

CPwD Statement

For immediate release, 3 December 2022

Statement by Chairperson of the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities network, Hon. Laura Kanushu, MP, on International Day of Persons with Disabilities 2022

On International Day of Persons with Disabilities, I want to recognise the disability champions in the Commonwealth and around the world who are working every day to improve the lives of persons with disabilities.

Since becoming the Chairperson of the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities network in August this year, I have had the honour of meeting disability champions from several of the 56 countries of the Commonwealth.

Meeting these people - Members of Parliament, academics, businesspeople, youth activists – has given me real hope that we are making progress towards a more accessible and equitable future.

At the 65th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in August, I met Hon. Carla Qualtrough, Canada’s Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion. Hon. Qualtrough, a lifelong disability champion who is legally blind, talked inspiringly about her work on Canada’s *Accessible Canada Act*, the country’s first-ever Disability Inclusion Action Plan and the goal of a barrier-free Canada by 2040.

I also met Dave Dame, Director of Accessibility at Microsoft. He told people in the room about the untapped potential of accessible technologies like speech-to-text and closed captioning. He explained how these technologies, which benefit not just persons with disabilities but everyone, are being integrated into the computer and mobile software that billions of people around the world use every day.

This month, at the 2nd CPwD Africa Regional Conference, I heard stories from civil servants, charity workers and activists across Africa who are working to guarantee disabled persons equal opportunities and rights in education, employment and elections.

For example, Dr Magreth Matonya, Director of Special and Inclusive Education in the Tanzanian Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, told us about new

inclusivity initiatives in the Tanzanian education system, such as the publication of a Tanzanian Sign Language dictionary.

The meetings I have had and the stories I have heard make me confident that the call for equality for persons with disabilities is growing louder, and the number of disability champions is growing.

As elected representatives, it is our job to take this momentum into the debating chambers and Committee rooms of Parliament. I call on all Commonwealth Parliamentarians to be disability champions in your respective Parliaments.

Pass new legislation to enshrine disability rights within national law. Scrutinise government policies to ensure they are in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Use your platform to bring the stories of persons with disabilities into the public eye.

The Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities network stands ready to support you in this work. Our aim is to equip Members and parliamentary staff with the expertise to become disability champions within their Parliament. I urge all Commonwealth Parliaments to seek the support of the CPwD network in their journey to becoming disability inclusive institutions.

Thank you and I wish you all the best on International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

-ENDS-

The **Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD)** supports elected representatives with disabilities in Parliaments and legislatures across the Commonwealth and ensures that issues of persons with disabilities are brought to the fore in parliamentary debate and legislation. The network campaigns for equality for persons with disabilities in all spheres. Visit www.cpahq.org/our-networks/commonwealth-parliamentarians-with-disabilities.

The **Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)** is an international community of 180 Parliaments and Legislatures working together to deepen the Commonwealth's commitment to the highest standards of democratic governance. Founded in 1911, the CPA brings together Members of Parliament and parliamentary staff to identify benchmarks of good governance and implement the enduring values of the Commonwealth. It offers a vast opportunity for Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff to collaborate on issues of mutual interest and to share good practice.

Visit www.cpahq.org for further information.

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