia, was a huge step towards making the Parliament of New South Wales a more welcoming place for Aboriginal communities.

The role is an important resource for Members and staff, in supporting interactions with Aboriginal communities via their work in electorates across the State, providing advice on cultural protocols and significant events, assisting with committee activity and guiding Parliamentary events and programs. Over time, this role will help work towards breaking down the barriers that have traditionally been in place for Aboriginal people seeking to understand, access and engage with the Parliament of New South Wales, in recognition of the importance Aboriginal voices play in the future of the Parliament.

The Parliament's Aboriginal Liaison Officer Steven Collins is a Pitta Pitta man, whose traditional lands are in Queensland. Steven has had a long career in the public sector and has led many projects to help bridge the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. Steven's recent role was at the New South Wales Public Service Commission, where he led the development of a training package designed to teach the State's 400,000 public sector employees about the Stolen Generations and the impacts of forcible removal policies. The impacts of past forcible removal policies and practices on Aboriginal communities are still felt today. This period of Australia's history is close to Steven's heart, as he is a descendent of the Stolen Generations.

### Increasing participation in Parliamentary activities

An important area of outreach for the Parliament is through its Committees, which regularly travel to rural areas across New South

Wales to engage and consult communities on particular inquiry topics. Historically, Committees have at times struggled to engage with Aboriginal communities appropriately on inquiries, and Steven Collins has been working with the Committee offices to understand the barriers and start to develop strategies for greater Aboriginal participation. Some of these include working with the Committee staff on rewriting Committee resources to make them more culturally specific and inclusive, and leveraging its social media channels with targeted posts. These have proven to be an effective way for Committee inquiries to engage with Aboriginal communities.

In April 2021, the Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control travelled to Narrandera in the Riverina region of southern New South Wales to meet with domestic violence victim-survivors, indigenous organisations, frontline services and local charities from the across the State. The involvement of the Aboriginal Liaison Officer commenced in the planning phase of the Committee to ensure he had a detailed understanding of what the inquiry was about, to be able to provide sound advice to the Aboriginal communities on what that issue was going to look like for their engagement. Steven Collins was also on hand in Narrandera to provide advice to the Committee Members on culturally appropriate questioning of Aboriginal witnesses, as well as to ensure the participants felt comfortable about participating in the Committee process. Following the hearing, Steven briefed Committee staff on how future Committees and site visits could be run to better include Aboriginal voices. Steven was also very focused on his own learnings from the experience, to better work with Committee members and help them understand and engage with evidence from Aboriginal witnesses.

Further regional Committees were unable to go ahead, as travel outside of Sydney was prohibited during extended COVID-19 lockdowns in New South Wales. Going forward, the Aboriginal Liaison Officer will be attending more regional Committees,



**Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox, MLC** is the President of the New South Wales Legislative Council since May 2021. He was first elected in 2006 and has held several parliamentary positions

including Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party and Minister for Fair Trading.



**Hon. Jonathan O'Dea, MP** is the Speaker of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly and the Member for Davidson in northern Sydney. He was first elected in 2007 and became Speaker in

2019. He has held a number of parliamentary roles including Chair of the Public Accounts Committee and Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier and Treasurer.





particularly those inquiries with strong Aboriginal engagement or where efforts are needed to increase Aboriginal participation.

## Building relationships and partnerships

The Aboriginal Liaison Officer has looked for new and innovative ways for the Parliament of New South Wales to engage with Aboriginal communities, including building different relationships and partnerships. In the lead-up to NAIDOC (National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee) Week in July 2021, six Aboriginal guest chefs were invited in to the Parliament's kitchens to showcase native ingredients on its menu, for the inaugural 'Koori Kitchen Takeover'.

The partnership with the National Centre of Indigenous Excellence and the National Indigenous Culinary Institute provided an opportunity for Parliament's chefs to learn about native ingredients from the up-and-coming Aboriginal chefs, and to find ways in incorporate these flavours in future dishes at the Strangers' Restaurant at New South Wales Parliament House.

Building on the success of Koori Kitchen Takeover, an idea was developed for a kitchen garden on the Parliament's rooftop. There was also a desire from the Parliamentary Catering team to feature native ingredients more prominently in their menus. A variety of native edible plants has been seeded in the existing native garden including lemon myrtle, saltbush and native mint. This initiative was undertaken in collaboration with Indigrow, a specialist in Australian bushfoods and environmental services, who were consulted to provide advice and source the appropriate native plants for the garden.

An Acknowledgement of Country is a statement that recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the Traditional Custodians of the lands in Australia, and allows people to pay their respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, dependent on the lands they are on. For many years, both Houses of Parliament in New South Wales have included an Acknowledgement of Country at the start of sittings. In line with this approach, an Acknowledgement of Country is now a part of each public tour of the Parliamentary precincts. This is an action that sends a strong message about the Parliament's commitment to do better in this space. An Acknowledgment of Country plaque will also be installed in the precinct this year, as a simple foundational step towards upskilling people in their cultural capability and understanding of different community issues.

A 'Leaders in Conversation' online panel event was broadcast live from the Parliament of New South Wales to mark National Reconciliation Week in 2021. The panel featured leaders from across the New South Wales public sector unpacking what



Image credit: Parliament of New South Wales © Sally Dingo 2021 BH-3589

Above: The two Presiding Officers of the New South Wales Parliament visit the 'Koori Kitchen Takeover' event.

Aboriginal employment, retention and attraction meant to reconciliation action, whilst reflecting on the unique challenges and opportunities specific to the New South Wales public sector. This successful event will form part of an ongoing series run by the Parliament that brings leaders together to discuss topics of importance to Aboriginal people and communities, as well as a tool to educate Members and the broader community.

## Finding opportunities for engagement with the Aboriginal community

The Parliament's Reconciliation Wall is a dedicated space within the precinct for the display of Aboriginal artwork from both within the Parliament's collection and from Aboriginal communities. Established in 1998, it is part of the Parliament's commitment to reconciliation with Aboriginal people. An upcoming engagement project led by the Aboriginal Liaison Officer is a refresh of the Reconciliation Wall policy in the Parliament's Fountain Court. While the Wall has been in place for many years, it is not well known in the Aboriginal community. The Parliament will lead interactions with various galleries and community groups around the State to actively encourage Aboriginal communities to use this free and accessible space for the display of artworks and for small exhibitions. This initiative provides an avenue to introduce the role of the Aboriginal Liaison Officer and the work Parliament is doing to increase engagement and trust outside of the institution. It also provides an opportunity for Aboriginal artists to display their works and share messages with Members and the broader community.

The Parliament of New South Wales is also honoured to acknowledge the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Apology to Stolen Generations in June. New South Wales was the first Australian



## APPOINTMENT OF ABORIGINAL LIAISON OFFICER

Right: The New South Wales Parliament's Aboriginal Liaison Officer, Steven Collins (centre) with the panel for the 'Leaders in Conversation' event.

State government to apologise to the Stolen Generations after the release of the *Bringing them home* report (1997), which revealed the magnitude of the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families in the twentieth century. The Aboriginal Liaison Officer will work closely with Stolen Generations survivors as we commemorate and reflect on what has changed since.

The Parliament's upcoming Bicentenary celebrations, commemorating 200 years since the establishment of the Legislative Council, will be key in building trust with the Aboriginal community in New South Wales, as the Parliament works to ensure the Aboriginal voice is heard as part of the Bicentenary, and to demonstrate an understanding of the shared history between colonial and Aboriginal people.

### Increasing Aboriginal cultural capability at the Parliament

Much of the early focus of the Aboriginal Liaison Officer has been on external engagement. A key part of the work going forward at the Parliament of New South Wales will focus increasing the cultural capability of Members and staff. In March 2021, a delegation from the Parliament of New South Wales visited a native rooftop garden

Below: The New South Wales Parliament's Aboriginal Liaison Officer pictured in front of the Reconciliation Wall.



Image credits: Parliament of New South Wales

at the Cultural Landscape Garden at South Eveleigh in Sydney, co-designed by members of the local Aboriginal community. The visit inspired the Catering team, and provided them with the skills and knowledge to set out to achieve a similar garden of edible native plants.

Further, developing an understanding of the history of the relationship between Parliament and Aboriginal communities will help us attract and retain Aboriginal staff. The existing Aboriginal Employment Strategy will be revisited, and events held to showcase the Parliament as an ally to Aboriginal people. It is vital that Aboriginal staff are well supported in the workplace. Steven Collins has made a major contribution in providing advice on cultural practices that may impact on an Aboriginal employee such as connection to family and kinship structures.

### The future

The past twelve months have seen much progress for the Parliament of New South Wales with its engagement with Aboriginal communities. The Parliament of New South Wales will continue to look for new ways to engage, seeking to build relationships and partnerships with Aboriginal communities. Ultimately the role of the Aboriginal Liaison Officer is to help connect, support and educate people, as well as to provide tools and skills to all employees in the organisation to ensure they are better able to engage with Aboriginal communities. This work does not fall solely on the shoulders of the Aboriginal Liaison Officer Steven Collins – everyone in the Parliament of New South Wales has a shared responsibility to champion the changes that signal progress and healing.





# NEW CPA MENTAL HEALTH TOOLKIT HIGHLIGHTS UNIQUE MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES IN PARLIAMENTS

Caught between a rock and a hard place: Parliamentarians are often tasked with far-reaching decisions which can shape our democracies, and, ultimately, the way of life for millions of their constituents. The influence and day-to-day work experience of Parliamentarians in their individual capacities, however, may be fraught with challenges. There may be a chasm between pre-election promises and their realistic post-election fulfillment, Parliamentarians may face incongruence between their personal, party and greater public values and demands, and while they navigate these obstacles, Parliamentarians are under constant and, at times, intrusive, public scrutiny.

What's more, Parliamentarians and parliamentary support staff function in an environment characterised by irregular and long working hours, regular travel away from home, and in some Parliaments, pervasive harmful behaviours like bullying, abuse and sexual harassment. This highly demanding environment is causing significant mental distress among Parliamentarians and support staff. A 2016 study of mental health in Members of Parliament (MPs) in the United Kingdom (UK) House of Commons found that more than 40% of MPs had less than optimal mental health, and more than a third were probable to have ill mental health.<sup>1</sup> Stigma and a lack of privacy<sup>1</sup> may prevent MPs and support staff from utilising existing mental health support services, while these services may be absent or inadequate in some Parliaments.

Mental health interacts with all spheres of a person's life. It has bidirectional associations with physical health, occupational functioning, financial prosperity, and family and social life. There can be 'no health without mental health'.<sup>2-5</sup> The burden of mental ill health is growing globally and in all socio-economic groups, but the gap between demand and provision of mental health care and support is particularly pronounced in low-and middle-income

countries, where up to 85% of people with severe mental health disorders do not have access to care.<sup>6</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic has widened this gap, both by increasing the mental ill health burden, and limiting the delivery of health care and prevention services. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic brought sudden, unprecedented stresses, losses and change to billions of people. Many lost loved ones, income, health and close relationships. In some communities, security of access to provisions for basic needs like food and shelter became increasingly threatened. Public health restrictions to limit the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus inadvertently also restricted people's usual coping and mental health support mechanisms such as interacting

***“What's more, Parliamentarians and parliamentary support staff function in an environment characterised by irregular and long working hours, regular travel away from home, and in some Parliaments, pervasive harmful behaviours like bullying, abuse and sexual harassment. This highly demanding environment is causing significant mental distress among Parliamentarians and support staff.”***



**Dr Leandri Hattingh** is a medical doctor whose interest in the 'bigger picture' has led her from clinical practice to more than a decade of experience working at the intersections of public health policy, strategy, funding, management and research. She has formalised her knowledge with Master's degrees in Applied Ethics and Public Mental Health, and currently offers consulting services on public health intervention research, design, implementation and monitoring, funding and health education projects. [www.drleandrihattingh.com](http://www.drleandrihattingh.com)





## UNIQUE MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES IN PARLIAMENT

with family and friends, taking exercise, spending time outdoors, and engaging in leisure activities. This combination of extreme stress, disruption, uncertainty and restricted access to support and limitation of self-help strategies have created the proverbial perfect storm for mental ill health. In the wake of the pandemic, occurrences of sleeping problems<sup>7,8</sup>, depression<sup>9-11</sup>, anxiety<sup>9-12</sup>, substance misuse<sup>13</sup> and suicidality<sup>13,14</sup> have increased.

As we are cautiously hopeful that the COVID-19 pandemic is drawing to a close, we now have to contend with returning to a way of life as it was 'before COVID-19'. People are now faced with readjustment to social activities, returning to workplaces, and coping with the many challenges left in the aftermath of the pandemic. It presents a 'second wave' of mental distress that will require consideration and amelioration as we adjust to life after the pandemic.

Parliamentarians may be confronted with mental health problems through various avenues. These include their constituents, colleagues, management, staff, their personal social circles, and themselves. In line with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 16 – to “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels” and Sustainable Development Goal 3 – to “Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”, the CPA has developed a toolkit to support its member Branches in strengthening their mental health work. The Commonwealth Charter's article II: Human Rights; article IV Tolerance, Respect and Understanding; article VIII Good Governance and article XI Access to Health, Education, Food and Shelter, are also relevant values and principles reflected within the toolkit.

The CPA Mental Health Toolkit provides insight, guidance and resources on the particular mental health challenges faced by Parliamentarians and support staff, and possible approaches to address them. The toolkit incorporates current literature on Parliamentary mental health with contemporary, practical case studies of successful initiatives in more than 20 Commonwealth jurisdictions, including the United Kingdom, Australian Capital Territory, Malaysia, Northern Ireland, Canada, Northern Territory, Gauteng Province, Victoria, Québec, Ontario, Manitoba, Isle of Man, Tasmania and Guernsey. Each guidance chapter concludes with a list of relevant resources easily accessible online.

The toolkit starts with the rationale for Parliaments to promote mental health for MPs and support staff and an exploration of the unique challenges to mental health in this environment. It then offers guidance on investigating and prioritising the mental health support needs in Parliament. This includes survey question examples for assessing the mental health support needs and a set of basic principles of good practice when implementing a mental health support initiative. It also proposes strategies on ensuring that as many participants as possible are included in the initiative, and stresses the importance of keeping sensitive information confidential.

The next section of the toolkit describes systemic initiatives that are key to promoting mental health in high-stress environments such as Parliament. These include robust processes for addressing bullying, harassment, abuse and victimisation, adequate training and induction, strategies for addressing unhealthy work patterns, and support for MPs leaving Parliament. The chapter also includes brief case studies on approaches to bullying, abuse, and sexual harassment in the UK and Australian Parliaments. This is followed by a chapter on organisational support which includes employee assistance programmes, occupational health services, connection to community health services, Mental Health First Aid, and peer support initiatives. This chapter also includes a section on supporting return to work after absence due to ill mental health, and examples of mental health awareness campaigns within Parliament. A section dedicated to advice for smaller Parliaments describes specific adaptations to the toolkit items that can be made in these settings.

The World Health Organisation recommendations for an optimal mental health service mix<sup>15</sup> include self-help strategies. In the CPA Mental Health Toolkit, a chapter on self-help describes the use of online support resources, including online cognitive behavioural therapy and mindfulness-based interventions. This chapter also offers advice on choosing online applications that are most likely to result in meaningful outcomes. A list of self-help resources is also provided.

Advice on supporting constituents with mental health problems is included towards the end of the toolkit. Finally, a chapter on monitoring and evaluation of mental health initiatives in Parliament outlines key considerations to ensure effective assessment, review and improvement of mental health support initiatives in Parliament.

**Introducing the new CPA Mental Health Toolkit for Commonwealth Parliaments, Hon. Louisa Wall MP, a founding member of a cross-party mental health support group in the New Zealand Parliament, thanked the CPA for “providing a resource to specifically address parliamentary workplace stresses and challenges.” She added that, “we need to better understand the risk factors and the protective factors to keep ourselves and those we work with mentally fit and well to undertake our duties as parliamentary representatives.”**





While the world struggles to come to terms with the COVID-19 pandemic and its profound effects on our personal lives, politics, economies, and global relations, our mental health bears the brunt of unprecedented stresses which continue to evolve. Even during pre-pandemic times, Parliamentarians tended to suffer higher rates of ill mental health compared to the general population.<sup>1</sup>

Parliament is a unique, highly-stressful work environment. It is incumbent on all Parliaments to protect and promote the mental health of MPs and support staff to ensure healthy parliamentary life, meaningful productivity in Parliament, and, ultimately, healthy democracies. With its contemporary insights and variety of initiatives and case studies from Commonwealth Parliaments, it is my hope that the CPA Mental Health Toolkit will provide meaningful guidance towards implementing successful mental health support initiatives in Parliaments. The CPA should be congratulated for its commitment to this profoundly important cause.

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## Mental Health Toolkit

### For Commonwealth Parliaments

**Designed to:**

guide, advise and educate Commonwealth Parliaments on how to protect and promote the mental health and well-being of Parliamentarians and support staff.

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mental health screening and monitoring methods; culture-changing workplace initiatives; organisational support systems; self-help resources and more...

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# TWO HALVES MAKE A WHOLE: LESSONS FROM SWEDEN ON GENDER EQUALITY

According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), only 25% of all national Parliamentarians are women, which is up from 11% in 1995. Only four countries have 50% or more women in Parliament in single or lower houses with Rwanda being at 61%, Cuba with 53%, Bolivia with 53%, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) with 50%.

According to the United Nations, ten countries have a woman Head of State, and 13 countries have a woman Head of Government while only 21% of government Ministers are women, with only 14 countries having achieved 50% or more women in Cabinets. With the current status in mind, according to UN Women calculations, with an annual increase of just 0.52 percentage points, gender parity in Ministerial positions will not be achieved before 2077.

The equal participation of women in political and public life is critical to the global efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Research shows that countries with fewer women in political spaces are more likely to face violence, hunger and authoritarianism. Conversely, countries which promote human rights and gender equality are more peaceful, stable and enjoy high levels of economic growth. Thus, the empowerment of women will contribute to greater global prosperity. When women have a seat at the table, the results of most of the actions by the governments are more inclusive and equitable.

As of 1 September 2021, there were 26 women serving as Heads of State and/or Government in 24 countries. According to calculations

by UN Women, at the current rate, gender equality in the highest positions of power will not be reached for another 130 years.

*Is it possible for Parliaments around the Commonwealth to accelerate the balancing of political participation and power-sharing between women and men in decision-making in order to meet the internationally agreed target set in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action?*

Unfortunately, many countries have not achieved gender balance, and few have set or met ambitious targets for gender parity (50–50). Perhaps countries from within the Commonwealth, especially developing ones can learn lessons from countries outside of the Commonwealth such as Sweden on how to enhance the political participation of women, which will contribute to strengthening their democracies.

Many people associate Sweden with gender equality, democracy and socially progressive ideologies. However, it is important to note that the situation in that country has not always been like that. The Leader of the Social Democratic Party, Magdalena Andersson, who is the country's Prime Minister, is the first woman to hold that position in the history of the country. She boasts of having been in the country's legislative space for over 20 years and once even served as Minister of Finance.

*"Sweden is where it is today because of a diverse group of strong and committed actors who pushed in the same direction. Women's movements, human rights organisations and political parties were all in the frontline demanding for gender equality,"* the Prime Minister states.

Today, Sweden has an equal representation of men and women in elected positions at both at national and regional levels. This situation would not have been possible without political will and decisive action. It is certainly difficult to go back from equal representation once it is achieved because of its clear benefits.

In 1994, the Swedish Prime Minister, Ingvar Carlsson, decided that his new government would be made up of an equal number of men and women. This led to the formation of the world's first gender neutral government, whereby 11 out of the 22 Members were women. Ever since, all the governments in Sweden have been gender neutral including the present one, which is led by a female Prime Minister.

In order for Sweden to get to where it is today, three landmark reforms had to be implemented. The reforms included access to

***"The equal participation of women in political and public life is critical to the global efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Research shows that countries with fewer women in political spaces are more likely to face violence, hunger and authoritarianism."***

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affordable childcare, taxation reforms and equal share paid parental leave between the father and mother. Before affordable childcare was accessible, many women faced the daunting task of balancing between unpaid household work and childcare. This reduced the chances of women entering the labour market and political space competitively. Further, the ability of women to advance in their different positions was severely hampered.

In 1971, the independent income taxation as opposed to household taxation was introduced in Sweden. This incentivised the lowest income earner in the household, who almost always was a woman to pursue their own careers. The new tax law made it beneficial for women to seek employment, which also increased their independence and overall incomes earned by the different members of the household.

Another game changer was the introduction of a paid gender-neutral parental leave system in 1974. This was intended to spread the responsibilities associated with the raising of children in a home, which is the cornerstone for building gender equality in a society as well as economic emancipation.

Alongside these reforms were other equally forward looking policies associated with sexual reproductive health and rights which contributed to the push for gender equality.

This work had an impact on the participation of women in the labour market and political spaces. As a result of all this, the country's economy grew in leaps and bounds.

In Sweden, gender equality demands are mainstreamed in all policy making initiatives. Every Ministry is required to show how the expenditure and implementation of programmes will benefit the gender equality agenda. In the budgeting process, all Ministries are required to include a gender equality impact assessment proposal

to the Minister of Finance. If the gender equality impact assessment is not included, the budget proposal is sent back for resubmission.

In 2014, Sweden was the first country in the world to create a feminist foreign policy approach. This meant that the country had linked the gender equality perspective to any of its aid and foreign policy initiatives. Other countries have since followed Sweden's foreign policy path. The countries which have gone in that direction include France, Canada, Luxembourg, Spain, Mexico and most recently Germany.

Undeniably, there is no democracy in world which does not have its flaws. Thus, all countries must have the desire to constantly improve their democratic spaces. Sweden's experiences do provide lessons which many countries in the Commonwealth can learn from in their quest to increase the participation of women in their governance architecture. It does not make any sense to offer more than half of the population limited participation in the governance structures of a country. After all, it takes two halves to make a whole.

The **Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP)** is the network of women Members of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's Parliaments and Legislatures. The CWP network provides a means of building the capacity of women elected to Parliament to be more effective in their roles, improving the awareness and ability of all Parliamentarians, male and female, and encouraging them to include a gender perspective in all aspects of their role - legislation, oversight and representation and helping Parliaments to become gender-sensitive institutions.

**Below: The Parliament of Sweden is located at the Riksdag, which sits on the Strömmen, a bay of the Baltic Sea.**



Image credit: The Swedish Parliament

# COMMONWEALTH YOUTH VOICES: GIBRALTAR'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE COMMONWEALTH AS STRONG AS ITS ROCK

Although it is not a member state, Gibraltar has always been proud to have a very close and long-standing relationship with the Commonwealth. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Patron of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, visited Gibraltar for a short period in May 1954 during her post-coronation tour of the Commonwealth and, Gibraltar has, for example, participated in every single Commonwealth Games since its inception in 1958.

There has been, in my view, a defining day in the trajectory of Gibraltar's international relations – the 23 June 2016. This was the day the United Kingdom (UK) voted to leave the European Union (EU) in an in-out referendum, or the 'Brexit referendum'. Without delving into the complexities that have arisen for Gibraltar as a result of the decision of the British people to leave the EU, it is safe to say that this meant Gibraltar had to very quickly start to look elsewhere and ensure that it built even stronger relationships with countries around the globe with the aim of securing continued socio-economic prosperity for its people.

What better way to build these relationships than by looking towards the Commonwealth?

The Commonwealth is home to more than 2.4 billion people, consisting of 54 independent and sovereign states spanning six continents; Asia, Africa, South America, North America, Oceania and Europe. It includes countries which have very large and vibrant economies, like the UK, Nigeria or Canada, as well as other developing countries such as Anguilla, Mozambique or Kiribati. Therefore, in the post-Brexit era in which we find ourselves, Gibraltar cannot afford to ignore a very large political association such as the Commonwealth. Fortunately, Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar has ensured it has used this opportunity and has enhanced its relationships within the Commonwealth family in the months and years that have passed since the Brexit referendum.

Only 11 months after the UK voted to leave the EU, the Chief Minister of Gibraltar, Hon. Fabian Picardo, QC MP announced at a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association dinner held in Gibraltar that on the morning after the UK left the EU, the Commonwealth flag will replace that of the EU at all official Gibraltar Government locations. This happened on the 31 January 2020 and was seen as a powerful statement by the Gibraltar Government to mark the start of an even closer relationship with the Commonwealth. Additionally, the Chief Minister has recognised that *"relationships across the Commonwealth are what's going to make Gibraltar strong and enduring in trade"*. These comments are particularly welcome considering that there are, in my opinion, many opportunities waiting to be explored within the Commonwealth.

As mentioned earlier, Gibraltar is very proud of its long standing relationship with the institutions, organisations and countries of the Commonwealth. It is a clear reflection of the many similarities we share as part of the Commonwealth family of nations. Gibraltar has a particularly close relationship with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (the CPA), one of the oldest established organisations of the Commonwealth. Gibraltar belongs to the CPA's British Islands and Mediterranean Region and both Government and Opposition Members of Parliament jointly participate in discussions and debates which give Commonwealth countries the opportunity of learning from each other on various issues ranging from parliamentary democracy to climate change. In fact, the Minister for Health, Care and Justice, Hon. Samantha Sacramento, MP, is currently the Chair of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) of the CPA British Islands and Mediterranean Region and has recently returned from Reykjavik, Iceland, after attending the Global Women Political Leaders Forum on behalf of the CWP.



**Aaron Santos** is 23 years old and graduated with a BA (Hons) in Politics and International Relations in 2019. Aaron has always had an interest in politics since his early teenage years and in 2016 was very involved in the Gibraltar Stronger IN Europe campaign. As part of the campaign, Aaron took part in a Q&A session with the then Chancellor of the Exchequer Mr Phillip Hammond and was also chosen to meet the then Prime Minister Mr David Cameron, on behalf of the Gibraltar Stronger IN Campaign, during his short visit to Gibraltar. In 2019, following an essay competition, Aaron was selected to represent Gibraltar at the 10<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Youth Parliament held in New Delhi, India in November 2019.

With special thanks for the coordination of this article to Khadijah Khatun, Youth Representative for the CPA British Islands and Mediterranean Region on the Editorial Advisory Board for *The Parliamentarian*.





Youth participation is also extremely important, given that it is their future that is at stake and their future that is currently being shaped by our leaders. In the Commonwealth, around 60% of its citizens are under the age of 30 and, as a qualifying member of that age group, I strongly believe it is vital that we be included in the future shaping of our international relationships going forward, at every level. It makes me very proud to say that in Gibraltar, our Government has ensured youth involvement throughout its relationship with the Commonwealth. In 2019, for example, I was delighted to have been selected to represent Gibraltar at the 10<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Youth Parliament (CYP) held in New Delhi, India. This came about following an essay competition which saw the then Speaker of the Gibraltar Parliament and former Chief Minister, Hon.

Adolfo Canepa, CMG OBE GMH select me as one of Gibraltar's representatives. This was the second ever CYP event in which Gibraltar had participated in, the first being held the year before in Jersey. Since then, the Government of Gibraltar has ensured that it is represented at this yearly event which, although educational, is also an opportunity for our youth to build relationships with future leaders from across the Commonwealth.

Additionally, as part of the Government of Gibraltar's policy to enhance its relationship with the Commonwealth post-Brexit, each year a group of sixth form students are selected to represent Gibraltar and visit the various institutions and organisations of the Commonwealth in London, and not in Brussels, as was the case prior to our departure from the European Union. The visit by sixth

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## COMMONWEALTH YOUTH VOICES: GIBRALTAR'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE COMMONWEALTH

form students to the UK, and indeed the participation at various Commonwealth youth events, involves a briefing held by the Deputy Chief Minister, who also happens to be the Minister with responsibility for the Commonwealth, Hon. Dr Joseph Garcia, CMG MP. This clearly demonstrates the importance the Government of Gibraltar gives to these visits and the potential net gain for Gibraltar of this in the years to come.

Additionally, just one year after the Brexit referendum, Gibraltar became an Institutional Strategic Partner of the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council (the "CWEIC"). This is commonly referred to as the business arm of the Commonwealth and was designed to promote trade and investment across all the countries and territories of the Commonwealth. In June last year, the CWEIC opened an office in Gibraltar which, in my view, demonstrates our intention as a nation to create new and prosperous business relationships across the Commonwealth. This can only be a good thing and is currently being very ably led by Gibraltar's former Governor, Lieutenant-General Edward Davis, CB CBE.

It is clear that Gibraltar's relationship with the Commonwealth is stronger and closer than ever before. Not only do we have our very own Commonwealth Park; a magnificent green public park in the centre of town, but we also have the Commonwealth flag flying over us at the entry to Gibraltar and at all official Government buildings. Our youth are more involved than they ever have been with representation for Gibraltar at events like the Commonwealth Youth Parliament and Youth Forum. Our students are also learning about the Commonwealth with yearly trips to the UK's Commonwealth institutions and our political and business relationships are stronger than ever with visits to Gibraltar from High Commissioners from around the Commonwealth and excellent engagement between Governments at direct ministerial level.

Gibraltar may have already left the European Union, but it was that departure which has, in my opinion, been what has strengthened our relationship with the Commonwealth even more. Our relationship has always been close, but it is now as strong as the 'Rock of Gibraltar'.



Above: Adriana Lopez and Aaron Santos were Gibraltar's youth representatives at the 10<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Youth Parliament, hosted by the Delhi Legislative Assembly in India.

The Commonwealth, through its many forums, provides one of the greatest platforms for young people to have a prominent seat at the table. As the current National Youth Delegate for Gibraltar hoping to be able to travel to the twice postponed Commonwealth Youth Council (CYC) in Rwanda later this year, and having participated in the 10<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Youth Parliament (CYP) in India in 2019, I confidently believe the Commonwealth offers an unimaginable opportunity to engage with our peers at an international level and ultimately a gateway to bring about change. It is in the abovementioned Youth Forums where global topics and concerning factors can be discussed at length. It is also an opportunity to understand the issues faced by our counterparts around the globe, as what might concern the youth in Gibraltar, is at times in stark contrast to other regions across the globe.

The key is in how we eventually use these newly formed global networks to our advantage to really bring about positive change. However, there is at times a disconnect between how we engage and make connections with future leaders, and how we continue to develop those relationships beyond social spaces after these events.

### Preparing future leaders

Young people make up more than 60% of the Commonwealth's global population. Yet, the same representation is not afforded in the process of decision-making. By and large, Parliaments and Legislatures across the Commonwealth have an average age of 50, with Parliamentarians under 30 years of age few and far between. So, are we doing enough to prepare 'future leaders'?

***“Young people make up more than 60% of the Commonwealth's global population. Yet, the same representation is not afforded in the process of decision-making. By and large, Parliaments and Legislatures across the Commonwealth have an average age of 50, with Parliamentarians under 30 years of age few and far between. So, are we doing enough to prepare 'future leaders'?”***



# COMMONWEALTH YOUTH VOICES: THE ROLE OF YOUNG PEOPLE ACROSS THE COMMONWEALTH

It is as a result of this underrepresentation within our societies that young people have a much less chance of being engaged in the political processes or empowered enough to voice their concerns which could really impact and bring about change. This matters twofold because young people are the ones who will be impacted most by these decisions, and less equipped when dealing with those direct consequences in the future.

As a person towards the older bracket of the youth community, I look back towards the next generation with great uncertainty about the future in which we will live. There are a range of issues that concern youth today, from illiteracy to professional opportunities and arguably our biggest challenge, climate change. The extent to which each problem affects young people varies within each community, but we all have a role to play in the solution.

As the great Mahatma Gandhi said: *"Responsibility will mellow and sober the youth and prepare them, for the burden they must discharge"*.

The 2020 Global Youth Development Index revealed that although progress remains slow, conditions of young people have improved around the world by 3.1% between 2010 and 2018. The index shows advancements for youth in education, employment, and health care, but youth participation in politics is declining in most parts of the world. Additionally, efforts towards youth centred initiatives face great uncertainty because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Why is this concerning?

The state of the world is by no means perfect. There are serious targets which need to be implemented, such as the '2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', which today's Youth will have an extremely important role to play if we are to be successful in achieving those goals, and especially have the ability to continue the work thereafter.

Youth development throughout the Commonwealth is understood as: *"Enhancing the status of young people, empowering them to build on their competencies and capabilities for life"*.

If youth participation in politics is low, it is hard to shape the development of the communities we live in. Whereas it can be argued that countries with higher youth political participation will see further social integration and allow for better links to be created between generations for the inevitable transfer of power in the future.

## Looking forward

We often speak about unity throughout the Commonwealth but there is still a vast number of young people who lack necessities and opportunities. This is worse for certain demographics, including but not limited to young women and girls, young people with disabilities, people of minority backgrounds etc. All of which is now aggravated by COVID-19 which also puts at risk all the pre-pandemic gains that were made in other fields such as education, health care and employment.

It is important to highlight these concerns. I was fortunate enough to meet some of the most inspiring young people from across the Commonwealth at the 2019 CYP in India. It was there where I realised that I could never truly understand the struggles faced by my some of my peers. What is clear though, is that the issues transcended us all and that only together, will we be able to achieve the socio-economic and climate goals that have been set by our predecessors.

To finish off with a more positive insight by Mahatma Gandhi, and as advice to my friends across the Commonwealth: *"Be the change you wish to see in the world."*

Young people throughout history have also been the greatest vehicles for change. And perhaps it is worth reminding ourselves, that the current decision-makers were also once in our shoes. As we navigate the uncertainty that the pandemic has accelerated, we should focus on bridging the gap between generations, and fortunately, the Commonwealth, through all its outstanding forums, will give us the greatest opportunity to make that possible.



**Adriana Lopez** studied in London and Barcelona where she attained an MSc in Political Science, an MA in International Political Journalism and a BA in Politics with Sociology. She is 27 years old, bilingual in English and Spanish and specialises in political communication and international relations. She has worked as a journalist in Barcelona and covered the 2019 General Elections in Gibraltar. Adriana is the current National Youth Delegate for Gibraltar and participated in the 10<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Youth Parliament held in New Delhi, India in 2019, where she was able to connect with youth from all around the Commonwealth family and focus on global issues such as the environment and women's rights.

With special thanks for the coordination of this article to Khadijah Khatun, Youth Representative for the CPA British Islands and Mediterranean Region on the Editorial Advisory Board for *The Parliamentarian*.



# COMMONWEALTH YOUTH VOICES: ACTING TODAY FOR A BETTER TOMORROW FOR YOUTH IN WALES

Wales. To many across the globe, it's a nation of its castles and mythical creatures, its abundant and unique history and its landscapes - both agricultural and industrial. The 'Welsh caricature' is straightforward to configure. To some, therefore, it may be an unlikely candidate to be a trailblazing nation that places future generations at the heart of all decision-making.

The *Well-being of Future Generations Act*, which passed through the Welsh Parliament - the Senedd - in 2015, embeds a simple principle within the DNA of our policy making. Candidly, that principle is that decision-makers must not screw over future generations. Welsh Government Ministers must not wreak havoc on the environment and public bodies must not create or worsen inequalities through their actions.

The aspirations, however, are not merely constrained to a list of prohibited activities that ought to be avoided. Instead, the legislation envisages a positive ambition for a nation of vibrance and sustainability, grounded in seven well-being goals: to achieve a Wales that is prosperous, resilient, healthier, more equal, globally responsible, with vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language, and cohesive communities. Together, these culminate in a shared vision for public bodies to work towards together, and their work should demonstrate progress against all areas.

Enshrined in law, the duties apply to public bodies, ranging from Ministers to our Health Boards, and many other institutions in between. The public bodies must make sure that they take into account the impact they could have on people living their lives in the future. To underpin the overarching objectives, the *Well-being of Future Generations' Sustainable Development Principle* requires public bodies to adopt five ways of working, to ensure that they can work together better, avoiding repeating past mistakes, whilst addressing some of the ongoing and upcoming challenges we face. These ways of working include collaboration, integration, involvement and prevention, with a view on the long-term.

For this bold mission to protect the interests of future generations, a strong voice of accountability is required to hold decision-makers 'feet to the fire' and promote the positive vision that Wales has signed up to for itself. The legislation therefore established the role of Commissioner for Future Generations, described by some as the world's first 'Minister of the unborn'. Its inaugural holder, Sophie Howe, was appointed to the unique position in 2016, to act as a guardian of the interests of future generations. She is responsible for providing advice to the Welsh Government and other public bodies in Wales on delivering social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being for Wales' current and future generations, as well as assessing and reporting on how they are delivering. The Commissioner has not shied away from the challenge. Initiating high-profile interventions across policy areas, Sophie has promoted the basic concept of protecting future generations both domestically and internationally.

The objectives, written into law and hailed as representing a cornerstone of policy-making, are admirable and largely agreeable universally. However, they mean nothing to the generations of today and tomorrow if decision-makers don't rise to the challenge.

A light can be shone on emerging best practice that the 'Well-being of Future Generations' has prompted. Swansea, Wales' second largest city, tasked itself with urgently tackling the scourge of homelessness. Swansea Council has delivered long-term homes for hundreds of people through the pandemic, and plans to further develop on this progress over coming years. Taking a holistic approach to developing solutions, the Council has linked the aspirations of solving homelessness, reducing carbon emissions and fuel poverty through this project by integrating energy efficient technology in affordable housing developments. This work is being supplemented by activity to improve the mental and physical health of residents, demonstrating a clear commitment to the joined-up thinking that the 'Well-being of Future Generations' embeds and encourages.



**Brett John** works in policy and public affairs in Wales. He previously worked in the Welsh Government as a Policy Manager in the Economic Policy team, engaged in EU Exit activity and COVID-19 interventions. He also has experience working in the Welsh Parliament to support and promote the work of elected representatives. In his position as Welsh Political Editor for Voting Counts, he is responsible for developing accessible resources to ensure that people in Wales can make informed decisions about their vote. In 2018, Brett represented Wales at the 9<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Youth Parliament held in Jersey, alongside 50 future leaders from across the Commonwealth.

With special thanks for the coordination of this article to Khadijah Khatun, Youth Representative for the CPA British Islands and Mediterranean Region on the Editorial Advisory Board for *The Parliamentarian*.





Above: The Senedd building in Cardiff houses the debating chamber and three Committee rooms of the Welsh Parliament.

Elsewhere, the interventions of the Future Generations Commissioner have proved central to the considerations of significant infrastructure projects. In 2019, plans to build a £1.6billion relief road in south Wales were cancelled, with Welsh First Minister Mark Drakeford citing impacts to the environment as reflecting a critical concern that ultimately made the proposal unjustifiable. A prominent opponent of the project, Sophie Howe argued that the development would serve to destroy local biodiversity. Instead of paving the way for a Wales condemned to continued reliance on roads over coming decades, the legislation clearly advocates an alternative view that required those in charge to take a longer-term approach. The Welsh Government has since committed to a new Transport Strategy, 'Llwybr Newydd' - meaning 'New path' in Welsh. This sets out a way of thinking that places people and climate change at the heart of the transport system. The journey to an accessible, sustainable and efficient transport system will be long, but this signifies an important step in a new direction; one that has the well-being of future generations at its core.

***“As a nation and a planet, it is clear that we face a number of challenges - both now and in the future. The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has tangibly demonstrated how quickly our way of life can be turned on its head.”***

Like anything, the 'Well-being of Future Generations' legislation is imperfect. It is arguable that it lacks teeth and clarity. It is sufficiently prominent to act as a shield to make unpopular decisions not to proceed with commitments, and sufficiently vague to not show it the regard and respect that it was designed for. Nonetheless, it has become a hallmark of decision-making in Wales, and has encouraged principles of better governance.

As a nation and a planet, it is clear that we face a number of challenges - both now and in the future. The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has tangibly demonstrated how quickly our way of life can be turned on its head. Far too many continue to live in poverty and deprivation, mired in a system that holds them back from achieving their goals. Climate change represents a huge and unprecedented threat to the lives of us all, and the generations that will come after us. Indeed, the climate crisis is more than a cause of impending catastrophe; it is a lived experience and reality for many communities across the globe.

There's a motto in Welsh; 'A fo ben, bid bont'. It effectively conveys the message, 'If you want to be a leader, be a bridge'. We will not lead the way to overcoming any of these hurdles if we act alone, in isolation, with myopic approaches and solutions. Joined-up thinking, with embedded collaboration and a clear vision of the long-term issues are conducive to taking important steps to realising our ambition. We must build bridges between decision makers, between challenges and solutions, and into the future to be leaders that can rise to the challenge.

Wales has illustrated the art of the possible at a small scale, of decision makers, rallied together under a shared vision to tackle some of our greatest and complex challenges. While Wales must now walk the talk, the world must follow the simple sentiment of this small nation: Act today for a better tomorrow.

# COMMONWEALTH YOUTH VOICES: INCLUSIVE PARLIAMENTS FOR INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

In recent years, advocacy and social movements surrounding equality, diversity and inclusion have largely been at the forefront of conversations worldwide. With movements such as #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter emphasising what is and isn't acceptable in the modern age, it is important for societies to listen carefully and implement necessary changes at both micro and macro levels.

When we discuss social change, we look to the ways in which cultural patterns and human interactions and relationships develop over time. With inclusive and progressive ways of thinking becoming prominent, these will in turn help transform the institutions and cultural norms that are dominant in societies. To put this in layman terms, change often starts with a thought, a shift in thinking which then leads to a change in action which in turn, impacts people's lives and lived experiences. Through this, real tangible change occurs. So what roles do our Parliaments have to play in this?

The Commonwealth, comprised of 54 countries across continents and even the remotest of regions, presents countless opportunities for listening and learning between Parliaments, Legislatures and societies to implement best practice when it comes to embedding inclusion and creating positive change.

Our Parliaments are an integral part of our diverse societies with Members representing constituents, scrutinising, debating and legislating on behalf of the people. We must therefore ensure that our Parliaments themselves embody diversity and inclusion.

## Lessons from the UK Parliament

The UK Parliament has been making great strides in recent years to ensure diversity and inclusion is embedded into both the House of Commons' and the House of Lords' administration strategies. This is seen in the *"vision to create a workplace that is accessible, inclusive and innovative, enabling Parliament to support democracy by being representative, fair and relevant."* This vision has been supported through the creation of workplace equality networks (WENs).

WENs at the UK Parliament provide an opportunity for colleagues to discuss and consider issues relevant to their situation or of interest

to them. WENs in this context are useful forums for groups protected by equality legislation and beyond, providing a safe space to connect with others, share experiences, celebrate community and advocate for necessary changes to support diversity and inclusion. These WENs are open to all members of the parliamentary community, which is made up of thousands, from House/administration colleagues, Members of both Houses, Members' staff and colleagues from Parliament's Digital Service (PDS). WENs are staffed by volunteers from all members of the parliamentary community.

The WENs include the following:

- **ParliAble** – focusing on disability in the workplace.
- **ParliCare** – focusing on supporting those with caring responsibilities.
- **ParliGender** – focusing on gender equality.
- **ParliION** – focusing on social mobility, inclusion and equality of opportunity in relation to socio-economic backgrounds.
- **ParliOut** – focusing on supporting LGBTQ+ colleagues.
- **ParliREACH** – focusing on support and advocacy for colleagues in relation to race, ethnicity and cultural heritage.

## Change in action

As co-chair of ParliREACH and having been on the committee for a number of years, my connection to this work is deep rooted. When we speak of change, oftentimes it can feel abstract or out of reach. However, in my advocacy, organising and campaigning I have seen how the work of networks such as ParliREACH have influenced change directly and meaningfully.

An example is ParliREACH's *'Stand in my Shoes: Race and Culture in Parliament'* report published in April 2019. After conducting seven focus groups with members of the parliamentary community from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, ParliREACH found that more could be done to challenge both conscious and unconscious bias as well as racial discrimination experienced in the workplace. ParliREACH used this research to make informed suggestions to both the House of Commons and the House of Lords management boards and advocate for change



**Khadijah Khatun** works at the UK Parliament as a Senior Internal Communications Officer at the House of Commons and previously did the same role at the House of Lords. Alongside this role, Khadijah also co-chairs the UK Parliament's workplace equality network ParliREACH which advocates for diversity and inclusion surrounding race, ethnicity and cultural heritage. She also heads a UK-based not-for-profit, Muslim Women Connect, which supports Muslim women in career growth and development. She is also a youth member of the Editorial Advisory Board for *The Parliamentarian* and was the UK representative at 9<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Youth Parliament.

With special thanks for the coordination of this article to Khadijah Khatun, Youth Representative for the CPA British Islands and Mediterranean Region on the Editorial Advisory Board for *The Parliamentarian*.



***“Our Parliaments are an integral part of our diverse societies with Members representing constituents, scrutinising, debating and legislating on behalf of the people. We must therefore ensure that our Parliaments themselves embody diversity and inclusion.”***

to make the UK Parliament a more equal and representative workplace. These recommendations included a call to action for the following areas:

- Diversity becoming a key objective in both Houses corporate strategies
- Commitment from both Houses to publish a pay gap audit
- Removal of grade and role related access restrictions on the parliamentary estate
- A leadership programme specifically for Black, Asian and minority ethnic colleagues to be introduced
- A review of the openness and transparency of current recruitment and promotion processes across both Houses

All of these recommendations were either successfully implemented or are currently in the process of being implemented. Furthermore, following the murder of George Floyd in the United States in May 2020, in an open letter to management boards, ParliREACH requested renewed efforts to tackling racial inequality. This saw the creation of *The Clerk of the House of Commons' Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Advisory Group*. The group functioned as a sub-group of the Diversity and Inclusion Steering Group to provide the necessary time, expertise and experience to create a diverse and inclusive workplace at the UK Parliament. Moreover, WEN chairs and committee members are often invited as key stakeholders to House steering groups for change implementation,

projects and policy, ensuring that the WENs feed into the continual development of the UK Parliament.

These WENs which are supported largely by both Houses' management boards will continue to serve colleagues with existing concerns and interests, and as new challenges arise, the work will continue. As the UK Parliament emerges from the height of the pandemic and begins preparation for a new way of hybrid working, WENs will work alongside colleagues to ensure their respective groups' interests and concerns are listened to and included in the planning processes.

Our Parliaments are comprised of highly talented, valuable and skilled workforces. It is through their hard work and efforts that our Parliaments function at high standards, serving societies as a result. It is only appropriate our parliamentary colleagues across the Commonwealth feel seen and valued in their respective Parliaments and workplaces.

Alongside strategy and policy development, the UK Parliament's WENs ensure this through the delivery of campaigns, celebrations, film screenings, panel discussions, networking opportunities, fayres, exhibitions and much more. As a network of countries touching regions spanning this vast globe, we sit on a wealth of opportunity to uplift and empower one another, and where better to begin than within our own Legislatures and Parliaments.



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# COMMONWEALTH YOUTH VOICES: WOMEN IN POLITICS: NECESSARY FOR GLOBAL GROWTH: A VIEW FROM THE CARRIBEAN

Honouring the human right of gender equality is the best chance we have to solve some of the most pressing issues of our time. From the mental health and health care crisis to the economic crisis and climate change to violence against women and escalating conflicts, ensuring that women are given a seat at the table is critical to accomplishing local, regional and global goals effectively.

Women are historically more affected by these problems, and they also possess brilliant ideas and the leadership to solve them. The gender discrimination that holds many women back is effectively holding back the entire world. As Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris have argued, perceptions of appropriate gender roles in politics are *'shaped by broader patterns of societal values and priorities, which in turn rest on economic development and religious traditions.'* With this, more economically developed and secular democracies are associated with more egalitarian gender attitudes. Simply put, women's ability to have their voices heard as voters has long been shaped by gender norms (alongside other factors such as wealth, race and ethnicity).

The COVID-19 pandemic has tested, and, in some instances, regressed progress made in gender equality and expanding women's rights and opportunities across the globe. Many women are still recovering from lost jobs and income, and school closures disproportionately affect young women and girls. Furthermore, despite women's central roles in responding to COVID-19<sup>1</sup>, including as front-line health workers, they do not have the leadership positions they deserve. Women and girls must be placed at the centre of all aspects of response and recovery, including passing gender-responsive laws, policies, and budgeting for the world to build forward better. En masse, women's leadership promotes bipartisanship, equality, and stability. When women make up at least 25-30%<sup>2</sup> of Legislatures, they are more likely to challenge established conventions and policy agendas.

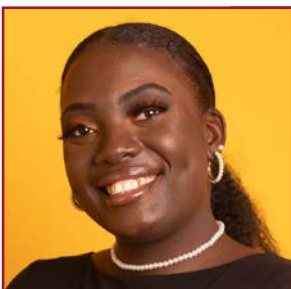
The year 2022 has already marked huge milestones in the Caribbean region for women in politics. On 19 January 2022, Hon.

Mia Mottley made history in the Republic of Barbados by leading the Barbados Labour Party to a 30-0 victory in the polls for the second time in a row.<sup>3</sup> Following this, Prime Minister Mottley named Hon. Santia Bradshaw as the Deputy Prime Minister. The Republic, led by Prime Minister Mottley also boasts a female President, Dame Sandra Mason.

Countries such as Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana are, however, exceptions to the rule. According to UN Women Caribbean, 'only 22% of Ministerial portfolios/ cabinet positions in the Anglophone Caribbean are held by women. Across the region, women generally do not hold more than 30% of elected positions.' Moreover, in a study conducted by UN Women Caribbean and Caribbean Development Research Services (CADRES), 67% of people across the Caribbean perceived the national attitude in their country to be generally supportive of women's participation in politics and leadership. While much progress has been made, women have yet to become significant decision-makers in the corridors of power.

Women's political representation also remains muted and unequal at a global level. UN data shows that as of 1 September 2021, there are 26 women serving as Heads of State and/or Government in 24 countries. At this current rate, gender equality in the highest positions of power will not be reached for another 130 years.<sup>4</sup> The driver behind unequal representation in politics is a complex matter. However, a greater understanding of harmful gender norms and norm change strategies is crucial to promote more equitable political systems.

Women are more likely to cross party lines to find common ground. A study of the US Senate found that women Senators more frequently worked across the aisle and passed more legislation than their male counterparts.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, Parliaments with a higher share of women lawmakers are also more likely to pass and implement legislation that advances gender equality, including laws on domestic violence, rape, and sexual harassment. In Russia, for example, women lawmakers crossed party lines to impose penalties for violence against women.<sup>6</sup>



**Chaneil C. Imhoff** is a young entrepreneur, communications specialist, and mental health activist in Antigua and Barbuda. Chaneil has worked with local, regional and international organisations consulting on branding, communications and design, and is passionate about leveraging technology to advance national development. Chaneil currently serves as the Communications Officer of the Democratic National Alliance and the Team Leader in the St. Peter Constituency. She has also recently been selected as a participant in the 2022 Young Leaders of the Americas (YLA) Initiative.

With special thanks for the coordination of this article to Rashana Jones, Youth Representative for the CPA Caribbean, Americas and the Atlantic Region on the Editorial Advisory Board for *The Parliamentarian*.



An increase in the share of women legislators is also positively correlated with investment in education and health: among the mostly high-income countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), growth in the number of female legislators led to an increase in educational expenditures. Similarly, in non-OECD India, women-led village councils were more likely to support investments in clean drinking water. In Antigua and Barbuda, the Network of Women Parliamentarians, chaired by Senator Gail Christian, has worked together to assess and make recommendations to archaic legislation through a multi partisan gendered lens. Laws such as *The Marriage Act*, *The Sexual Offences Act* and *The Mental Treatment Act* have all be reassessed by the gender caucus and the proposed amendments are to be submitted to the Attorney-General. Through this high level of cooperation, the lives and livelihoods of women and girls are finally at the forefront of the Legislature.<sup>8</sup>

Electing more women does not guarantee these outcomes. Holding political office is just the first step to wielding actual political power. In many countries, institutional structures and political systems still hinder women's ability to effectively influence policy. Women, like any other group, are not a homogenous group, and not all female leaders will be cooperative, peaceful, or advocate for laws that strengthen gender equality. Often, when you are the first woman elected to a leadership position it means navigating previously male-dominated systems, which can translate into an abundance of political caution rather than meaningful policy change. Furthermore, it is important to note that as the number of women seeking office rises, so too does the hostility and violence against them.

Regardless of the outcome, as the number of women in politics increases, more women will likely be inspired to become politically engaged too. Around the world, women are vying for political office like never before, speaking out against harassment and discrimination, and winning seats at the table.



Above: Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians and Parliamentary Clerks from the CPA Caribbean, Amercias and the Atlantic Region at the 6<sup>th</sup> triennial CWP Conference in Uganda.

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**“Women’s political representation also remains muted and unequal at a global level. UN data shows that as of 1 September 2021, there are 26 women serving as Heads of State and/or Government in 24 countries. At this current rate, gender equality in the highest positions of power will not be reached for another 130 years.”**



# COMMONWEALTH YOUTH VOICES: THE GLASS CLIFF OF POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN THE CARIBBEAN: A CONTEMPORARY REFLECTION ON WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN POLITICS

Many young people I suppose do not visit Parliament sittings nor in this age of technology listen to the debates across the floor of the personified Westminster model of government. I suppose it is because it feels foreign, alien, even a bit cold and separated from the material reality of their struggles but also marred with the vitriol of partisan adversary. It is no wonder why, at the very least, a youth in Parliament is seen as an exception to the rule.

I reflect on the times that I as a young citizen and media practitioner peered down at the 31 Members of the House of Representatives and 13 Senators who sit in Belize's National Assembly rarely ever seeing anyone born in my generation and as such less likely to intimately understand our plight. Despite that glaring truth, there was also another part of my identity that I only minutely saw reflected at me, women. Simultaneously, what was staring back at me was an unfilled gap of legislative power and therefore social power. What was looking back at me was powerlessness.

In this context, I will be looking at two countries in the CPA Caribbean, Americas and the Atlantic Region that have been experiencing seismic shifts in their political landscapes particularly as it relates to women in political leadership. Barbados has been making significant strides in this arena with women constituting 26% of the newest iteration of its Parliament. (Kevz Politics)

More than that its Executive branch is being led by women in the persons of the Prime Minister, Hon. Mia Mottley QC MP and the Deputy Prime Minister, Hon. Santia Bradshaw coupled with the Barbadian Head of State being President Dame Sandra Mason. I want to peer deeper and with a broader scope to look at now former leader of the Democratic Labor Party, Verla De Pieza, who carried the party into the 2022 Barbadian elections. It is a party that has been struggling to find its footing after a wipeout loss in Barbados' 2018

elections. Her tenure of party-political leadership is the first vantage point from which we'll be looking at the 'glass cliff' phenomenon.

Next, is Belize whose Parliament consists of only 16% women, one of those women being the Speaker of the House, Hon. Valerie Woods and the President of the Senate, Senator Hon. Carolyn Trench-Sandiford. The substantive Opposition is also currently in a quagmire of instability seeing constant changes in relation to its party-political leadership. Hon. Tracy Panton has contested for the party leadership and is the first woman to contest the leadership of the United Democratic Party. Though at different times in an electoral cycle both Woods and Panton, while their parties sit in opposition spaces and simultaneously faces a crisis of leadership, have been launched into the spotlight to regain stability within their relatively mature post-independence political parties. It is my conviction that both these cases epitomize the crises of the 'glass cliff' that women must contend with when they do ascend to top office.

In the 'first past the post' electoral system often used within the Westminster system of government, the primary goal of any candidate is to win a seat. For a party-political leader, this pressure to win as the primary goal becomes Herculean. In 2018, the Commonwealth Secretariat conducted research entitled '*Women and Political Parties in Five Small States of the Commonwealth Caribbean*' and outlined the characteristics of a winnable candidate according to respondents in five countries:

*'The winnable candidate has to start her political career three years prior to the general election. Following the announcement of her interest to the party, she has to start working on building relationships at the community level. It will involve her purposefully becoming a visible active member in the community. This woman has to be self-confident and able to tolerate the company of men including 'men*



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With special thanks for the coordination of this article to Rashana Jones, Youth Representative for the CPA Caribbean, Americas and the Atlantic Region on the Editorial Advisory Board for *The Parliamentarian*.





talk', have integrity and not be afraid to speak up. She must be unpretentious and have the ability to associate with men and women from different socio-economic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and she has to be prepared to do her research on geo-political and socio-economic issues to make her contributions in Parliament. Economic independence and financial security will be her strengths in the long run. Most women in Caribbean politics have either come from legal backgrounds, education or community mobilisation. The winnable candidate has to be placed in a safe constituency for the party and the constituency has to match her personality. Coming from a political family will be an asset but a party that seeks out the ordinary successful woman and strongly supports her candidacy is likely to be rewarded by voters'. (Hesse-Bayne and Kremer)

These perspectives again sketch the views that women must be able to contort and conform into a space that is seen as a space that is built only for men. It also highlights the view that they must be placed in constituencies that are 'safe seats' because inherently their candidacies are seen as liabilities or anecdotally, we have seen women being placed in constituency races as 'fillers' in contests that they have lost from the time the ink dries on their candidacy approvals.

Researchers at the University of Exeter found that women do not necessarily lose elections because of weak candidacy but rather because they face more challenges than their male counterparts. (Ryan, Haslam and Postmes)

Finally, their prerequisite for success is attached to their familial relations as opposed to their own earned qualifications. All very problematic views that seep down into party political conventions and are usually only dismissed when there is only the woman left to turn to. This is the crux of the 'glass cliff' of which we're seeking to decipher in Commonwealth Caribbean politics. A glass cliff that is accepted as the "barrier that women face, such that they are more likely than men to occupy precarious leadership positions." (Ryan, Haslam and Postmes). The 'glass cliff' refers to the phenomenon whereby women (and members of other minority groups, such as those based on race or disability) are over-represented in leadership positions that are risky and precarious.

***"Understanding the adversarial nature of 'Westminster-style' politics, there must be a move away from the cultural vitriol of partisanship of all stakeholders to realise this imagined future of gender parity in political representation."***



*How does Caribbean society work towards keeping women as more than the martyrs that take the brunt of the impact after leaping off the cliff in periods of instability?*

The answer begins with the ease of access to the political space by starting early with a country's youth. The youth arms of political parties and initiatives like Barbados' Pink Parliament are perfect examples of 'flowering beds' for young people, irrespective of gender identity and sexuality, to understand why women in politics is means manifestly more than just a female body sitting on a Parliament bench. Breaking biases as it relates to women in leadership requires targeted education to debunk misconceptions, offer new perspectives and change behaviours.

Next, political parties and their guiding instruments are instruction manuals that breed the kind of candidates that will represent them. Only when political parties become serious about institutionally and financially supporting quota ambitions will it trickle into parliamentary chambers. An example such as those expressed by the People's United Party's constitutional article which states, "all units of the party include among its members a minimum of 30% women" (People's United Party).

Understanding the adversarial nature of 'Westminster-style' politics, there must be a move away from the cultural vitriol of partisanship of all stakeholders to realise this imagined future of gender parity in political representation. Indeed, reiterated by the COVID-19 pandemic, we cannot have a sustainable future without the meaningful involvement of women.

The journey toward this vision takes a concerted action to realise the magnitude of power and transformative change that women add to the political arena. It is an ambition that is radical and revolutionary in thought and achievable in a Caribbean space that has overcome many hurdles handed down from its colonially-interrupted history. It is an ambition that embodies a possible future where our young citizens look into an Assembly of its leaders and see themselves reflected, saying unequivocally, "that you are here - that life exists and identity, that the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse." It is an ambition espoused in the words of George Lamming that opines that women are a future we must learn; I go further to say that we must learn to support and include in the spaces that matter to all of us.

# COMMONWEALTH YOUTH VOICES: THE PARTI-PRIS PANDEMIC: EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON WOMEN AND GIRLS

As the first month of 2022 concludes, women and girls around the world continue to operate in this new pandemic modality. If we reflect for a moment, the adjustments we thought would be temporary have now seemingly become quite permanent.

Over the last two years the pandemic has had a very visible effect on all aspects of our lives. It has affected global healthcare systems and its subsidiaries; it has impacted global economies as well as altered the way we operate on a day-to-day basis. What we are now seeing is the long term and profound impact both positive and negative it has had on global minorities.

Louis Wirth while defining a minority group, noted that: *"it is any group of people who because of their physical or cultural characteristics are singled out for differential and unequal treatment and who therefore regarded themselves as objects of collective discrimination."*

We can see from the global gender ratio<sup>2</sup> that women and girls make up 49.58% of the global population, or to quantify, the world has 65.51 million more males than females. This is the quantitative beginning of the disparity women and girls face globally. More qualitatively, prior to the pandemic, women and girls were already disadvantaged through areas like poverty and hunger, education, employment, decision-making, maternal health, violence, environmental sustainability and health diseases like HIV, AIDS, and malaria. It is through these measurable indicators that we are able to monitor the development or further underdevelopment for women and girls as a whole.

After the full onset of the pandemic in early 2020, many things changed. Healthcare systems were paralyzed through the lack of PPE and other important equipment, limited staff due to rising infection rates and staff burn out, as well as the inability to financially service the needs of the healthcare sector, both at a local and global level. Some economies flourished, through extortionate sales in health equipment, return travel, and lock down incentives, while

other economies suffered as a result of the supply chain crisis, the inability to pay foreign debt, large national social service schemes, and the inability to generate revenue through lost tourism and other service industries.

Socially the world was divided as advanced societies were able to transfer to the alternate and digital modalities for commerce, work and education while other societies periled at the thought of change. Through a more gendered lens, both women and girls at home or on the frontlines have been impacted by this pandemic in one way or another.

Outside of the global shock to this pandemic, it has operated in a very 'parti-pris'<sup>3</sup> manner when walking the gender line. During times of crisis, women and girls are always impacted and the effects are amplified when resources are limited, when there is a crisis, or where their existing disparities are further disproportioned. Not long after the pandemic began its marathon race, the existing and new structural inequalities came to light. But with these also came positive solutions and new modes to support the much-needed work for equity amongst the genders.

The reality for women and girls goes as follows. Through recent surveys and impact studies, we can see exactly how affected women and girls really were from the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic to the present time. At the very start, it was noted that 70% of global healthcare and social workers fighting this virus were women. Women supported the initial and subsequent continued response as doctors, nurses, scientists, vaccine developers, launderers, caterers, and health facility cleaners, to name a few.

It is against this background we can observe that these efforts were unrecognised as many women were excluded from decision-making opportunities to support the global medical fraternities in their COVID-19 response. In addition, women were still paid much less than their male counterparts. In fact, further issues in the health sphere gives this argument of the pandemic being biased,



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more strength and verisimilitude for its gendered argument. It was revealed that PPE, including masks and gowns, were designed for males, leaving women, who made up the majority of the COVID-19 response, at greater risk of exposure.

With the majority of women on the immediate frontline, who was left in the homes? With work and school closures as well as stretched health care systems, many women were forced into the home or to pick up additional home tasks. Studies showed that pre-pandemic women and girls did three times more domestic work than men (usually unpaid) and during the pandemic that number increased. New pandemic demands like home-schooling, caretaking and working from home, have seen women and girls further disadvantaged. The contrast of these disparities is only further highlighted when we compare women in urban and rural communities. Job losses, home care needs and the inability to meet online school demands saw more girls dropping out of school within the first few months of the pandemic as well as women seeking taboo and sometimes dangerous means of generating income.

***“During times of crisis, women and girls are always impacted and the effects are amplified when resources are limited, when there is a crisis, or where their existing disparities are further disproportioned.”***

With more time spent at home (both willingly and forcibly), there was a concerning increase in reported occurrences of domestic violence incidents. Pre-pandemic, 40% of women and girls were estimated to report these incidents, and after lockdowns and job losses occurred, this number increased. Unfortunately though, these realities may be magnified as the COVID-19 pandemic continues. However, although worse, these are not entirely new to many women and girls as history has revealed.

The economic impact from this pandemic will create another defining moment in the reality for many women and girls for years to come. With any crisis it is clear that women and girls are generally affected more economically than males. Women for a start, generally earn less, which can impact their long term and short-term fiscal goals. People who were able to manage comfortably in the pandemic were those who had savings or other investments to support them when many jobs and businesses closed.

With further strains on government social protection schemes, this resulted in women and girls being even more economically disadvantaged and unable to meet basic everyday needs. Further, when economic studies were undertaken in the Commonwealth, the majority of which are developing countries, it was seen that larger proportions of women worked in informal economies, and their access to social protection schemes such as paid sick leave, insurance and other social subsidies are fewer or sometimes non-existent.

It is estimated<sup>4</sup> that global unemployment could have risen to 24.7 million as a result of COVID-19's impact on global GDP growth. Similarly, we see trends when we compare this number to the 22 million unemployed during the 2008 financial crisis and its effects on women and girls. Extreme poverty is the end result of these





## COMMONWEALTH YOUTH VOICES: EXAMINING IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON WOMEN AND GIRLS

cumulative crises where job loss, slowed economies and limited social protection schemes will disadvantage the vulnerable.

Paradoxically the solution is often found in the problem. The evidence is clear and supports the fact that the pandemic is biased when examining its impact on women and girls, but it also provides us with the unique opportunity to re-evaluate and adopt some of the few but needed positives. The pandemic has emphasised the significant contribution that women and girls have globally on a daily basis and forced us to accept and acknowledge that.

The solutions will lie with policy change. We have, for current and future crises, to take into consideration the needs of women and girls when creating our policies. Using data from previous and current crises, new policies can be crafted to capture in detail the needs of women, in order to safeguard and protect women and girls. All of the data gathered can be used to strengthen the social protection system, educate women and girls about insurance schemes, and create opportunities for women to develop skills to explain their fiscal opportunities. The pandemic has birthed an entrepreneurial spirit in many women who have lost their jobs or have had to work fewer hours to support greater domestic demands.

With these new businesses, women have been able to diversify and strengthen their fiscal ability and opportunity to provide for themselves and their families by reducing their dependency on the state and other supporting partners. This severely mitigates opportunities for women and girls to be taken advantage of and greatly reduces the occurrence of gender-based violence. Women have become more vocal as a result and challenged governments and organisations to review their social protection programmes in order to include and to protect the most vulnerable during these times.

Indeed the pandemic has created new opportunities and solutions on how to balance the demands of work and home life. With many jobs adopting hybrid systems of remote and scheduled office working modes, it has given women a new opportunity that didn't exist before. In a survey conducted globally with businesses, it showed that 97% of its respondents are comfortable with their employees working in a hybrid method. Around 45% of workforces going forward have pledged already to allow hybrid models to remain. With this flexible work option, women are able to balance work and home life at their own will. Creating opportunities for women to have more time with their children, partners, family and friends. This improves work attitudes and increases overall productivity. It also provided a new opportunity for men as well

to have time with their children and families, not usually available before as demonstrated by shorter paternity leave.

Attention on the social impact of this pandemic on women and girls have also been a positive outcome, as greater focus and education has been given to mental health issues that were prevalent.

The pandemic has challenged the status quo as a result of greater demand for ICT knowledge where we now see a bigger uptake by women and girls in ICT and STEM programmes. Digital platforms to support commerce, communications, education and other aspects of daily life are in demand to keep the world connected through this new 'pandemic digital revolution'. New opportunities for investment in ICT are needed that are open for women and girls to explore. Social distancing has allowed women to build more meaningful and genuine relationships, and devise creative solutions for connecting, communicating and creating. The pandemic in its most literal nature has increased our ability to improve and implement better lifestyle changes and hygiene practices. Emphasis on a healthy body and clean environment being at the core.

The 'parti-pris' nature of this pandemic is the catalyst to finally and actively working towards ending the existing and potential disparities found between men and women.

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<sup>3</sup> noun French: a position or attitude resolved upon or taken in advance.

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***“Attention on the social impact of this pandemic on women and girls have also been a positive outcome, as greater focus and education has been given to mental health issues that were prevalent.”***





# COMMONWEALTH YOUTH VOICES: REDEFINING THE COMMONWEALTH ADVANTAGE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

International trade policy and global trade have a significant impact on the way we live, ranging from the cost of goods and services to the performance of the various economic organs that we rely on. As such, we should align trade objectives with our respective developmental plans, which sees the use of trade as a proactive tool in promoting sustainable development. It should be noted that inasmuch trade has the potential to advance sustainable development, it can also slow efforts, depending on how trade policy is designed and implemented.

It is important that issues of sustainable development and the necessary accompanying trade measures, form a central component of any discussion between and amongst all countries. Placing these matters on the agenda should not be the sole responsibility of multilateral organisations such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), International Trade Centre or Commonwealth Secretariat but rather should be led by individual states in any fora where two or more countries meet.

In a broad sense, the international community has accepted the definition of the Brundtland Report which defines sustainable development as *“development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”* (Brundtland).<sup>1</sup>

Sustainable development has been a guiding principle of the WTO; mentioned in the preamble of the *Marrakesh Agreement* (World Trade Organisation) (which established the WTO) and therefore ingrained in the formal trading system.

In many instances, countries have gone further than the WTO by implementing sustainable provisions in various trade agreements in which they negotiate. These agreements are ambitious, going beyond the traditional tariff liberalisation and instead extending to other sustainable development issues. Some of these

issues include sustainability standards, labour requirements, environmental obligations and gender considerations, among others. These conditions can be seen in trade agreements like those signed by the European Union (EU), United States, Canada and Chile. Today, development is seen as a way to address social, economic and environmental conditions, as seen with the EU's common trade policy<sup>2</sup> and by extension various economic partnership agreements, which are used to promote international trade, while at the same time achieving the targets established in the Sustainable Development Goals.

Outside of trade agreements, we see countries using their trade policy to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Examples of such policies include taxes on greenhouse gas emissions and the prohibition of the use of single use plastic bags, as seen in recent bans in the Commonwealth Caribbean, amongst many others.

Therefore, it can be argued that a country's trade policy is critical to supporting development, and by extension will be key in whether a country achieves the targets set out in the Sustainable Development Goals.

With these considerations in mind, there must be an opportunity for collective action by intergovernmental institutions in achieving common outcomes for sustainable development. The Commonwealth Charter, signed in 2013, commits members to the promotion of themes which include sustainable development, protection of the environment, gender equality, a recognition of the importance of young people and the recognition of the needs of small and vulnerable states. The upcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting (CHOGM) in Rwanda, therefore, gives member countries the opportunity to begin discussions aimed at renewing their sustainable development commitments and undertakings to reflect this agenda in their respective national trade priorities.



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# COMMONWEALTH YOUTH VOICES: REDEFINING THE COMMONWEALTH ADVANTAGE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

## Sustainable Development

Sustainable development has three main pillars; economic, social and environmental. However, these pillars are best reflected in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets proposed by the United Nations in 2015. The promotion of trade is not necessarily an objective of the SDGs; rather, it is considered an important means to reach these goals. While there may not be a 'trade-specific' SDG, trade and trade policy tools are referenced in the 17 goals.

## Redefining the Commonwealth Advantage for Sustainable Development

Spanning 2.5 billion people and roughly one-third of the world's population within 54 countries, the Commonwealth is one of the most diverse and important intergovernmental networks. It includes members with a broad range of economic capabilities with representation in the Group of 7 (G7), Group of 20 (G20), Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Collectively, these countries account for a gross domestic product of US\$13 trillion with there being few goods and services which they do not produce or export (Brown).<sup>3</sup>

Given this economic potential, coupled with its shared cultural, political and institutional features, and established mechanisms for partnership, the Commonwealth is well placed as a key player in global trade and sustainable development.

It should be noted however that the Commonwealth, an intergovernmental network, is not and does not purport to be a formal trading block like the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), African Continental Free Trade Area (ACFTA) or the United States Mexico Canada (USMCA) trade agreement. Shared history and common values are not necessarily the makings of a trade agreement; however they can underpin trade diplomacy and co-operation.

Research undertaken by the Commonwealth Investment Council revealed that shared values, historical, cultural and sporting ties offers unique advantages to trade and investment through the similarities in business, commercial and legislative practises which makes it 21% cheaper to do business across the Commonwealth. Furthermore, the research shows that traders and investors benefit from familiar legal and administrative systems, as well as similarities in business, commercial and legislative practice.

- Contract enforcement is more efficient among Commonwealth members, in general, and requires 20% less time compared to the world average.

- A 10% reduction in the costs incurred for goods to be exported can increase intra-Commonwealth exports by 5%.
- Every 1%-point improvement in government effectiveness triggers a greater increase in exports from Commonwealth traders, at 3.4%, compared to the rest of the world, at 2.4%.

Notwithstanding these advantages, the Commonwealth's actual influence (as a grouping)<sup>4</sup> on world trade is negligible. This is a consequence of the absence of a formal trade agreement, which remains unlikely. This is also due to the absence of a single approach to trade or common economic ideologies. There are also geographical considerations and differing developmental priorities which constrains the likelihood of a trade agreement being formalised.

The Commonwealth should therefore redirect its efforts on being a catalyst for the expansion of world trade through its pursuit of rules that are fairer, more equitable and more sustainable as declared in its Charter. Additionally, there is a need for common policies and joint programmes which go beyond the scope of the WTO and UN. The Commonwealth can fill this void by leveraging their shared values and common history to build on partnerships, even if they occur within subsets of the larger grouping.

The upcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) meeting in Rwanda later this year, under the theme 'Delivering a Common Future', is a perfect opportunity to renew efforts of collaboration and coordination. Strengthening this collaboration will be critical for ensuring that member countries have effective and holistic trading relationships, and thereby strengthening the Commonwealth Advantage.

Collaboration at CHOGM should include:

- Aid for Trade - The Commonwealth should work to target supply side constraints to facilitate the participation of developing countries in global supply chains.
- Promotion of Voluntary Sustainability Standards - The Commonwealth should also promote co-operation and initiatives to help Commonwealth members meet technical standards in specific sectors.
- Funnelling resources via foreign direct investment in developing countries to advance sustainable development with an attractive suite of private sector incentives and the build-up of trade-related infrastructure in developing countries to create 'common wealth' in the Commonwealth.
- An undertaking to incorporate trade and sustainable development chapters, including on gender in trade

***“Spanning 2.5 billion people and roughly one-third of the world’s population within 54 countries, the Commonwealth is one of the most diverse and important intergovernmental networks ... Given this economic potential, coupled with its shared cultural, political and institutional features, and established mechanisms for partnership, the Commonwealth is well placed as a key player in global trade and sustainable development.”***



# COMMONWEALTH YOUTH VOICES: REDEFINING THE COMMONWEALTH ADVANTAGE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



Figure 1: Sustainable Development Goals, United Nations 2015

agreements. Commonwealth countries should consider incorporating such chapters in their own future trade agreements with adequate mechanisms for enforcement of their provisions, providing for enhanced dialogue with social partners, and tailoring their provisions to the specific social and environmental needs of partner countries.

- Capacity Building Support – Some Commonwealth countries in the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific Regions have limited capacity in linking the relationship between international trade with their domestic pursuits. Technical assistance programs should therefore be reviewed and where not offered, implemented to assist these countries with assessing their policy options and the formulation of complementary trade policy frameworks.
- Trade Vulnerability Index – There is ongoing discussion about the need to have a trade vulnerability index as the basis for determining eligibility for Special and Differential Treatment at the WTO (J. Jason Cotton). The promotion of this index is consistent with the Commonwealth charter, where members commit to achieving “an effective, equitable, rules-based multilateral trading system.... on terms fair and equitable to all, while taking into account the special requirements of small states and developing countries”. (The Commonwealth, 2013)

There are opportunities for greater collaboration in trade and the accompanying societal and environmental benefits, however the Commonwealth needs to redefine its *modus operandi* if it is to achieve gains in sustainable development using trade as a vehicle and therefore making the Commonwealth fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/renewing-the-uks-trading-relationship-with-commonwealth-countries/>

<sup>4</sup> Individually the countries such as U.K and India may be influential, however as a grouping their trade prowess is left wanting.



# COMMONWEALTH YOUTH VOICES: ROLE OF PARLIAMENTS IN ENHANCING TRADE AND CONNECTIVITY

## How the Parliament of Pakistan is leveraging parliamentary diplomacy to turn power into impact

At a time when the world is moving towards trade protectionism and COVID-19 has further choked logistic lines, the enhancement of intra-Commonwealth trade no longer represents an option but a necessity. Intra-Commonwealth trade is significantly beneficial and reduces trade costs by more than 20% in comparison to trade with non-Commonwealth States.

Therefore, it is essential to improve this cooperation in order to reap the full benefits of shared prosperity, stability and sustainability.

A historical trend of the intra-Commonwealth trade data shows that trade grew at an average rate of around 10% from 1995 till 2015. However, in the last five years, progress on trade front is uneven and well below the estimated growth target of intra-Commonwealth trade of US\$1 trillion by 2020, earmarked during Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in 2013 at Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Currently, major economies of the Commonwealth, like the UK, Canada, Australia, India and Singapore, are leading trade both in and out of the Commonwealth, while other countries are well behind in terms of trade and development. The Commonwealth's share of global trade was around 15% (\$ 3.73 trillion) in 2019, out of which the UK's exports alone were around 24%, while the top ten countries out of the 54 Commonwealth states contributed 94% in goods and 93% in services exports. This is very much in line with the globally used gravity model to analyze trade statistics, which states that *"trade between rich and developed countries grows at a faster pace than the developing or least developing countries"*.

The overall trade situation of the Commonwealth gives rise to two very pertinent questions:

(i) whether Commonwealth states will be able to enhance intra-Commonwealth trade to US\$2 trillion by 2030 as agreed by Commonwealth Heads of Government at CHOGM back in 2018?;

(ii) if trade continues in the same fashion as mentioned above, can the Commonwealth fulfill its dream of equitable and sustainable growth for all?

Undoubtedly, Commonwealth countries are extending collective efforts to improve the overall trade situation, but the achievement of targets by 2030 will be no less than a herculean feat. Nevertheless, intra-Commonwealth trade and connectivity may grow if Parliaments of the respective countries of the Commonwealth are actively and formally involved in the trade processes from negotiations till implementation within their defined boundaries. The Lisbon Treaty (2009)<sup>1</sup> significantly increased the power of the European Parliament in Europe's trade policy and a similar function/role may allow Commonwealth Parliaments to work side by side with their governments.

The National Assembly of Pakistan presents an interesting case of successfully leveraging parliamentary diplomacy to pave ways for expanding bilateral and multilateral engagements in respect of trade and connectivity.

The first example is Pakistan's trade with Afghanistan. In 2011, trade between the two countries was its peak (US \$ 2.5 billion) which reduced to less than US \$ 800 million in 2019. Besides security considerations and procedural delays, the absence of a designated dispute resolution mechanism and growing mistrust between two states resulted in that downfall. The decline in trade not only constrained the country's overall economic growth but also badly affected the livelihoods of people living in border areas as they were totally dependent on cross border trade activities for their sustenance.

Keeping these challenges in mind, the Speaker of the National Assembly decided to effectively use parliamentary tools (diplomacy and oversight) to mitigate the situation and unshackle the huge



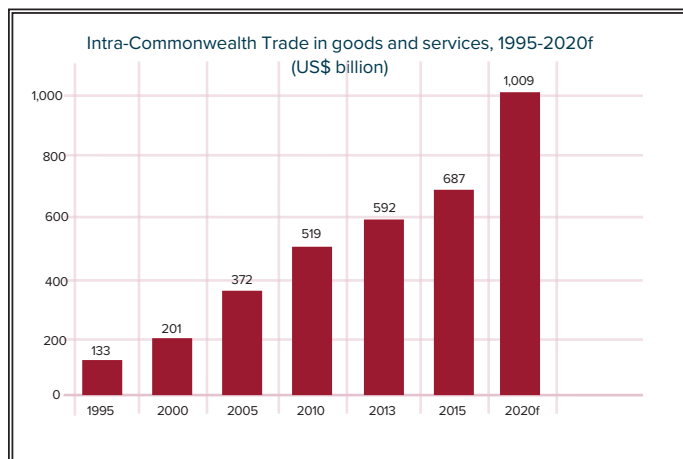
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Image credit: Shutterstock\_127403000

potential of trade and investment between the two countries. A Parliamentary Committee was constituted, which had cross-party representation; MNAs with expertise in international trade law and commerce were brought in along with representation from regions most affected by the dip in bilateral trade. Issues were identified and mapped. Afterwards, issue specific task forces in collaboration with all concerned stakeholders worked day and night to address as many problems as they could to ease out trade tensions. Moreover, bilateral visits and joint trade seminars, the establishment of effective channels besides the Executive, and the promotion of people-to-people contacts through parliamentary outreach helped enormously in streamlining the trade and connectivity related issues.



\*Source: Commonwealth Secretariat (calculations using data from UNCTAD Stat)

In less than a year, the Committee made massive gains. Some of them are reflected below:

1. Optimization of the transit trade arrangements, bringing down the time taken by an (Afghan Transit Trade) ATT container after leaving the port till crossing the Afghan border from 40 days to 3 days.
2. Stamping of goods of ATT was abolished.
3. 100% scanning of ATT at Border Crossing Points (BCPs) was brought down to under 20%.
4. A historic visa regime was put in place which is highly liberal and facilitative in nature. Today Pakistan issues over 200,000 visas monthly to the Afghan nationals.
5. The country is attempting to make the whole process of visa application and issuance as a dignified experience for Afghans.
6. New BCPs were opened and made operational. Pakistan plans to open up to 18 new BCPs.
7. Construction of state-of-the-art International Transit Trade Management System (ITTMS) has been started at Border Crossing Points (Torkham and Chaman).
8. In June 2020, the daily average of clearance of containers at the BCPs was under 100/day, today it has crossed 2,700/day.
9. The pedestrian movement was previously allowed for only two days in a week. Today it is seven days a week at Chaman and six days a week at every other BCP with Afghanistan.
10. Pakistan wishes to bring the cost of ATT by up to 80% in near future.

Apart from promoting bilateral trade, the National Assembly of Pakistan also seems to be at the forefront when it comes to





## COMMONWEALTH YOUTH VOICES: ROLE OF PARLIAMENTS IN ENHANCING TRADE AND CONNECTIVITY

boosting multilateral engagements for the promotion of trade and connectivity.

The second example is the establishment of the Parliamentary Assembly of Economic Cooperation Organization (PAECO) with the aim of providing parliamentary support to all socio-economic and political initiatives taken by the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO<sup>2</sup>) Member States to bring peace and prosperity in the region through enhanced connectivity and expanding economic cooperation.

The former Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan, Hon. Dr Fehmida Mirza first proposed the idea of the establishment of a parliamentary forum for the ECO but also contributed greatly in its materialisation in 2013. The National Assembly of Pakistan hosted two back-to-back conferences of PAECO in 2013 and 2020 respectively.

The forum has so far proven exceptional in taking forward the ECO agenda. Objective-specific Committees have been constituted to deliberate on issues of trade and the ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA); Communication and Connectivity; Women, Youth and Cultural Affairs. Hopefully, the forum will actively promote the outcomes of these Committees into actions so that the collective parliamentary efforts can benefit the public in the form of peace and prosperity.

The beauty of both these initiatives is that progress was achieved under the cardinal principle that Parliament is a recommendatory and oversight body, and it will not interfere in the affairs of the Executive. Owing to the joint efforts of Pakistan's Government and Parliament, a lot has been achieved in terms of boosting Pakistan's exports, which reached beyond US\$30 billion for the first time in the country's history. Moreover, efforts to expand trade destinations within and beyond the Commonwealth are also bringing plausible results. Hopefully, Pakistan will emerge as one of the top economies of the world with the friendliest trade policies for both foreign and local investors.

The lesson from these Pakistan-specific examples is simple - that both Governments and Parliaments should act in unison to promote cross border trade and connectivity. Pakistan has made enormous trade gains by leveraging parliamentary diplomacy. Other Commonwealth countries may also adopt such practices to accomplish their dreams of shared prosperity and sustainable development by overcoming constraints under each cluster (business to business, digital, physical, regulatory and supply-side connectivity) as reflected in Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda for Trade and Investment (CCA).<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, it is suggested that:

- A Commonwealth Heads of Parliament Meeting (CHOPM) may be convened regularly in addition to Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) and Commonwealth Trade Ministers' Meeting to divulge upon trade matters.
- Formalizing arrangements for the establishment of parliamentary contact groups for the promotion of trade and connectivity.
- Devising a mechanism for periodic review of trade and economic policies by Commonwealth Parliaments.
- Frequent exchange of ideas among MPs of Commonwealth Parliaments through holding quarterly meeting.
- Expanding the role of the Commonwealth Secretariat to administer the parliamentary initiatives taken for improvement in trade.

Lastly, Commonwealth countries need to emphasise more and more on the enhancing of the parliamentary role in bilateral and multilateral trade engagements. This will not only help greatly in achieving the Commonwealth's 2030 trade targets but also open up avenues of cooperation in all fields of mutual interest to build back a better, greener, equitable, prosperous and sustainable future for all.

### References:

<sup>1</sup> The Treaty of Lisbon is an international agreement that amends the two treaties which form the constitutional basis of the European Union. The Treaty of Lisbon, which was signed by the EU member states on 13 December 2007, entered into force on 1 December 2009.

<sup>2</sup> The Economic Cooperation Organization or ECO is an Asian political and economic intergovernmental organization of 10 states (Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) which was founded in 1985 in Tehran by the leaders of Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey. It provides a platform to discuss ways to improve development and promote trade and investment opportunities.

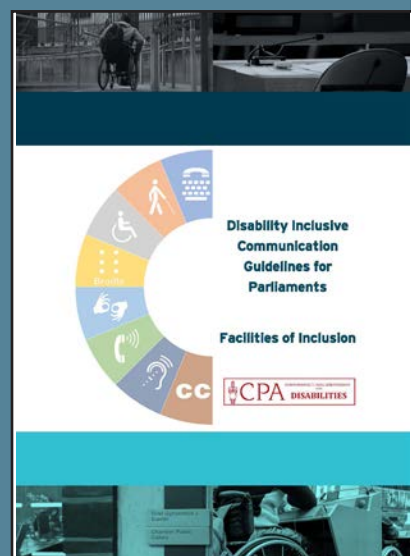
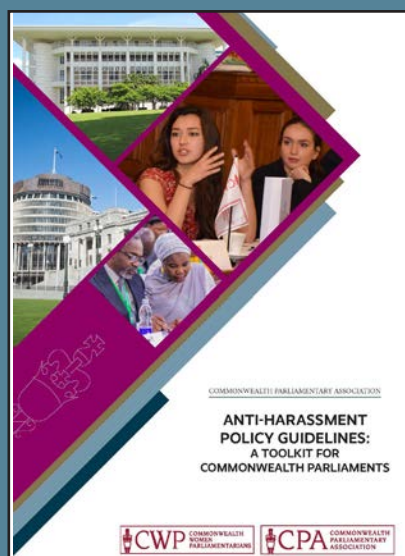
<sup>3</sup> Commonwealth Leaders committed themselves to the vision of increasing intra-Commonwealth trade to US\$2 Trillion by 2030 and expanding intra-Commonwealth investment. This is to be achieved through the Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda for Trade and Investment.

***“Commonwealth countries need to emphasise more and more on the enhancing of the parliamentary role in bilateral and multilateral trade engagements. This will not only help greatly in achieving the Commonwealth’s 2030 trade targets but also open up avenues of cooperation in all fields of mutual interest to build back a better, greener, equitable, prosperous and sustainable future for all.”***



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# COMMONWEALTH LEGISLATIVE NEWS

PARLIAMENTARY REPORTS AND THIRD READINGS FROM  
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# ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF THE CONFERENCE OF PRESIDING OFFICERS OF LEGISLATIVE BODIES IN INDIA

Parliamentary Report by Pulin Behari Bhutia, Director, Lok Sabha Secretariat, Parliament of India.

The Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India completed 100 years of its existence in September 2021. To commemorate its centennial year, the 82<sup>nd</sup> All India Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India (AIPOC) was organised from 16 to 19 November 2021 at Shimla, in the same location as the 1st Conference, which was held from 14 to 16 September 1921. At the time, the conference was then called the *Conference of the President of the Central Legislative Assembly and the Presidents and Deputy Presidents of the Legislative Councils in the Provinces*.

The first President of the Central Legislative Assembly of India, Sir Frederick Whyte, laid down the foundations of the conference in 1921. Over the years, the Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India has evolved into a forum, keeping pace with the challenges of democratic system and ever-changing profile of Indian Legislatures. The conference has provided a forum for the Presiding Officers of the Legislatures all over the country to discuss matters

relating to parliamentary practice and procedure and has thus gone a long way in establishing sound democratic conventions and uniform parliamentary procedure in India.

Initially, the object of the Conference was to secure appropriate co-ordination of parliamentary procedure throughout India. The aims, objects and scope of the conference also kept on widening with the democratisation of the Legislatures and evolution of responsible Government in the country.

The conferences have discussed and deliberated upon many issues of concern and importance from time to time from giving recognition to political parties and groups in the House, diversifying the Committee System, through to transparent and responsive governance and technological development.

The recommendations and decisions of the conference carry great weight with the Presiding Officers and by holding these conferences in different State capitals, it

has also promoted a sense of oneness and national unity.

The Prime Minister of India, **Hon. Shri Narendra Modi, MP** inaugurated the 82<sup>nd</sup> All India Presiding Officers Conference (AIPOC) and recognised its centennial year celebrations by joining the opening event virtually. The Prime Minister said that democracy is not just a system for India. Democracy is ingrained in our nature and part of life in India. He also stressed that “*we have to take the country to newer heights, achieve extraordinary goals in the years to come*”.

The Speaker of the Lok Sabha and Chairperson of the 82<sup>nd</sup> AIPOC, **Hon. Shri Om Birla, MP** addressed both the opening and closing ceremonies of the conference and said that the objective of the legislative institutions is to ensure active participation of the people and their representatives towards making progressive legislation so that positive socio-economic changes can be brought to the lives of the people. In his valedictory remarks, the Speaker emphasised that Legislatures must run smoothly in the interest of development and people's welfare. He said

that the increasing trend of indiscipline, disruption, and uproar in the Legislatures, have become a matter of grave concern, and must stop. He also urged Presiding Officers to hold discussions with Leaders of all political parties to ensure smooth conduct of the proceedings of the House.

Other guest speakers at the conference included: the Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh, **Hon. Shri Jairam Thakur**; the Deputy Chairperson of the Rajya Sabha, **Hon. Shri Harivansh**; the Speaker of the Himachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly, **Hon. Shri Vipin Singh Parmar**. Many Presiding Officers of State Legislatures of India, the Secretaries-General of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha; and Secretaries of many State Legislatures were also present.

The conference delegates deliberated on two main subjects - *Journey of a Century: Evaluation and the Way Forward*; and *Responsibility of Presiding Officers towards the Constitution, the House and the People*. The founding principle behind the Conference of Presiding Officers was to secure coordination among the Legislatures in India and to





establish sound democratic conventions across the country. With 100 years gone by, the event gave the opportunity to reflect upon the contributions of the conference in strengthening parliamentary practices and procedures. Similarly, the centennial year celebrations were a fitting occasion to remind and reiterate the responsibilities of the Presiding Officers to guide Legislatures to work towards achieving the vision and spirit enshrined in the Constitution, in particular the welfare of the people.

In the sidelines of the conference, an exhibition on 'Journey of All India Presiding Officers' Conference since 1921 to 2021' was organised by the Lok Sabha Secretariat in the Himachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly. The exhibition showcased photographs and archives from the one hundred year history of the Presiding Officers Conferences.

Prior to the 82<sup>nd</sup> conference, on 15 September 2021, the 81<sup>st</sup> All India Presiding Officers Conference was held virtually on the theme 'Role of Legislature in fostering effective and meaningful democracy'. The event coincided with the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the day that the 1<sup>st</sup> AIPOC was held in Shimla and also the same day as International Day of Democracy, which is celebrated on 15 September every year. Chairing the conference, the Speaker of Lok Sabha and Chairperson of AIPOC, Hon. Shri Om Birla, MP emphasised that the smooth functioning of Legislatures helps in strengthening democracy and suggested that Legislatures should function

effectively in public interest, in accordance with the rules and conventions, so that the people's hopes and aspirations are fulfilled and their trust on democratic institutions is enhanced.

The virtual AIPOC was attended by Presiding Officers from many legislative bodies in India and heard from many guest speakers including the President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Hon. Duarte Pacheco (Portugal); the Speaker of the Parliament of Guyana, Hon. Manzoor Nadir, MP; the Speaker of the Peoples' Majlis of The Maldives, Hon. Mohamed Nasheed, MP; the Speaker of the National Assembly of Namibia, Professor Peter Katjavivi, MP; the Speaker of the Parliament of Sri Lanka, Hon. Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena.

The virtual conference adopted the following resolution: 'Let us take a pledge on this historic occasion that together we will strengthen Indian democracy, make our democratic institutions more effective, work to strengthen democracy in the country and abroad and we will transform our political democracy into economic and social democracy.'

The Conference of Presiding Officers of Legislative Bodies in India is a significant body and plays a crucial role in chartering and paving the way for further strengthening of democracy in India. The deliberations and decisions in the conferences held so far have certainly played an important role in making democracy in India stronger and more resilient.



The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of the Parliament of India commemorated its centennial year with a two-day event on 4 and 5 December 2021.

One of the oldest Public Accounts Committees in the Commonwealth, the India PAC was constituted in 1921 under the provision of the *Government of India Act of 1919* as a result of the Montague Chelmsford Reforms. The First Chairperson of the PAC was the then Finance Member of the Governor General's Council; the maximum strength of the PAC was twelve and not less than two-thirds of its Members were elected by the non-official Members of the Assembly. During the twenty-five years of its existence up to the time that India attained Independence, the Committee came to be a major force in legislative control of the expenditure and exercised increasing influence on the actions of the Government despite limitation of its constitution and restricted authority.

The Public Accounts Committee continued to function under the old arrangement even after 1947, with the Finance Minister functioning as its Chairperson. After the Indian Constitution came into effect on 26 January 1950,

the Committee acquired its rightful place as a full-fledged Parliamentary Committee under the control of the Speaker with one of its Members elected as its Chairperson. The Minister of Finance ceased to be a Member of the Committee *vide* Rule 309(i) of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha.

Since 1954-55, the PAC consists of 22 Members, 15 Members from the Lok Sabha (House of People) who are elected by the House every year from amongst its Members according to the principle of proportional representation by means of single transferable vote and 7 Members of the Rajya Sabha (Council of States). The Chairperson of the Committee is appointed by the Speaker from amongst the Members of the Committee from the Lok Sabha. In 1967, a convention was set to appoint a Member of the Opposition party as Chairperson of the Committee and Shri M. R. Masani was the first Opposition Member to hold this office. Notably, distinguished personalities including R. Venkataraman, former President of India, and three former Prime Ministers *viz*, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, P. V. Narasimha Rao, and Inder Kumar Gujral,





# CENTENNIAL YEAR CELEBRATION OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE OF THE PARLIAMENT OF INDIA

Parliamentary Report by Pulin Behari Bhutia, Director, Lok Sabha Secretariat, Parliament of India.

among others have served as Chairpersons and Members of the Public Accounts Committee.

Since its inception, the PAC has remained committed to its duty ensuring citizen's welfare and plugging financial loopholes in the administration. With the changing times, the PAC in recent years has examined some of the key sectors of economy. Since the Committee became a Parliamentary Committee under the control of the Speaker from January 1950, it has presented more than 1,600 Reports which has significantly contributed to the development of India.

Over the past several years, the PAC has contributed significantly to furthering good governance and the Committee has also examined development programmes in the health, education, employment, and irrigation sectors, sustainable development, and environmental conservation.

Conferences of the Chairpersons of the PACs in India were held in the years 1955, 1959, 1966, 1971 (Golden Jubilee), 1978, 1983, 1986, 1997, 2001 and in 2015.

The President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind, inaugurated the centenary celebrations for the India Public Accounts Committee in the Central Hall of Parliament House in New Delhi on 4 December 2021 and also launched a special centenary publication and exhibition on the '*Journey of the Public Accounts Committee from 1921 to 2021*'. The President of India said that in a democracy, Parliamentary Committees, especially the

PAC, ensure the administrative accountability of the Executive towards the Legislature. Without them, a parliamentary democracy would be rendered incomplete. It is through the PAC that citizens keep a check on the government finances, the President said.

Speaking at both the inaugural and closing sessions of the event, the Speaker of the Lok Sabha and Chairperson of the CPA India Region, Hon. Shri Om Birla, MP said that in its journey of one hundred years, the Public Accounts Committee has made a significant contribution in maintaining the supremacy of the Legislature. Over past century, the relevance of the Public Accounts Committee has increased as have people's hopes and expectations for the Committee. Hailing the tradition of non-partisan functioning of PACs, Speaker Birla said that it should be the collective endeavour to not only maintain this tradition but to strengthen it further.

The current Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee, Hon. Shri Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, MP said that the Committee works on non-party lines with a spirit of dedication and service to the country. He also expressed satisfaction that the deliberations of the Public Accounts Committee will now work with more intent and sincerity in the coming years in delivering democracy and setting high benchmarks for democratic Legislatures.

The centenary celebrations were also attended by the Vice-President of India and Chairperson of the Rajya Sabha, Hon. Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu along with Government Ministers, Members of Parliament and Presiding Officers of State Legislatures.

During the two-day conference, four agenda themes on the working of the Public Accounts Committee were deliberated:

(i) Functioning of PAC in Present Times, Challenges and the Way Forward:

Realigning PAC's Approach; Collecting Information from Non-Governmental Sources; and, Assessing Outcomes of Programmes/Schemes/ Projects.

(ii) Implementation of Recommendations of PAC: Adherence to timelines and mechanism for strict compliance.

(iii) PAC as a Development Partner: Focusing on strengthening of systems and promoting good governance.

(iv) Impact of PAC: Ensuring citizens' right to due process and value for taxpayers' money.

The centennial celebrations of the Public Accounts Committee of India were a considerable success and the deliberations and discussions during this conference will go a long way to further improving the financial health of the country.







## THIRD READING REPORT

### The Election Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021

Electoral reform is an ongoing and continuous process. The Government of India had been receiving proposals for electoral reform from various quarters, from time to time, including the Election Commission of India (ECI). The ECI has been taking up proposals with the Government for streamlining the electoral process to enable it to conduct free and fair elections as mandated under the provisions of article 324 of the Constitution of India. Such proposals are mainly aimed at enhancing the efficiency of the process of the conduct of elections to the House of the People (Lok Sabha) and the State Legislative Assemblies, and also to ensure voters' confidence in the purity and integrity of the elections.

One serious problem affecting the proper electoral roll management is the issue of multiple enrolment of the same person at different places due to frequent shifting of residence by electors and getting enrolled in the new place without giving full details about the previous enrolment. The ECI was of the view that the linking of the electoral roll with the Aadhaar number system (used by the Unique Identification Authority of India) will curb the menace of multiple enrolments of the same person at different places since the electoral roll data system will instantly alert the existence of previous registrations whenever an elector applies for a new registration.

Accordingly, a Bill, namely, the Election Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021 was introduced in the Lok Sabha on 20 December 2021 with a view to amend the *Representation of the People Act, 1950* and the *Representation of the People Act, 1951* to provide *inter-alia*:

- (i) enabling the linking of electoral roll data with the Aadhaar ecosystem to curb the menace of multiple enrolments of the same person in different places.
- (ii) specifying the 1<sup>st</sup> day of January, 1<sup>st</sup> day of April, 1<sup>st</sup> day of July and 1<sup>st</sup> day of October in a calendar year as qualifying dates in relation to the preparation or revision of electoral rolls.

#### Debate:

While moving the motion for consideration of the Bill, Shri Kiren Rijju, Minister-in-

charge of the Bill explained the provisions of the amending Bill. However, due to disruptions in the House, only a few Members spoke on the Bill. The Bill was both supported and opposed. The main grounds of opposition were that it should not be passed in a hurry as it was introduced the same day.

Replying to the short debate, the Minister stated that the process of electoral reforms cannot be stopped as it is an ongoing process, and the Bill has been brought before the House after intensive discussion over the years. The Minister also informed Members that a Parliamentary Standing Committee had already had a thorough discussion on this issue and recommended unanimously for these amendments.

The Bill was passed by the Lok Sabha on 20 December 2021 and by Rajya Sabha on 21 December 2021. The Bill as passed by both Houses was assented to by the President of India on 29 December 2021.

### The Farm Laws Repeal Bill, 2021

Agriculture marketing plays an important role in providing the necessary services to producers and buyers. The Government of India has been making several interventions to support farmers, including small and marginal farmers, by providing quality seeds, credit, insurance, procurement and market support. To enable the farmers to sell their produce at higher prices and benefit from technological improvements, three farm laws, namely,

- (i) the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020.
  - (ii) the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020
  - (iii) the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020
- were enacted as a part of the Government's endeavour to improve the conditions of farmers including small and marginal farmers. These enactments:
- (a) provided freedom to the farmers to sell their produce to any buyer at any place of their choice to realise remunerative prices.
  - (b) created an ecosystem wherein processors, bulk buyers, organised retailers and exporters can directly engage with the farmers.

(c) created a facilitative framework for electronic trading to improve transparency and price discovery.

(d) provided a legal framework for farming contracts to protect the interest of the farmers, economically empower them and assure the price for their produce in advance.

As a group of farmers were protesting against these laws, the Government tried to sensitise the farmers on the importance of the farm laws and explained the merits through several meetings and other forums. The operation of these three farm laws had been stayed by the Supreme Court of India. During the COVID-19 period, the farmers worked hard to increase production and fulfill the needs of the nation. In addition, the country was also celebrating the 75<sup>th</sup> year of Independence - *Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav* – and one of its key focuses was to take everyone together on the path of inclusive growth and development. Therefore, the Government proposed that the three farm laws as abovementioned be repealed.

#### Debate:

Due to disruptions in the House, the debate on the Farm Laws Repeal Bill, 2021 could not take place. The Bill was put to vote immediately after Shri Narendra Singh Tomar, the Minister-in-charge of the Bill moved the motion for consideration.

The Bill, which was introduced on 29 November 2021 was passed by both Houses, the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, on the same day. The Bill, as passed by both Houses received the assent of the President of India on 30 November 2021.

### The Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Bill, 2020

Assisted reproductive technology (ART) has grown by leaps and bounds in the last few years. India has highest growth in the ART Centres and the number of ART cycles performed every year. Assisted Reproductive Technology, including in-vitro fertilization, has given hope to a multitude of persons suffering from infertility. But it has also introduced a plethora of legal, ethical and social issues.

The need to regulate the Assisted Reproductive Technology Services was felt mainly to protect the affected women and children from exploitation. The oocyte donor needed to be supported



by an insurance cover. Multiple embryo implantation needed to be regulated and children born through ART needed to be protected. The cryopreservation of sperm, oocytes and embryo by the ART also needed to be regulated.

The Departmentally-related Standing Committee of Health and Family Welfare at the Parliament of India, in its One Hundred and Second Report on Surrogacy Regulation Bill, 2016 recommended to introduce regulation for the Assisted Reproductive Technology Clinics and Banks. The 228<sup>th</sup> Law Commission of India Report also said an active legislative intervention was required to facilitate correct uses of the new technology, i.e., ART and the legalisation of surrogacy.

Accordingly, the Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Bill, 2020 was introduced in the Lok Sabha on 14 September 2020 to regulate the Assisted Reproductive Technology services in the country. The salient features of the Bill are as follows:

- a) to define certain terms like 'assisted reproductive technology', 'assisted reproductive technology clinic', 'commissioning couple', 'Woman', etc.
- b) to provide that the assisted reproductive technology services shall be available to a woman above the legal age of marriage and below the age of fifty years and a man above the legal age of marriage and below the age of fifty-five years.
- c) to provide that an oocyte donor shall be an 'ever-married' woman having at least one live child of her own with a minimum age of three years and to donate oocytes

only once in her life and not more than seven oocytes shall be retrieved from the oocyte donor.

d) to provide that the assisted reproductive technology clinics shall provide professional counselling to the commissioning couple and woman about all the implications and chances of success of the assisted reproductive technology procedures in the clinic.

e) to provide for offences and penalties for the contravention of its provisions.

During the debate, there were detailed deliberations in Parliament. The crux of views expressed both for and against the Bill and suggestions included:

- i. The law does not allow the LGBTQ community, live-in couples, same sex couples, transgender persons and single men to have access to this technology. A single mother cannot be a donor. Also, interfaith and inter-caste couples have been excluded.
- ii. In the State Board, instead of having an eminent medical practitioner, it would be appropriate if an eminent gynaecologist or obstetrician is included.
- iii. The Bill in the guise of stringent rules tries to project medical practitioners of assisted reproductive technology as willing and conscious defaulters. Proposing stringent criminal clauses and punishment provisions does not seem to be fair.
- iv. The Bill does little to protect the egg donor. Though there is provision for insurance, there is no monetary compensation provision for the loss of salary, time and effort. Also, there is no provision for the donor withdrawing her

consent at any point after giving her consent, as has been provided for the commissioning couples.

v. Confidentiality of data should be ensured.

vi. The Indian Council of Medical Research guidelines provide that any child born through ART should have the right to seek information about the donor except the individual identity. The Bill is silent on the right of the child to seek information on reaching adulthood.

vii. The Government should look into the matter of how this technology is made cost-effective so as to be within the reach of the poor.

viii. The Bill has a slew of advantages by providing safe and ethical ART methods, allowing doctors to test, thus preventing any genetic disease, and by establishing regulatory boards at national and state level.

ix. India is a hub for medical tourism. This Bill will offer numerous benefits such as economics of scale, promotion, branding and fair pricing, etc. combined with high quality of care and service.

**Dr Mansukh Mandaviya**, the Minister-in-charge of the Bill, replying to the debate thanked all the Members for their suggestions proffered during the course of discussion and assured the House that all the suggestions would be taken into consideration when framing the rules.

The Bill was passed by the Lok Sabha on 1 December 2021 and by Rajya Sabha on 8 December 2021. The Bill, as passed by both Houses, received the assent of the President of India on 18 December 2021.



# LEGISLATIVE NEWS FROM TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO PARLIAMENT

Parliamentary Report by Paras Ramoutar, Freelance Journalist based at the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago.

## TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO GOVERNMENT REJECTS OPPOSITION MOTION ON THE ECONOMY

*"The problem is not money. It's that the priorities of the government and the citizens are completely different. The budget is not a simple arithmetic exercise, but an exercise in development economics, used to improve the quality of life of the citizens. Once, the government got into power, it moved from serving the people to serving itself."*

Speaking was the Member of Parliament for Oropouche West and Shadow Minister of Finance, **Hon. Davendranath Tancoo, MP** on a motion condemning the government for its neglect of the economy and its failure to generate sustainable economic growth and development. Mr Tancoo, who presented a motion in the House of Representatives on 10 December 2021, pointed out that the People's National Movement had spent TT\$316 billion in the last six years, and planned to spend another TT\$14 billion.

However, Finance Minister, **Hon. Colm Imbert** rejected the motion outright and retorted that the Opposition had grossly exaggerated its figures, admitting that the unemployment rate had increased by 13.6% for the period 2019 to 2020. The Minister pointed out that in preparing the annual budget since 2015, his government had been in a collaborative process, which included taking suggestions from public sector departments, relevant stakeholder groups, civil society organisations, banks and private citizens, among others. In 2021, a

special effort had been made to facilitate as many private sector requests as possible, and many of the measures in the budget reflect these, including tax concessions to small and medium enterprises as well as companies involved in manufacturing, digitization, export and innovation.

The Shadow Minister of Finance replied that that the Government had promised many projects as far back as 2016, including a maritime maintenance facility, renewable energy, the full operationalization of the Tamana InTech Park, increased credit access for farmers and the establishment of a sports institute, however none of these projects had seen the light of day, despite a TT\$53 billion spend in 2015-16.

The motion was defeated by the government's majority.

## TOBAGO HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY CHANGES HANDS FOLLOWING RECENT ELECTIONS

Tobago, the sister island in the nation state of Trinidad and Tobago, has a new leadership following elections held on 6 December 2021, in which the ruling People's National Movement (PNP) was beaten by the People's Democratic Patriots (PDP) who captured 14 of the 15 seats available.

The previous elections had been held in January 2021, resulting in a tie of six seats for each party, resulting in deadlock in the Assembly who were unable to elect a Presiding Officer. As a result, the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, **Hon. Dr Keith Rowley, MP** proposed an amendment in Parliament which increased the number of seats in the Tobago House of Assembly from 12 to 15. There

followed a second election in the same year.

The island's new Chief Secretary **Farley Chavez Augustine** named his Ministerial team and assigned portfolios to newly elected Members, after the presentation of instruments of appointment to the Secretaries and Assistant Secretaries of the Tobago House of Assembly.

## TRINIDAD'S PRESIDENT CALLS ON NEW TOBAGO HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY TO KEEP THEIR PROMISES

Following two new elections in one year and an amendment to the *Elections and Boundaries Act* passed in the Trinidad and Tobago Parliament, the new Tobago House of Assembly held its inaugural sitting on 11 December 2021 which was addressed by the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Her Excellency **Paula Mae-Weekes**. In her address, she called on all the Members of the Assembly, led by its new Chief Secretary, **Farley Chavez Augustine**, to keep their promises. *"You have been chosen at a critical time in the history of Tobago, when infrastructural, economical and health challenges, among others, beset the island, bringing the tourism industry and small businesses to their knees and adding to the hardships suffered by Tobagonians. The people of Tobago were unequivocal, resolute and confident in deciding to whom they wish to give stewardship of their affairs and they have every right to expect that those stewards would be competent, trustworthy and ready, willing and able to put your shoulders to the plough. Of course, you were masked, and masks*

*have the effect of making identification, and recognition challenging, but they have a useful purpose, they force one to focus on the eyes and in yours, I saw the eagerness, hope and commitment which I interpret and continue to interpret to be an intention to enrich the lives of those who live and work in Tobago."*

## PROPERTY TAX BILL PASSED IN PARLIAMENT

Since 2009, the Property Tax Bill had been lingering in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. There were protests against the Bill by civic groups and the Opposition United National Congress, however the Government has recently re-introduced the Bill, which was passed by both Houses. However, the Bill had to watered down because of certain infringements to the human rights section of the Republic's Constitution.

## MINISTER DISMISSES FEAR OF ERECTILE DYSFUNCTION WITH COVID-19 VACCINATION

The Minister of Health, **Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh, MP** has dismissed fears among men in Trinidad and Tobago that the COVID-19 vaccine could make them dysfunctional. Speaking to the Senate in response to a question from Opposition Senator **Jearlean John**, the Minister noted that fears that the COVID-19 vaccination could render men unable to have an erection were false.

The Senate were investigating vaccine hesitancy amongst the population and looked at several reasons that may be behind this.

The Health Minister said that vaccine hesitancy *"has to do*





with socio-economic conditions (and) education levels (but) not to say only the uneducated. There are many educated persons – doctors, lawyers and medical professionals – who are vaccine-hesitant. You still have people who believe the vaccine is an invention of Bill Gates because he's planting a chip in you. There's still this talk about, 'The vaccines will make you magnetic. It alters your DNA.'"

The Health Minister said that many doctors agreed that the solution lies in one-on-one conversations with the vaccine-hesitant. He also noted that there was some geographic disparity in the take-up of the vaccine across Trinidad and Tobago, with some areas more effective than others.

## PARLIAMENT TO DEAL WITH ANTI-TERRORISM LEGISLATION

The Trinidad and Tobago Government laid a report in the House of Representatives on 24 January 2022 regarding anti-terrorism legislation that would deal with nationals who went abroad for terrorist training. According to the report, the Anti-Terrorism Bill 2021 remains a priority as the Government recognises the potential impact of nationals returning to and entering the jurisdiction from areas

of conflict, having endured exposure to violence. The threat is, therefore, exacerbated by the fact that people are entering may have gained terrorist military training and expertise overseas.

According to the report, the Trinidad and Tobago Government recognises its responsibilities in balancing the needs of individuals against the interests of national security. In so doing, the Government will ensure that all measures provided for within the legislation is subject to due process and judicial oversight.

Approximately 130 nationals from Trinidad and Tobago went to the Middle East and joined the ISS between 2012 and 2015.

## MINISTER COMPLAINS THAT 'DEAD PEOPLE' STILL CASHING GOVERNMENT CHEQUES

The Minister of Social Development and Family Services, Senator Donna Cox told the Senate during the Variation of Appropriation Bill that she was in full support of reviewing the programme with a view to 'weeding out' any untoward activity. In the process of review, officials had discovered several people who were still receiving government cheques for their deceased relatives.

Senator Cox pointed out that there have been some human errors with regard to citizens information, however "there are reports of ghosts clients on the system and we have found that there have been some dead persons whose cheques are still being cashed."

## MINISTRY OF HEALTH HIRES MORE HEALTH CARE WORKERS DUE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago employed some 1,329 more health workers, according to the Health Minister, Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh in response to a question from Opposition Senator Wade Mark. The Minister gave a breakdown as follows of the new workers: 387 doctors, 434 nurses, 150 nursing assistants, 98 hospital attendants, 109 patient care assistants, 32 patient escorts, 23 customer service representatives, 30 medical orderlies, 42 ward maids, 90 clerks and 37 cleaners.

## INDEPENDENT SENATOR QUERIES THE STATUS OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR JOB EVALUATION EXERCISE

Independent Senator Amrita Deonarine has queried the

status of the job evaluation exercise being undertaken across the public sector during a Senate debate. The Minister of Public Administration, Allyson West said that the project is carded for completion next year.

## TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO PRIME MINISTER HIGHLIGHTS THE PROBLEMS OF PROSTITUTION AND HUMAN-TRAFFICKING

The Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Hon. Dr Keith Rowley has told Parliament on 11 February 2022 that the increased demand for sex work and prostitution is being driven by a high rate of local consumption, especially in the boroughs of Chaguanas in central Trinidad.

The Prime Minister was speaking in response to a question from Opposition MP, Rodney Charles regarding illegal migration and went on to speak about the problems of sex-trafficking affecting the country. Dr Rowley also said other countries in the region – like Jamaica and Antigua and Barbuda – were seeing a decline in human-trafficking following government measures.

However, three Members of the Opposition - Vandana Mohit MP, Dinesh Rambally MP and Rishard Seecharan MP - objected to the Prime Minister labelling their central Chaguanas constituencies as 'a hotbed of prostitution' and accused him of singling out Venezuelan communities in the area. The Members also highlighted the Prime Minister's failure to appreciate that the Government's inability to deal with trafficking is resulting in a decline in country's global reputation with the international community.



## THIRD READING REPORT

### UGANDA

Third Reading Report by Katamba Mohammed,  
Parliament of Uganda

#### THIRD READING REPORT

##### **The Administration of Parliament (Amendment) Bill, 2021**

The Bill was intended to amend the *Administration of Parliament Act*, Cap. 257 to include the Deputy Speaker as a member of the Parliamentary Commission; to mandate the Parliamentary Commission to train Members of Parliament, staff of Parliament and local government councils; to align the Act with the *Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Authority Act, 2003*; to repeal the *Institute of Parliamentary Studies Act, 2020*; and for related matters.

The Bill, the first to be considered and approved by the 11<sup>th</sup> Parliament of Uganda, was a Private Member's Bill and was assented to by the President of Uganda.

##### **The Public Finance Management (Amendment) Bill, 2021**

This Bill was intended to amend the *Public Finance Management Act, 2015* to allow the Uganda National Oil Company to retain a portion of the proceeds from the sale of petroleum accruing from the Government's State participating interest in the Production Sharing Agreements to meet Government's and UNOC's financial obligations in the Tariff and Transportation Agreement (TTA), the Production Sharing Agreements (PSA) and the Joint Operating Agreements.

##### **The National Social Security Fund (Amendment) Bill, 2021**

This particular Bill was first considered and passed by the previous Parliament, which wound up before getting the Presidential assent. However, the President had rejected some sections of the Bill and returned it to the House for reconsideration. It was re-tabled and eventually passed. The President has since assented to the Act.

The Bill sought to provide for mid-term access to savings by Members before they reached 60 years as was provided by the parent Act. The amendment Bill was moved at a time when COVID-19 had ravaged economies and individuals looked at their savings for rescue. The Bill sought to allow mid-term access to contributions by Members who are 45 years and above and have contributed to the fund for at least 10 years. It also sought to expand social security coverage by providing for mandatory contributions by all workers, regardless of the size of the enterprise or number of employees and also allowing voluntary contributions to the fund.

##### **COVID-19 RULES AT THE UK PARLIAMENT**

The early winter season at Westminster was dominated by news of the Omicron variant of COVID-19 and the UK Government's response.

On 29 November 2021, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Rt Hon. Sajid Javid, MP, gave an update to the House of Commons in which he advised of the addition of a number of southern African countries to the travel 'red list', which required all entrants from those countries to undertake a two-week hotel quarantine period on

arrival into the UK. He also said that all travellers into the UK would be required to take a PCR test and self-isolate until a negative result had been received. Finally, he announced stricter self-isolation rules for contacts of positive Omicron cases, and the return of mandatory face coverings on public transport and in shops.

On 6 December 2021, he made a further statement to the House of Commons, in which he announced the addition of Nigeria to the red list and a requirement for all incoming travellers to take a further test prior







# COVID-19 RULES AND RESHUFFLES AT THE UK PARLIAMENT

Parliamentary Report by Simon Keal, Parliament of the United Kingdom.

to their departure for the UK. This was a reinstatement of a requirement that had been removed in the autumn.

On 13 December 2021, the Secretary of State provided a further update to the House of Commons in light of further emerging evidence about Omicron, including that it was the fastest-spreading variant to date and would shortly become the dominant variant in the capital city of London. He also reported that two COVID-19 vaccinations were insufficient to provide protection against symptomatic illness from the variant but that a third 'booster' dose would give stronger protection. Because of this, the Secretary of State announced an acceleration of the timetable for booster doses, with an intention for all adults to be offered a booster by the end of December. He also told the House that the Government would be implementing its so-called 'Plan B' for winter, which included a requirement for face coverings in all indoor public places, a requirement to work from home if possible, and the introduction of vaccination passports for nightclubs and large events. He said that *"after our successful reopening in the summer, it is not an update that I wanted to deliver. But the renewed threat of omicron means that we have more work to do to stay ahead of this virus"*.

Responding for the opposition Labour Party, the newly appointed Shadow Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, **Wes Streeting, MP**, told the House that Labour would *"give our full support"* to the acceleration of the booster programme, but criticised the Government for the shortage of testing kits, stating that he *"might be living on a different planet when he described the availability of testing"*.

Evidence subsequently emerged confirming that Omicron was considerably milder than previous variants, and therefore that ensuing hospitalisations and deaths from COVID-19 over the winter period would be much lower than forecast. The UK Government allowed the 'Plan B' measures to lapse on 26 January 2022.

The Secretary of State for Transport, **Rt Hon. Grant Shapps, MP**, also told the House of Commons that incoming vaccinated travellers would no longer be subject to any testing requirements.

On 21 February 2022, the UK Prime Minister, **Rt Hon. Boris Johnson, MP**, told the House of Commons that from 24 February there would no longer be a legal requirement to self-isolate, staff and students would not be required to undertake asymptomatic testing, and that free testing for the general public would end on 1 April.

In response, the Leader of the Opposition, **Rt Hon. Sir Keir Starmer, MP**, criticised the Government for removing free testing, and for removing sick pay for isolation, which he stated *"are decisions that will hit the lowest paid and the most insecure workers the hardest, including care workers, who got us through the toughest parts of the pandemic"*.

## RESTORATION AND RENEWAL

The 'restoration and renewal' programme, an initiative to comprehensively renovate the Palace of Westminster, saw further developments in recent weeks. The programme was initiated several years ago but, to date, there has yet to be any agreed framework for the works, including timeframes, costs or detailed plans. A sponsor body was established to support delivery of the programme in 2020 and in May 2020 undertook a strategic review on how the programme should be carried out. The review was published in March 2021 and proposed that *"by approaching the restoration in a new way, with a phased approach to the delivery of the works to the Palace of Westminster, the time Members and staff would spend in temporary accommodation could be kept to a minimum"*, but maintained the existing position that it would likely be necessary for there to be a 'full decant', with everyone leaving the estate while works took place.

The sponsor body was then commissioned to undertake a study on options for maintaining a continued presence on the Parliamentary estate during renovation works. Its ensuing report, finished in January 2022, set out costs of three options for renovation, costing between £7 and £22 billion, including a 'full decant' option and a 'stay put' option. The 'full decant' option was assessed to require 19-28 years and a cost of £7-13 billion, while the 'stay put' option was assessed to cost £11-22 billion and to last 46-76 years.

The report of the sponsor body was considered by the House of Commons Commission – the oversight body for the Commons – in January 2022. During the meeting, the Commission *"expressed concern about the cost and schedule presented in the initial assessment"*, and asked the Clerk to provide a paper considering next steps. Also in January, the House of Lords Commission considered the report and was critical of options for continued presence in the Palace of Westminster, noting *"the significant impact on the overall cost and schedule... as well as the significant on-site health and safety, fire and security risks, and disruption to parliamentary business, that would result. Accordingly, the Commission agreed not to endorse any further work on the continued presence options and agreed to intimate its position to the House of Commons Commission"*.

On 1 February 2022, the House of Commons Commission declared that the sponsor function should transfer to a new body that was formally accountable to both Houses of Parliament and their respective Commissions. Following this, the House of Lords Commission met on 8 February and agreed to replace the sponsor body but *"but not until further consideration had taken place and agreement had been reached on what should replace it, based on independent advice and assurance"*. As a result, the immediate future of the Restoration and Renewal Programme remains unclear.

## RESHUFFLE AND HOME AFFAIRS COMMITTEE ELECTION

The Prime Minister, **Rt Hon. Boris Johnson, MP**, undertook a minor 'reshuffle' of government Ministerial positions. This saw **Rt Hon. Jacob Rees-Mogg, MP**, who had served as Leader of the House of Commons since July 2019, appointed to a new post as Minister of State for Brexit Opportunities and Government Efficiency, a cabinet-level role. His replacement was **Rt Hon. Mark Spencer, MP**, who had previously served as Chief Whip since July 2019.

Unusually, the Prime Minister also appointed a Member of Parliament, **Rt Hon. Steve Barclay, MP**, as his new Downing





The Parliament of the United Kingdom in London.



Street Chief of Staff. The role had not previously been occupied by an elected politician.

The Leader of the Opposition, Rt Hon. Sir Keir Starmer, MP, also undertook a 'reshuffle' of his front bench team. Among other appointments, he gave the position of Shadow Secretary of State for Home Affairs to Rt Hon. Yvette Cooper, MP, a veteran of the Labour governments of 1997-2010, who had left the Labour front bench in 2015.

Cooper's appointment to this position meant that she was required to give up her existing role as Chair of the House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee, the Committee which scrutinises the work of the Home Office and its ministerial team. All House of Commons Committee Chairs are elected by MPs, and so Cooper's departure necessitated a fresh election. As the Committee Chair was allocated by agreement to the Labour Party, only Labour MPs were eligible to stand, and three did so: Dr Rupa Huq, MP, Dame Diana Johnson, MP, and Yasmin

Qureshi, MP. The vote, held according to a preferential system, saw Yasmin Qureshi eliminated in the first round with 74 votes; in the second round, Dame Diana Johnson was duly elected with 154 votes to 132 votes for Dr Rupa Huq. She will serve in the role until the end of the current Parliament.

### BY-ELECTIONS

A by-election was held for the constituency of Southend West on 3 February 2022, following the tragic murder of its incumbent MP Sir David Amess on 15 October 2021. Owing to the circumstances of the by-election, the main political parties agreed not to stand against the incumbent Conservative Party and so its candidate, Anna Firth, was expected to win comfortably. A number of smaller parties stood in the by-election but none secured more than 3% of the vote, with Anna Firth securing 12,792 votes, 86.1% of the total.

A by-election was also due to be held in the constituency of Birmingham Erdington on 3 March 2022, following the sudden death of its incumbent MP Jack Dromey on

7 January. Jack Dromey had held the seat since 2010 and the constituency had not elected an MP from the Conservative Party since 1936. In 2019, Labour won the seat by 3,601 votes, a majority of just over 10%. Both the Labour and Conservative Parties selected Birmingham City Councillors for the by-election, with the Conservative candidate Robert Alden having been a candidate at the past four elections. The Labour candidate was Paulette Hamilton.





## PARLIAMENTARY NEWS FROM FEDERAL PARLIAMENT OF CANADA

Parliamentary Report by Gabrielle de Billy Brown, Parliament of Canada.

### OPENING OF THE 44<sup>TH</sup> PARLIAMENT OF CANADA AND SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Following the 44<sup>th</sup> General Election of 21 September 2021, the first sitting of the 44<sup>th</sup> Parliament of Canada occurred on 22 November 2021. Hon. Anthony Rota, MP was re-elected as the Speaker of the House of Commons. He is assisted by Chris d'Entremont, MP as Deputy Speaker and by two Assistant Deputy Speakers: Carol Hughes, MP and Alexandra Mendès, MP.

On 23 November 2021, the Governor-General, Her Excellency Rt Hon. Mary Simon proceeded with the Speech from the Throne, entitled *'Building a resilient economy: a cleaner and healthier future for our kids'*. In addition to getting the COVID-19 pandemic under control, the Speech focused on a series of priorities for the government:

- Strengthening the healthcare system.

- Growing a more resilient economy.
- Addressing the climate emergency.
- Fighting for safer communities through gun control.
- Standing up for diversity and inclusion.
- Moving faster on the path to reconciliation.
- Standing up for a secure, just, and equitable world.

For the first time in the history of the country, the Speech from the Throne was read in English, French and Inuktitut, the Indigenous language spoken by Canadian Inuit and Her Excellency's mother tongue.

### CONTINUED RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

On 22 November 2021, the mandatory vaccination policy for all individuals entering the parliamentary precinct, including Parliamentarians, employees, and members

of the Press Gallery came into effect following a decision by the Board of Internal Economy. A question of privilege was raised by Blake Richards, MP and Claude DeBellefeuille, MP on 23 November, who argued that the decision went outside the Board's purview. In his ruling of 2 December 2021, the Speaker, Hon. Anthony Rota, MP, ruled that there was a prima facie question of privilege. The Speaker of the House of Commons indicated that the Board exceeded its powers and that only the House had the authority to impose such a condition on its Members.

On 25 November 2022, on division, the House of Commons adopted a motion governing the proceedings of the House until 23 June 2022. With this motion, it reestablished the hybrid system that had been put in place in September 2020, which consists of temporary modifications to the rules to permit the remote participation of Members, the virtual tabling of documents, and the use of a mobile voting application. It also confirmed the mandatory vaccination requirement for all individuals attending in-person events. These rules also apply to Committee meetings, as they did during the 43<sup>rd</sup> Parliament.

In addition, preventative measures regarding mandatory mask-wearing, social distancing, the suspension of public tours and visits, the moratorium on Committee travel, were prolonged until 28 February 2022 by the Board of Internal Economy. The Joint Interparliamentary Council, which supervises parliamentary associations, also announced a prolongation of its moratorium on travel until 31 March 2022.

### PARLIAMENTARY WORK

Two new House of Commons Parliamentary Committees were created for the 44<sup>th</sup> Parliament. First, following a motion adopted on 26 May 2021 which modified the Standing Orders of the House of Commons, a new Standing Committee on Science and Research was inaugurated at the beginning of the 44<sup>th</sup> Parliament. Its mandate includes *"all matters relating to science and research, including any reports of the Chief Science Advisor."*

Second, on 8 December 2021, the House agreed to a motion, on division, to create the Special Committee on Afghanistan. It is tasked with studying the government



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of Canada's plan regarding the Taliban's return to power and its "subsequent efforts to evacuate, or otherwise authorize entry to Canada of, Canadian citizens, and interpreters, contractors and other Afghans who had assisted the Canadian Armed Forces or other Canadian organisations."

### CHANGES IN THE SENATE

On 3 January 2022, Hon. Thanh Hai Ngo retired after having served in the Senate since 2012. He was the first Canadian of Vietnamese origin appointed to the Senate of Canada.

On 4 February 2022, Hon. Dennis Patterson, Senator for Nunavut, joined the Canadian Senators Group. He had previously been a member of the Conservative Party since his appointment to the Senate in 2009.

As of 14 February 2022, the standings in the Senate were: Independent Senators Group 42, Conservative Party 16, Progressive Senate Group 14, Canadian Senators Group 13 and non-affiliated 6. Fourteen seats were vacant.

### CHANGES IN PARTY LEADERSHIP

On 24 November 2021, the Green Party of Canada appointed Amita Kuttner as interim Leader. They had previously run for party leadership in 2020. The details of the leadership race, which according to party rules must occur within six months of the resignation of the party leader, have not yet been announced.

On 2 February 2022, Hon. Erin O'Toole, MP, Leader of the Conservative Party of Canada and Leader of the Opposition, was removed from his position following a vote by his caucus. He remains a Member of

Parliament. Hon. Candice Bergen, MP has been chosen as interim Leader until a new leadership contest is completed.

### LEGISLATION

As of 14 February 2022, four Bills have already received Royal Assent since the beginning of the 44<sup>th</sup> Parliament. One is Bill C-4: *An Act to amend the Criminal Code* (conversion therapy) which, as the title suggests, creates new criminal offences regarding the promotion or the forced participation in such therapy. It is also now illegal to remove a child from the country with the intention of having them attend conversion therapy elsewhere. Bill C-4 passed unanimously in the House of Commons and the Senate of Canada. It received Royal Assent on 8 December 2021.

Furthermore, Bill C-3: *An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Canada Labour Code* received Royal Assent on 17 December 2021. One of the purposes of the Bill is to make the intimidation of a healthcare professional or a person seeking healthcare a criminal offence. It also mandates ten sick days for employees in federally regulated workplaces. In addition, at Third Reading, a new clause was added to include an eight-week bereavement leave following the death of a child.

### EMERGENCY DEBATE

On 7 February 2022, an ongoing series of protest across the country regarding the public health measures in place to fight COVID-19 led the House of Commons to hold an emergency debate which lasted over five hours. On 2 February 2022, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health agreed to undertake a study on the emergency situation facing Canadians in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### IN MEMORIAM

On 15 January 2022, Alexa McDonough, former MP and former Leader of the New Democratic Party, passed away at the age of 77. Ms McDonough was first elected to the House of Commons in 1997 and remained in office until 2008. She was leader of her party from 1995 to 2003. Prior to joining federal politics, she was involved at the provincial level in Nova Scotia where, in 1980, she became the first woman in Canadian history to lead a major political party.

### THIRD READING REPORT

#### Bill 22, Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2021

Introduced on 18 October 2021, Bill 22 makes a number of amendments to the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. This included: updating provisions with respect to the disclosure of personal information outside Canada; adding a requirement for public bodies to have a privacy management program; establishing mandatory privacy breach reporting; increasing penalties for offences; adding Indigenous cultural protections and more information sharing with Indigenous peoples; and enabling public bodies to collect an application fee for information requests, with personal information requests and Indigenous governing entities not subject to fees.

Adam Olsen, MLA raised a question of privilege related to the Bill, questioning whether legislative amendments could be introduced on a statute which had been referred to the Special Committee to Review the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Hon. Raj Chouhan, MLA, Speaker of the British Columbia Legislative Assembly, noted that the determination of a prima facie breach of privilege required that the matter be raised at the earliest opportunity; since the Member's issue was raised two days after the Bill's introduction, the requirement had not been met. However, in his 21 October ruling, the Speaker stated that there are instances when the timing of the introduction of a Bill for the Legislative Assembly's consideration could be discourteous to the House or one of its Committees and therefore the timing of Bills should be carefully considered.

During the subsequent Second Reading debate, Hon. Lisa Beare, MLA, Minister of Citizens' Services, explained that the Bill brings British Columbia in line with the rest of Canada by updating data residency provisions so that public bodies can use modern tools while protecting personal information. The Bill also strengthens the safeguarding of information and promotes greater accountability in response to the increased demand for safe, convenient online services during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, provisions to enhance Indigenous cultural protection and information sharing align with the



Third Reading Report by Jesse Gordon, Legislative Assembly of British Columbia.

*Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, which was enacted in 2019.

Bruce Banman, MLA, Official Opposition Critic for Citizens' Services, called for the addition of provisions to safeguard data stored outside the province and prevent records from being destroyed prior to requests for information. He focused on the impact of the Bill's authorisation of fees for information requests, noting that the province's Information and Privacy Commissioner and numerous stakeholders opposed the introduction of fees, as they pose a significant barrier to access to public sector information.

The Leader of the Third Party, Sonia Furstenau, MLA, expressed concern about the legislative drafting process, indicating that the Bill did not incorporate the recommendations of a 2016 Parliamentary Committee which had reviewed the Act and that the Bill had been introduced before the above-noted Special Committee had completed its work. She also reiterated comments made by the Official Opposition about the negative impacts of a fee for requests for information.

On 25 November 2021, Bill 22 passed Third Reading.

### Bill 23, Forests Statutes Amendment Act, 2021

Introduced on 20 October 2021, Bill 23 amends the *Forest and Range Practices Act*, along with other statutes, to make changes to the government's role in forest health, control of timber, and response to environmental challenges. The Bill further adjusts forest land management practices to strengthen enforcement and facilitate collaboration with Indigenous stakeholders.

During the Second Reading debate, Hon. Katrine Conroy, MLA, Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development, outlined the Bill's objectives of helping secure jobs, supporting forest ecosystems, and fostering higher value from the forest sector. The Bill's provisions establish a forest landscape planning framework with ecosystem-based management, increases government control over forest roads to protect safety and the environment, and strengthens the ability to respond quickly to wildfires, including reforestation. In addition, the Bill promotes collaboration and shared decision-making with Indigenous stakeholders on the use of forest resources,

to align with the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*.

John Rustad, MLA, Official Opposition Critic for Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations, emphasised the need for forest management legislation to sustain the province's economy and employment. He recognised the importance of good planning and wildfire response such as reforestation, while noting a lack of detail on how the Bill's provisions will be implemented as well as the absence of clear dispute settlement frameworks for handling challenges such as environmental disputes and overlapping interests of Indigenous stakeholders. He suggested that uncertainty about the operation of the Bill's provisions would undermine investment and job creation across the forest sector.

Sonia Furstenau, MLA highlighted the climate emergency as the key challenge facing the province and the resulting need for forest management to protect and restore natural ecosystems, preserve biodiversity, increase carbon sequestration, and improve human and ecosystem reliance to climate impacts. She called for a paradigm shift to ensure addressing climate change is the top priority in forest management. She also indicated that forest management should be Indigenous led to ensure the preservation of ancient forests, noting their importance for maintaining biodiversity and mitigating climate change.

On 23 November 2021, Bill 23 passed Third Reading.

### Bill 28, Forest Amendment Act, 2021

Introduced on 15 November 2021, Bill 28 amends the *Forest Act* to provide tools that will enable government to alter the timber harvesting rights of existing forest tenure areas, provide compensation to tenure holders, and redistribute timber harvesting rights to First Nations and communities.

In opening the Second Reading debate on the Bill, Hon. Katrine Conroy outlined the government's vision for forestry, involving shared economic benefits for workers and communities, partnerships with Indigenous peoples in sustainable forest management, and the protection of the province's

oldest and most ancient trees. The Bill provides the government with a new legislative tool – called special purpose areas – to redistribute forest tenure to advance reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and share the benefits of forest resource use with small and mid-sized forest operations and First Nations license holders.

John Rustad, MLA expressed support for the goals of protecting forests and strengthening the role of Indigenous stakeholders in forest management and economic development. He emphasised the lack of consultation with industry, local communities, and Indigenous stakeholders on the Bill's significant changes to forest management. Noting that substantial areas of the province's ancient forests were already protected, he indicated that the changes to forest tenure would adversely affect businesses and workers, particularly those which rely on old growth wood to manufacture high value products.

Adam Olsen, MLA, representing the Third Party, stated that the existing forest management framework prioritises economic development over environmental stewardship, which has made the province more vulnerable to natural disasters such as wildfires and contributed to climate change. The framework has also limited the ability of Indigenous stakeholders to participate in forest sector decisions. He noted that the Bill provides for considerable steps to give government the tools to strengthen the role of Indigenous peoples in forest management and development, while acknowledging the impact that abrupt shifts in forest management have on communities across the province, and that a smooth transition requires investments to support those people early on.

On 25 November 2021, Bill 28 passed Third Reading.





## THIRD READING REPORT

### Births, Deaths, Marriages, and Relationships Registration Bill

The Births, Deaths, Marriages, and Relationships Registration Bill passed its Third Reading on 9 December 2021. This Bill re-enacts the majority of the eponymous 1995 Act, while making a few policy changes and removing some provisions that are considered redundant. The Bill intends to make accessing and changing information on official records more modern and accessible. The Bill also makes it easier for individuals to amend their birth certificate to reflect their gender, a change which previously had to go through the Family Court.

The Minister of Internal Affairs, Hon. Jan Tinetti, MP (Labour) opened the Third Reading by discussing the addition to the Bill that garnered significant public debate: *“For those people outside of this environment, this Bill was probably seen to be a bit bland. But when it came back from the Select Committee in August 2018, all hints of blandness had gone. In fact, it would be fair to say that it was a little bit more interesting than what it was before it went to the Select Committee. The then Select Committee had listened to the petition of Allyson Hamblett and agreed with the request that the Government introduce a self-identification process for amending registered sex without the requirement for medical treatment and without the need for a court process, and the Bill was amended accordingly.”*

Dr Elizabeth Kerekere, MP (Green) spoke in support of the Bill, but pointed out her dissatisfaction with how the self-ID process does not apply to those born overseas: *“I may or may not have tried the patience of the Select Committee by my persistent encouragement of the officials to come up with a solution for this, but I wholeheartedly thank those officials for the hard work that they did. I know they’re all personally invested in marking this work.”* Dr Kerekere also discussed her disappointment in the language used by some submitters: *“The hearings were something else. We would have hoped that all submitters presented with accurate information and a genuine care for the humanity of all New Zealanders. Sadly, that was not the case and we*

*acknowledge that many members of takatāpui [LGBTIQ], trans, intersex, and non-binary communities and your allies were infuriated and traumatised by the gaslighting, transphobia, and in particular transphobic misogyny that was expressed in those hearings.”*

Ian McKelvie, MP (National), who chaired the Select Committee for the Bill, discussed his party’s support for the Bill, but expressed his own concerns regarding the submissions process: *“I was uncomfortable with the manner in which the live streaming of the Select Committee proceedings led to some submitters being very unfairly attacked on social media without either the will or in fact the ability to reply or any protection from Parliament. And if we’re to continue to use live streaming and social media to get our proceedings out there, we’re going to have to put suitable protections in place or we will lose the public’s confidence and we will no longer have people willing to submit to Parliament, particularly on difficult pieces of legislation.”*

Nicola Grigg, MP (National) dismissed some of the concerns that had been raised during submissions: *“the fears some hold that their freedoms will be removed and that they’ll be affected and the rights they hold will be affected - I believe that as we’ve seen in the past, these fears will be unfounded ... This is a shift in the right direction.”*

Dr James McDowall, MP (ACT Party) explained why his party also supported the Bill: *“I think ultimately this Bill is about advancing liberalism and actually*

*reducing Government interference in people’s lives by enabling choice and by making things just a bit simpler for those that need it. There is also the ancillary stuff. It modernises systems and practices, and people have spoken about the digital access being improved, which is desperately needed.”*

The Bill passed its Third Reading unanimously upon a voice vote, and received Royal Assent on 15 December 2021.

### Resource Management Act (Enabling Housing Supply and Other Matters) Amendment Bill

After a fast-paced and eventful process, The Resource Management (Enabling Housing Supply and Other Matters) Bill passed its Third Reading on 14 December 2021. The Bill, which was drafted in response to an ongoing housing affordability crisis, intends to increase housing supply by requiring local councils to set more permissive land use regulations in urban areas. It also introduces medium density standards, under which landowners can build three homes of up to three storeys each on most sites without a resource consent, for a maximum site coverage of 50%.

The Minister in charge of the Bill, Hon. David Parker, MP (Labour), opened the debate, saying: *“This Bill introduces the medium-density residential standards, which will mean that more people in our cities will have more housing choices - not being forced to do anything; they’ll have choices - at more price points ...*





*The Bill makes things easier and cheaper for councils and their communities by streaming this part of the council plan-making process, and so will, in turn, make sure that the houses that we need can be built sooner."*

New Zealand's largest Opposition party, the National Party, also supported the Bill. Praising its bipartisan nature, Nicola Willis, MP (National) said the Bill had been significantly improved since its First Reading: *"We believe that only by building more houses and building more affordable houses in the places where people want to live, will we be able to truly restore the idea of an egalitarian property-owning democracy."*

The Green Party acknowledged *"an incredibly constructive process by the Environment Committee and by the Parliament in improving the Bill."* Hon. Eugenie Sage, MP (Green) supported the Bill but said it needed to go further to support environmental standards: *"The Green Party believes this Bill was a bit of a lost opportunity. We tried really hard to get things like Homestar standards included in the density standards."*

The ACT Party was the only party to oppose the Bill. Brooke van Velden, MP (ACT) said it was rushed and addressed the wrong issues: *"The first is that it focuses on changing our planning laws when we know it's not the planning laws that are the issue. It is infrastructure financing and funding. The second reason that we have for opposing this is because of the process that came about while we're passing this law ... Rushed law seldom leads to good law, and that's why we oppose it."*

More than 50 pages' worth of changes were made during the legislative process, including reworked design standards and improved capacity for local authorities to set region-specific standards. The Select Committee had about five weeks to consider a highly technical Bill with lots of public interest. There were nearly 1,000 submissions and 183 oral submissions made, including one day of parallel Subcommittees.

Furthermore, while the Committee had the authority to meet while the House was sitting, the Chair opted not to use this power as her party needed to be in the House. This meant there was no time for a revised-tracked (RT) version as there normally would be. The Parliamentary

Counsel Office said it only had time to draft minor amendments, whereas the Committee had recommended several pages' worth of substantive changes.

To work within this timeframe, the Select Committee relied on an innovative process enabled by changes to the Standing Orders in 2020. Instead of publishing its advice through an RT version, the Committee created a narrative report and made recommendations through an RT Supplementary Order Paper (SOP) at the Committee of the whole House stage, asking the responsible Ministers to provide a draft version of such an SOP in advance.

The Bill passed its Third Reading with 110 votes to 10. It received the Royal Assent on 20 December 2021.

### Drug and Substance Checking Legislation Bill (No 2)

On 23 November 2021, the Drug and Substance Checking Legislation Bill (No 2), an omnibus Bill, passed its Third Reading with support from the Labour Party, the Green Party, ACT Party, and Te Paati Māori. It was opposed by the National Party. The Bill amends three Acts - the *Misuse of Drugs Act 1975*, the *Psychoactive Substances Act 2013*, and the *Medicines Act 1981* - and replaces the 'stopgap' *Drug and Substance Checking Legislation Act 2020*. The Bill aims to minimise harm from controlled drugs and psychoactive substances by allowing services that check the composition of drugs and substances to operate legally in New Zealand.

The Member in charge of the Bill, the Minister of Health, Hon. Andrew Little, MP (Labour) explained: *"This is a drug harm reduction Bill. It is about people being kept safe. People who might use substances - even illicit substances - and they're not sure of the true nature of that substance will now have the opportunity to have that substance checked without putting themselves at legal risk, without putting the host of the event they're at at legal risk, and without putting any drug-testing service at legal risk."* He added: *"When we set this up on a temporary basis about a year ago, it was very much targeted at the summer music festival sort of market and the orientation week sort of market, but the reality is that these services needed to be available to some members of the community who are users of substances,*

*but who are not attenders of music festivals and orientation weeks."*

Hon. Mark Mitchell, MP (National) spoke in opposition to the Bill: *"The signal that we should be sending from this Parliament and this House is exactly that message: you shouldn't be taking drugs, your friends shouldn't be taking drugs."* He added: *"what we should be doing as a Parliament is we should be sending a very clear and succinct message in saying these drugs are illegal, they are harmful, they will kill, and you should not be taking them."*

The Deputy Chairperson of the Health Committee, Dr Tracey McLellan, MP (Labour) countered: *"Although we absolutely do not condone recreational drug use, it would be completely naive to think that this broad reopening isn't going to result in young people, in particular, taking these drugs."* She continued: *"All of the research shows that when it comes to recreational drug use, a move towards a health-based approach, providing information - which this Bill makes explicit; the need to be able to provide people with the correct information and offering support - is the key to actual harm reduction."*

Simeon Brown, MP (National) believed that: *"If this legislation was really about protecting young people, it would be sending a much clearer message and it would at least - at least - be saying if there was a contaminant in those substances, those drugs should be confiscated."*

Dr Elizabeth Kerekere, MP (Green) explained the Green Party's support for the Bill: *"this is a world-class framework for drug checking. It needs to be applied to more places than festivals. We hope to see this compassionate, non-judgmental nature applied in other circumstances, especially where there are young people and regardless of where they come from or whether they can afford to go to these festivals or not."*

Brooke Van Velden, MP (ACT) also spoke in support of the legislation: *"This Bill is about allowing volunteers to help New Zealanders keep other New Zealanders safe. For that reason, we commend it to the House."*

The Drug and Substance Checking Legislation Bill (No 2) passed its Third Reading after a party vote of 87 to 33. It received Royal Assent on 25 November 2021.





# NEW SPEAKER ELECTED AT AUSTRALIAN FEDERAL PARLIAMENT

Parliamentary Report by Fleur Hall, Parliament of Australia.

## NEW SPEAKER OF THE AUSTRALIAN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

On 23 November 2021, Hon. Andrew Wallace, MP (Liberal National Party of Queensland) was elected as 33<sup>rd</sup> Speaker of the Australian House of Representatives, following the resignation earlier that day of Hon. Tony Smith, MP.

Mr Smith had announced on 28 October 2022, his intention to resign the Speakership, telling the House that he wished to spend the remainder of his term as a Parliamentarian on the backbench, focusing entirely on his electorate of Casey, in Melbourne, Victoria. After presiding over Question Time for the final time on 22 November 2022, the then Speaker made a statement of thanks, which was followed by statements from the Prime Minister, Hon. Scott Morrison, MP (Liberal Party of Australia); the Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Anthony Albanese, MP (Australian Labor Party); the Deputy Prime Minister, Hon. Barnaby Joyce, MP (The Nationals); the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Richard Marles, MP (Australian Labor Party); the Leader of the House, Hon. Peter Dutton, MP (Liberal National Party of Queensland); the Manager of Opposition Business, Hon. Tony Burke, MP (Australian Labor Party); and the Leader of the Australian Greens, Mr Adam Bandt, MP.

When the House met at noon the next day, the election of the new Speaker took place as the first item of business after the Clerk, pursuant to Standing Orders, read a communication from the Governor-General, His Excellency General the Honourable David Hurley, AC DSC (Retd), informing the

House that he had accepted Mr Smith's resignation. The Member for Fisher, Mr Andrew Wallace, MP, and the Member for McEwen, Mr Rob Mitchell, MP (Australian Labor Party), were nominated for the position and both accepted their nomination.

The Member for Berowra, Mr Julian Leeser, MP (Liberal Party of Australia), who nominated Mr Wallace, told the House that *"the Member for Fisher... was a trainee priest who became a carpenter and then a builder for 10 years before going to the bar and becoming Queensland's leading construction lawyer, practising for 16 years at the bar."* Describing Mr Wallace as a *"deep thinker and a true Parliamentarian"*, Mr Leeser said that since his election to Parliament in 2016, Mr Wallace *"has been among the most frequent contributors to debates"* and that he was an *"experienced Committee Chair."* Mr Leeser added that Mr Wallace *"has been a Member of the Speaker's panel for the last two years, and in this role, he has demonstrated a good knowledge of the Standing Orders and has developed a reputation for being firm but fair."*

Observing that the Member for Casey, Mr Smith, had set *"a very high standard as Speaker of the House"*, Mr Leeser said that it was his belief that Mr Wallace would *"serve this House with dignity, with good humour and with distinction in accordance with the traditions fostered by the Member for Casey."*

Seconding the motion, the Member for Moncrieff, Ms Angie Bell, MP (Liberal National Party of Queensland), told the House that her fellow Queenslander was *"a good*

*man...well respected across the Chamber and eminently qualified and experienced"* as well as being *"calm, measured, respectful and intelligent."*

The Member for Lalor, Ms Joanne Ryan, MP (Australian Labor Party), who nominated Mr Mitchell, told the House that *"the Member for McEwen would be the best person to follow the Member for Casey."* Ms Ryan described Mr Mitchell as *"a fine local Member [with] a breadth of experience of the Australian life"* and observed that he *"has been a Member of the Speaker's panel since 2012 [and] the Second Deputy Speaker for the entire term of this government."*

Seconding the motion, the Member for Cooper, Ms Ged Kearney, MP (Australian Labor Party), said that upon her arrival in the Parliament in 2018, *"it became clear very early on that the Member for McEwen had an intimate knowledge of the rules of this House and how it operated."* She added that Mr Mitchell *"is a good family man [and] he has enduring patience and an amazing sense of humour."*

A ballot was then held and the Clerk announced that Mr Wallace had received 70 votes and Mr Mitchell had received 59 votes. Mr Wallace was declared elected and was escorted to the Chair. He thanked the House for the honour and took the Chair. Statements of congratulations were made by the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition.

Paying tribute to his predecessor, the new Speaker said that the Member for Casey *"is acknowledged by all of us as one of the very best to have ever taken this Chair."* The Speaker said the responsibilities that had been

conferred on him *"have a history that stretches back some eight centuries"* but that *"across all of those years, the heart of what it means to be a Speaker has not changed."* The Speaker said that in pursuit of those *"ancient duties"* he would *"respect the independence of the Chair and seek to enforce the Standing Orders without fear or favour."* The Speaker concluded by telling Members that *"today... the responsibility lies more heavily than ever on us as Parliamentarians to embody the very best of political debate. It is up to us to show that, whatever the global crisis or the political pressures that are brought to bear, we can discuss the challenges we face rationally and calmly."*

## ADDRESS OF CONGRATULATION TO HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN – PLATINUM JUBILEE

On 8 February 2022, the first sitting day of the new year, the Prime Minister, Hon. Scott Morrison, MP moved in the House of Representatives that an address of congratulation be presented to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. The motion expressed *"our warm congratulations at this time of celebration of the Platinum Jubilee of your accession to the Throne [and] our respect and regard for the dedication you have displayed in the service of the Commonwealth and your deep and abiding commitment to Australia and her people."* The Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition both spoke to the motion. Debate was then adjourned and the order of the day referred to the Federation Chamber for debate. On 9 February 2022, the Speaker



Third Reading Report by Fleur Hall, Parliament of Australia.

### THIRD READING REPORT

#### Territories Stolen Generations Redress Scheme (Facilitation) Bill 2021

This Bill was introduced with in the Australian House of Representatives on 26 August 2021. It passed the Australian Senate on 2 December and was assented to on 7 December.

The Bill facilitates aspects of the Territories Stolen Redress Scheme ('the Scheme'), which provides redress for stolen generations survivors who were forcibly removed as children from their families in the Northern Territory or the Australian Capital Territory prior to their respective self-government, or from the Jervis Bay Territory. The Scheme provides to eligible participants, *inter alia*, a one-off redress payment in recognition of the harm caused by forced removal.

The Bill ensures that recipients of a payment are not adversely affected by it, by providing that:

- the receipt of a redress payment does not affect any person's eligibility for any pension, benefit, payment or service under a law of the Commonwealth of Australia or require the repayment of an amount to the Commonwealth of Australia; and
- the redress payment cannot be transferred to another person, either by voluntary act or by operation of law.

The Minister for Indigenous Australians, Hon. Ken Wyatt, MP (Liberal Party of Australia) told the House that the Bill "ensures that the [redress] payment is absolutely inalienable, which...means the Commonwealth [of Australia] cannot set off the amount of the redress payment...against amounts owing to the Commonwealth [of Australia] by the participant." The Minister added that the Bill would "support the survivor-focused and trauma-informed approach of the Scheme [and] support intergenerational healing." The Minister added "with

many stolen generations survivors being of an advanced aged and suffering life-threatening illnesses, the imperative to act now has been brought into sharp focus."

The Member for Barton, Hon. Linda Burney, MP (Australian Labor Party), speaking in support of the Bill, told the House that it "is long overdue, and Labor hopes to see a speedy and effective implementation of this Scheme." Ms Burney, noting that "the anguish, the pain, the dislocation, the loss and grief are all alive today", added that "I'm sure that had my circumstances not been as they were when my great aunt and uncle took me and raised me, I could well have ended up - along with thousands of other children - as part of the stolen generations."

Recalling the day that the Apology to the Stolen Generations was delivered in 2008, Ms Burney said that she had witnessed "one of the most generous things I have ever seen in my life...an old woman stood up and handed to Minister Macklin and to Prime Minister Rudd a glass coolamon. A coolamon is what we carried our babies in. It was just remarkable. It was gracious, and it was truly a healing moment."

Concluding, Ms Burney said: "I implore the Minister, whom I know understands; make sure you work with stolen generations organisations, make sure information about the Scheme is available in language, make sure community organisations and health services are informed, make sure First Nations media is used, make sure that face-to-face help is available and make sure those who are making claims cannot be misled or ripped off. Accessing the scheme will be painful for many people, and we do not need to make it any harder than it already is."

The Member for Melbourne, Mr Adam Bandt, MP (Australian Greens), while acknowledging the Bill as a "welcome step towards providing redress", said that it was "quite basic and leave[s] a lot of detail to the regulations" and that, therefore, the Greens would be "watching closely..."

reported the return of the motion, with Members rising in their places to signify their agreement.

A similar motion was moved on 8 February 2022 in the Senate by the Minister for Finance and Leader of the Government in the Senate, Senator Hon. Simon Birmingham (Liberal Party of Australia). Several Senators spoke to the motion, including the President of the Senate, who observed that "we join in commemorating this moment with the community of 54 nations that we know today as the Commonwealth." The motion was then agreed to.

#### NEW GOVERNORS FOR QUEENSLAND AND SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Dr Jeannette Young, PSM was sworn in as the 27<sup>th</sup> Governor of Queensland on 1 November 2021, succeeding Hon. Paul de Jersey, AC CVO, who had served in the role since July 2014. Prior to her appointment, Her Excellency was for sixteen years the Chief Health Officer for Queensland.

At her swearing-in, Her Excellency thanked the Premier of Queensland, Hon. Anastacia Palaszczuk, MP (Australian Labor Party), and the Leader of the Opposition, Mr David Crisafulli, MP (Liberal National Party). Her Excellency pledged "to be a Governor for all of Queensland, and to travel widely throughout the State, especially to Indigenous communities."

Her Excellency is the fourth woman to serve in the role and her appointment makes Queensland the first State

in Australia to have, at the same time, the positions of Premier, Chief Justice (The Honourable Chief Justice Catherine Holmes, AC) and Governor all occupied by women.

On 7 October 2021, Ms Frances Adamson, AC was sworn in as the 36<sup>th</sup> Governor of South Australia, succeeding Hon. Hieu Van Le, AC. Prior to her appointment, Her Excellency was the head of Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. She has also been International adviser to the Prime Minister and Chief of Staff to the Foreign Minister and Defence Minister, and was Australia's ambassador to China from 2011 to 2015.

At her swearing-in, Her Excellency thanked the Premier of South Australia, Hon. Steven Marshall, MP (Liberal Party), and the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Peter Malinauskas, MP (Australian Labor Party). Her Excellency, who said she has been proud all her life to call herself a sixth generation South Australian, pledged "to uphold South Australia's Constitution and safeguard the institutions which are vital to its sovereignty, democracy and prosperity and which give expression to our values." Her Excellency said that she wanted Government House "to be a place where all South Australians feel welcome, including those who have to travel to be here. For the Kaurna people, after all, the banks of Karrawirra Parri have been a place of coming together for many tens of thousands of years."



*because we've seen in the past, in other areas, a gap between what gets announced and what turns up in the regulations."*

In the Australian Senate, Senator Malarndirri McCarthy (Australian Labor Party), said that *"in the Northern Territory, the exact number of children who were taken away may never be known, but... there are hundreds of families that have been affected."* She said that *"the Scheme we have is thanks to the dedication and tenacity of advocates, community groups and survivors themselves"* and she implored the government to *"work closely with the community organisations and elders in the decision-making process all the way through"* including through the provision of *"information in languages early and on and throughout the rollout."*

Summing up, the Assistant Minister to the Attorney-General and Assistant Minister for Women and Assistant Minister for Industrial Relations, Senator Hon. Amanda Stoker (Liberal Party of Australia) thanked Senators for their *"sincere and heartfelt contributions"* and, acknowledging the *"work of that the members of the stolen generations and their families have done in the past and that they continue to do to bring this Scheme into effect"*, said that the Senate *"should be honoured to be involved in this important and historic moment."*

### Counter-Terrorism Legislation Amendment (High Risk Terrorist Offenders) Act 2021

This Bill was introduced to the House of Representatives on 3 September 2020. It was referred on 1 October 2020 to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security (PJCIS), and the Committee's report was tabled on 16 September 2021. The Bill passed the Senate on 22 November 2021 and was assented to on 8 December 2021. The Bill amends the:

- *Criminal Code Act 1995* to provide for a State or Territory Supreme Court to make an extended supervision order (ESO) as an alternative to a continuing detention order, which may impose conditions on high-risk terrorist offenders.
- *National Security Information (Criminal and Civil Proceedings) Act 2004* to provide for the availability of court-only evidence in ESO proceedings.
- *Crimes Act 1914*, *Telecommunications (Interception and Access) Act 1979* and *Surveillance Devices Act 2004* to extend the application of the existing control

order monitoring warrant provisions to the monitoring of ESOs.

- *Australian Security Intelligence Organisation Act 1979* and *Administrative Decisions (Judicial Review) Act 1977* to make consequential amendments.
- *Telecommunications (Interception and Access) Act 1979* to make amendments contingent on the commencement of the *Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (International Production Orders) Act 2020*.

The then Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations, Hon. Christian Porter, MP (Liberal Party of Australia) told House that the Bill *"will establish an extended supervision order scheme to ensure that high-risk terrorist offenders who are released into the community at the end of their custodial sentences are subject to close supervision in proportion to the level of risk they pose to community safety."* Mr Porter explained that the ESO scheme *"has been designed to allow the court to tailor orders to address the particular risk posed by each terrorist offender. The offender must comply with the conditions set by the court, and offences will apply to breaches of those conditions. The maximum duration of an extended supervision order is three years, but subsequent orders may be made if the offender continues to pose an unacceptable risk to the community."*

Mr Porter said that *"as we have learnt from the appalling 2019 London Bridge and 2020 Streatham attacks in the UK, convicted terrorist offenders can pose a very real threat to the community at the conclusion of their sentence."* He observed that with several convicted offenders due to complete their custodial sentences of imprisonment in the next five years, *"the need for effective risk management measures to keep our community safe is greater than ever."*

Informing the House of her support for the Bill, the Member for Cowan, Dr Anne Aly, MP (Australian Labor Party) described it as *"an essential addition to the toolbox of agencies [to] ensure community safety from terrorism, especially where there is no guarantee or absolute confidence that an individual has fully deradicalised and has the supports in place to remain deradicalised."* Dr Aly observed that *"all too often we have seen terrorist attacks being carried out by individuals who have already served a sentence for a terrorist offence...or who are known to security agencies"* and she described how the perpetrator of the terrorist

attack in Vienna in November 2020 had been released from prison *"despite [having been] assessed as a high-risk terrorist offender and despite [having been] assessed as holding ideologies...and intent to commit a terrorist act."* Dr Aly noted that one of the PJCIS recommendations, which she was pleased to see that the government had accepted, was to include an independent review of risk assessment tools that evaluate the risk of re-offending for terrorist actors.

The Member for Cowper, Mr Pat Conaghan, MP (The Nationals), said that *"as Australians we need to appreciate that the peaceful freedoms we currently enjoy are not given; they are hard fought and hard won and have been actively and... successfully protected in recent years."* Describing the measures as *"proportionate and necessary"*, Mr Conaghan said that *"if we put into context the [Bill's] amendments, for the 13 convicted offenders due to be released up until 2025 they are not...harsh or heavy-handed restrictions, particularly when we look at what's at stake - the safety of our nation and the safety of our citizens."*

In the Senate, Senator Lidia Thorpe (Australian Greens), describing the legislation as *"highly flawed"*, urged her fellow Senators *"not to consider this law on its own, but in the broader ecosystem in which it lives"*, arguing that *"this Parliament has passed over 70 counter-terrorism laws in the last 20 years. Many of these laws create really broad, extensive and often overlapping powers."*

Senator Hon. Kristina Keneally (Australian Labor Party) told the Senate that the Bill had been *"strengthened and improved"* by the PJCIS recommendations that had been agreed to by the government, and that the PJCIS report was *"bipartisan [and] done in the national interest."* Senator Keneally thanked all Committee Members for their *"diligence"* and the Chair, Senator James Paterson (Liberal Party of Australia), for his *"considerable work on this legislation"* since his appointment.

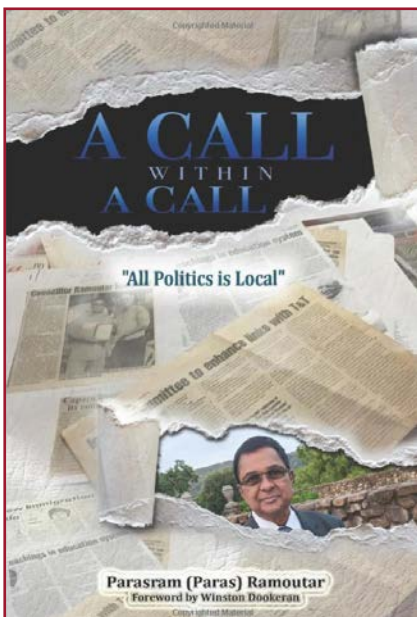
Summing up, the Minister for Sport and Minister for Senior Australians and Aged Care Services, Senator Hon. Richard Colbeck (Liberal Party of Australia) thanked Senators for their contributions, and the PJCIS for its consideration, saying that *"this Bill reflects the government's ongoing commitment to protecting the Australian community from terrorists and ensuring our law enforcement and security agencies have the powers they need to respond to the evolving threat of terrorism."*



## The Parliamentarian: Book Review

### 'A call within a call: All politics is local' by Parasram Ramoutar

Review by former Minister and Member of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, Winston Dookeran.



Human justice in our land. "What 'human justice' can do is solve, or attempt to solve, concrete problems of individual and societal life: to enact and enforce norms, to create institutions, to design processes, all with that one goal in mind - to solve actual problems" - Mauro Capelletti, a scholar of eminence of all times, on legal justice and the pursuit of political freedom.

Mauro Capelletti reminded us that among the "challenging life problems of our epoch" are also listed the problems of human freedom and dignity. The

solutions to these problems should "unite all men of goodwill, whatever their race, nationality, and faith .... and give us a basis for designing a philosophy of life for individuals and nations of our epoch".

'A call within a call: All politics is local' is an autobiography that captures the essence of the life, the ideas and deeds of journalist Parasram Ramoutar and his story follows the meaning of the quote above.

The pages of this book tell the adventures of a young man, driven by the quest for human justice making choices in his life of a practical nature that has always been consistent with his inner beliefs. Politics was at the centre of his actions, but a politics that deals with the problems of human liberty and justice. Throughout his many expressions, as a community activist, a journalist, an educator, a political aide and even in the world of international diplomacy, the story reveals an unwavering desire "to solve concrete problems of individual and societal life" and to create institutions and design processes "all with one goal in mind to solve actual problems."

Parasram Ramoutar, who first attracted my interest through his articles as 'the man from Toronto' while he was a student there, as he commented with vigour and purity on the affairs of the day. Later, he would be a local government councillor

in a remote village constituency in a small Caribbean country. However, he has also accumulated more political achievements than most elected Members of Parliament of his time, which brought him roles of a judicial nature, and rewards of international recognition. His life's journey is indeed an inspiration to the next generation of students of international politics and community service. These lessons are attested to through the many episodes of courage, service and diplomacy that fill the pages of his masterly account of his many actions, events and encounters – at the local level and even in the company of world leaders. This is the unimaginable story of humility and action, where in the Vedic tradition his 'thoughts, words and deeds' are in unity. 'A call within a call: All politics is local' is a unique expression of one man's life journey – that continues today - to unite all men of goodwill in pursuit of truth, freedom and justice. As the story unfolds in this autobiography, the teachings become clearer, the advocacies are never in doubt and the struggles of life look so much easier to overcome, in retrospect.

Winston Dookeran, ORTT, PBS, is a former Member of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago and served as Minister of Planning and Development, Finance, and Foreign Affairs. He has written/edited several books on economics and is presently Professor of Practice at the Institute of International Affairs, University of the West Indies.

'A call within a call: All politics is local' is an autobiography by Parasram Ramoutar, an international journalist and Communications consultant from Trinidad and Tobago. He received the Hummingbird National Award for Community Service (2002) and the Rotary Paul Harris International Fellow Award (2016). The book is available to purchase via Amazon.



Left: The journalist and author, Parasram Ramoutar at an international conference in China.

## Office Holders of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association



**PATRON:**  
Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II  
Head of the Commonwealth

**VICE-PATRON:**  
*Vacant (Canada Federal)*

### CPA Executive Committee

Dates of membership below. Some Members are completing terms started by other Members. \* Term dates extended as no CPA General Assembly held in 2018, 2020 and 2021.

### CPA Officers

**CPA PRESIDENT:** (64<sup>th</sup> CPC to 65<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2019-2022)\*: **Hon. Anthony Rota, MP**, Speaker of the House of Commons (Canada Federal)

**CPA VICE-PRESIDENT:** (64<sup>th</sup> CPC to 65<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2019-2022)\*: **Rt Hon. Alban Bagbin, MP**, Speaker of Parliament (Ghana)

**ACTING CHAIRPERSON OF THE CPA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE** (63<sup>rd</sup> CPC to 65<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2017-2022)\*: **Hon. Ian Liddell-Grainger, MP** (United Kingdom) - since April 2021.

**ACTING CPA VICE-CHAIRPERSON** (64<sup>th</sup> CPC to 65<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2019-2022)\*: **Hon. Osei Kyei Mensah Bonsu, MP**, Ghana - since August 2021.

**CPA TREASURER** (64<sup>th</sup> CPC to 65<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2019-2022): **Hon. Datuk Shamsul Iskander Md. Akin, MP** (Malaysia)

**COMMONWEALTH WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS (CWP) CHAIRPERSON** (64<sup>th</sup> CPC to 65<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2019-2022): **Hon. Shandana Gulzar Khan, MNA** (Pakistan)

**ACTING CPA SMALL BRANCHES CHAIRPERSON** (64<sup>th</sup> CPC to 65<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2019-2022): **Joy Burch, MLA**, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Australian Capital Territory - Acting Chairperson since Feb 2021.

The CPA Coordinating Committee comprises the CPA Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Treasurer, CPA Small Branches Chairperson and Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Chairperson.

### Regional Representatives

#### AFRICA REGION

**Hon. Solomon Lechesa Tsenoli, MP**, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, South Africa (62<sup>nd</sup> CPC to 65<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2016-2022)\* *Completing the term started by Namibia.*

**Hon. Dr Christopher Kalila Kalila, MP**, Zambia (62<sup>nd</sup> CPC to 65<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2016-2022)\* *Completing the term started by another Zambia Member.*

**Hon. Dr Makali Mulu, MP**, Kenya (63<sup>rd</sup> CPC to 66<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2017-2023)\*

**Rt Hon. Sephiri Enoch Motanyane, MP**, Speaker, Lesotho (63<sup>rd</sup> CPC to 66<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2017-2023)\*

**Hon. Osei Kyei Mensah Bonsu, MP**, Ghana (64<sup>th</sup> CPC to 67<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2019-2024)\* - Also Acting CPA Vice-Chairperson.

**Rt Hon. Dr Abass Bundu, MP**, Speaker, Sierra Leone (64<sup>th</sup> CPC to 67<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2019-2024)\*

#### ASIA REGION

**Hon. Dr Fehmida Mirza, MP**, Pakistan, (62<sup>nd</sup> CPC to 65<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2016-2022)\*

**Hon. Dr Lal Chand Ukrani, MPA** Sindh, (63<sup>rd</sup> CPC to 66<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2017-2023)\*

**Hon. Mahinda Yapa Abeywardana, MP**, Speaker, Sri Lanka (64<sup>th</sup> CPC to 67<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2019-2024)\* *Completing the term started by another Sri Lanka Member.*

#### AUSTRALIA REGION

**Hon. Jonathan O'Dea, MLA**, Speaker, New South Wales (62<sup>nd</sup> CPC to 65<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2016-2022)\* *Completing the term started by another NSW Member.*

**Hon. Bruce Atkinson, MLC**, Victoria (63<sup>rd</sup> CPC to 66<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2017-2023)\*

**Senator Hon. Slade Brockman**, President of the Senate, Australia Federal (64<sup>th</sup> CPC to 67<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2019-2024)\* *Completing the term started by another Australian Member.*

#### BRITISH ISLANDS AND MEDITERRANEAN REGION

**Hon. Stuart McMillan, MSP**, Scotland Standing in for Northern Ireland (62<sup>nd</sup> CPC to 65<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2016-2022)\*

**Hon. Leona Roberts, MLA** Falkland Islands (63<sup>rd</sup> CPC to 66<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2017-2023)\*

**Hon. Julie Elliott, MP**, United Kingdom (64<sup>th</sup> CPC to 67<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2019-2024)\* *Completing the term started by another UK Member.*

#### CANADA REGION

**Hon. Maryse Gaudreault, MNA**, Vice-President of the National Assembly, Québec (62<sup>nd</sup> CPC to 65<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2016-2022)\* *Completing term started by Northwest Territories.*

**Hon. Randy Weekes, MLA**, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan (63<sup>rd</sup> CPC to 66<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2017-2023)\* *Completing the term started by Nova Scotia.*

**Hon. Terry Duguid, MP**, Canada Federal (64<sup>th</sup> CPC to 67<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2019-2024)\* *Completing the term started by another Canadian Member.*

#### CARIBBEAN, AMERICAS AND THE ATLANTIC REGION

**Hon. Arthur Holder**, Speaker, Barbados (63<sup>rd</sup> CPC to 66<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2017-2023)\* *Completing the term started by Trinidad and Tobago.*

**Hon. Claudius J. Francis, MP**, Speaker, Saint Lucia (64<sup>th</sup> CPC to 67<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2019-2024)\* *Completing the term started by another St Lucia Member.*

**Hon. Gordon J. Burton, MHA**, Speaker, Turks & Caicos (64<sup>th</sup> CPC to 67<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2019-2024)\* *Completing the term started by another Turks & Caicos Member.*

#### INDIA REGION

**Shri Premchand Aggarwal, MLA**, Speaker of Legislative Assembly, Uttarakhand (62<sup>nd</sup> CPC to 65<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2016-2022)\* *Completing the term started by Jammu and Kashmir.*

**Shri Biswajit Daimary, MLA**, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, Assam (63<sup>rd</sup> CPC to 66<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2017-2023)\* *Completing the term started by another Assam Member.*

**Shri Anurag Sharma, MP**, Lok Sabha, India Union, (64<sup>th</sup> CPC to 67<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2019-2024)\*

#### PACIFIC REGION

**Hon. Gerry Brownlee, MP**, New Zealand (62<sup>nd</sup> CPC to 65<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2016-2022)\* *Completing the term started by another New Zealand Member*

**Hon. Therese Kaetavara, MHR**, Deputy Speaker, Bougainville (63<sup>rd</sup> CPC to 66<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2017-2023)\* *Completing the term started by another Bougainville Member*

**H. E. Hon. Ratu Epeli Nailatikau** Speaker, Fiji (64<sup>th</sup> CPC to 67<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2019-2024)\*

#### SOUTH-EAST ASIA REGION

**Hon. Suhaizan Kayat, MLA** Speaker, Johor (62<sup>nd</sup> CPC to 65<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2016-2022)\* *Completing the term started by Malacca*

**Hon. Mr Lim Biow Chuan, MP** Singapore (63<sup>rd</sup> CPC to 66<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2017-2023)\* *Completing term started by another Singapore Member*

**Hon. Datuk Wira Dr Mohd Hatta Ramli, MP**, Malaysia (64<sup>th</sup> CPC to 67<sup>th</sup> CPC - 2019-2024)\*

## CPA Small Branches Steering Committee

### ACTING CPA SMALL BRANCHES CHAIRPERSON

**Joy Burch, MLA**, Speaker of  
the Legislative Assembly of  
Australian Capital Territory (Acting  
Chairperson since Feb 2021)

### AFRICA REGION

**Hon. Churchill Gill, MNA**  
Seychelles  
(2021-2024)

### AUSTRALIA REGION

**Hon. Ngaree Ah Kit, MLA**  
Northern Territory (2020-2023)

### BRITISH ISLANDS AND MEDITERRANEAN REGION

**Hon. Juan Watterson, SHK**  
Speaker of the House of Keys,  
Isle of Man (2020-2023) - CPA  
Small Branches Vice-Chairperson

### CANADA REGION

**Hon. Nils Clarke, MLA**  
Speaker of the Legislative  
Assembly, Yukon (2019-2022)

### CARIBBEAN, AMERICAS AND THE ATLANTIC REGION

**Hon. Barbara Webster-Bourne,  
MHA**, Speaker of the House of  
Assembly, Anguilla (2020-2023)

### PACIFIC REGION

**Hon. Tofa Nafaitoa Talaimanu Ketu,  
MP**, Samoa (2019-2022)

### SOUTH-EAST ASIA REGION

**Hon. Hamizan bin Hassan, MLA**,  
Perlis (2020-2023)

*The CPA Small Branches Steering  
Committee comprises the CPA Small  
Branches Chairperson and seven  
Members who represent the seven out  
of the nine Regions of the CPA with  
Small Branches.*

## Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Steering Committee

### CWP PRESIDENT

*Vacant*, Canada Federal  
(2019-2022)

### CWP CHAIRPERSON

**Hon. Shandana Gulzar Khan,**  
**MNA**, Pakistan (2019-2022)

### AFRICA REGION

**Hon. Dr Zainab Gimba, MP**  
Nigeria (2019-2022)

### ASIA REGION

**Hon. Selima Ahmad, MP**  
Bangladesh (2021-2024)

### AUSTRALIA REGION

**Senator Nita Green**  
Australia Federal (2019-2022)

### BRITISH ISLANDS AND MEDITERRANEAN REGION

**Hon. Samantha Sacramento, MP**,  
Gibraltar (2021-2024)

### CANADA REGION

**Hon. Lisa Thompson, MPP**  
Ontario (2020-2023)

### CARIBBEAN, AMERICAS AND THE ATLANTIC REGION

**Hon. Valerie Woods, MP**  
Speaker of the House of  
Representatives, Belize  
(2021-2024) - Also CWP Vice-  
Chairperson (2021-2022)

### INDIA REGION

**Smt. Sunita Duggal, MP**  
Lok Sabha, India (2020-2023)

### PACIFIC REGION

**Hon. Selina Napa, MP**  
Cook Islands (2020-2023)

### SOUTH-EAST ASIA REGION

**Hon. Alice Lau Kiong Yieng, MP**  
Malaysia (2019-2022)

## Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) Regional Champions

### CPwD CHAIRPERSON

**Hon. Dennitah Ghati, HSC MP**  
Member of the National Assembly of  
Kenya (2021-2024)

### AFRICA REGION

**Hon. Dennitah Ghati, HSC MP**  
Member of the National Assembly of  
Kenya (2020-2023)

### ASIA REGION

**Hon. Zill-E-Huma, MNA**  
Member of the National Assembly of  
Pakistan (2020-2023)

### AUSTRALIA REGION

**Hon. Gareth Ward, MP**  
Minister for Families, Communities  
and Disability Services, New South  
Wales (2020-2023)

### BRITISH ISLANDS AND MEDITERRANEAN REGION

**Hon. Paul Maynard, MP**  
United Kingdom  
(2020-2023)

### CANADA REGION

**Hon. Dan Coulter, MLA**  
British Columbia (2020-2023)

### CARIBBEAN, AMERICAS AND THE ATLANTIC REGION

**Senator Paul Richards**  
Trinidad and Tobago (2020-2023)

### INDIA REGION

**Smt. Supriya Sule, MP**  
India (2020-2023)

### PACIFIC REGION

**Hon. Viam Pillay, MP**  
Assistant Minister for Agriculture,  
Waterways and Environment, Fiji  
(2020-2023)

### SOUTH-EAST ASIA REGION

**Senator Ras Adiba Mohd Radzi**  
Malaysia (2020-2023)

## CPA Regional Secretaries

**AFRICA REGION** Ms Nenelwa  
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**ASIA REGION** Mr Syed Shamoon  
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**BRITISH ISLANDS &  
MEDITERRANEAN** Mr Jon Davies,  
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**CANADA REGION** Mr Michel  
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ATLANTIC REGION** Mr Pedro E.  
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**PACIFIC REGION** Ms Megan  
Robins, Parliament of New Zealand

**SOUTH-EAST ASIA REGION** Mr  
Nizam Mydin bin Bacha Mydin,  
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## CPA Headquarters Secretariat

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A full listing of all CPA Branches can be found at: [www.cpahq.org](http://www.cpahq.org)

*Information as supplied by CPA Branches and CPA Regions to CPA Headquarters Secretariat*



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