



**COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARIANS' FORUM**

**LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM**

**26 FEBRUARY- 1MARCH 2018**

**Opening panel session: Engaging with the Commonwealth Heads of**

**Government Meeting 2018**

**Monday 26 February 2018**

**Panel speech by**

**Hon. Emilia Monjowa Lifaka, MP**

**Chairperson of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association**

**Deputy Speaker, National Assembly of Cameroon**

Chairperson,

Fellow Panellists

Honourable Members

Distinguished Guest Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great honour and privilege that I participate in this forum in my capacity as Chairperson of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association ahead of preparations for the meeting of the Heads of State and Governments of the Commonwealth, scheduled to take place in April this year.

Prior to the formation of the Commonwealth, there have always been shared values, some of which stem from the fabric of our societies and cultures and others which were learned from our various and continuous interactions across cultures. Today, those values - Fairness, Prosperity, Unity, Democracy, Freedom of speech, the Rule of Law and Good Governance amongst others - are embodied by the Commonwealth and remain the driving force in its aim to create a better world. Not just in one state but across nations where human existence strive.

As we evolve as an organization, so do the different challenges we face. So, while we celebrate our achievements, we should recognize the challenges that we face today as an Association, such as the security threat all over the world, inequality, poverty, hunger, etc. I am confident that, the Commonwealth is a veritable platform for us to unite in order to efficiently and effectively tackle the issues. Today and during the next three days, our aim here will be to address some of these issues and map out a path to an attainable future.

The reminiscence of the journey which began officially in 1949 still holds great memories of our accomplishments, as we navigate the present, there is bright hope for the future.

## **Fairness, prosperity, security and sustainable development**

Fairness to me is the key to prosperity, security and sustainable development. Fairness can be considered an impartial and just treatment or behaviour without favouritism or discrimination. Simply put, it's just being reasonable and doing the right thing. There can be no peace without fairness, there can be no meaningful development without peace, there can be no security without peace, and therefore, no nation can prosper without fairness, peace and security. Therefore, our nations can only attain their Sustainable Development Goals when all the above are in place. A just society gives a more secure environment and a well-planned future. All of these begin with the Legislators that we are.

Every nation must work to maintain a sustainable development that meets our needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. Sustainability therefore, requires capacity building. It is for this reason and many more that the United Nations and many of our member states agreed to design a framework of Sustainable Development Goals which addresses a range of developmental issues that still persist.

All over the globe, security has been a constant plaguing factor. From financial security with the economic meltdown in most African countries and other nations across the globe to terrorism, which have both caused a massive wave of migration and, hence, the refugee crisis. Violent conflicts in some parts of Africa and elsewhere, which include terrorism and the spread of extremist organisations that operate like loose networks and pose a threat to nations around the world. From another perspective, domestic violence against women and children still persist.

While all these principles of socio-economic theory may seem to have different definitions, the success of one depends largely on the efficiency and effectiveness of the other. What this tells us is, although these principles have different definitions, the interdependence on the outcome of each goes to demonstrate the urgent need for us to use this organisation to stir the world in the right direction.

## **Why the Commonwealth? What is its relevance today?**

The Commonwealth to some may seem to mean all member states have the same bank account or should have similar living standards. The name Commonwealth however, goes beyond the ordinary. Our diversity is our strength and our shared values our propeller to the future.

Educator and keynote speaker Stephen Covey said: "*Strength lies in differences, not similarities.*" As an organisation, we are 53 nations, 2.4 billion inhabitants and over 2,000 cultures strong. That to me is what continues to make the Commonwealth relevant. It is why we are gathered here to today and its why, if a definite solution to global warming, peace and security, fairness and prosperity is ever to be found, it should be discussed extensively during this forum and beyond. In an ever changing, growing and challenging world, it is imperative not to forget the relevance of this prestigious organisation in general and the role of each and every nation in building and shaping a better world and future leaders. From finding new and improved techniques to promoting sustainable development to network governance and the role of the big society.

## **Sharing what works, scaling ideas & initiatives and promoting Sustainable Development**

Over the next three years, my focus will be on: first working to increase the collaboration (at the CPA level) within member states through constant communication and networking geared towards sharing our various experiences to help improve policy learning and transferability and improve Parliamentarians' insight about 'what works' across the CPA through the use of Masterclasses to address issues that are common to member states.

Secondly, scaling existing ideas and initiatives through capacity building methods such as more training conferences and a follow-up on awarded scholarships, encouraging my fellow Parliamentarians to work closely with their communities so we can tackle these issues from the ground up and investing in our youths through diverse workshops and scholarship programmes.

Third, collaborating in promoting sustainable development by increasing our efforts in making more practical policy decisions, sharing the stories of our triumphs and failures but most importantly to never stop performing what our duties are, which is dedicating ourselves to our shared vision and purpose. For us to have come this far is definitely indicative that we have been doing a lot of things right.

Distinguished Members of the panel,

Mr Chair,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to quote Andrew Carnegie, the renowned Scottish-American industrialist: *“Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organisational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results.”*

Dear colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are all fingers of the same hand, the Commonwealth. I urge each and every one of us to work to strengthen our collective vision and never cease in our relentless efforts to keep growing and impacting positive change. The road might be rough and the journey long. But I can guarantee you, as long as we walk that road together, we would push and even surpass our limits.

### **Strengthening the role of Parliamentarians in addressing these challenges**

Heads of State can involve Parliamentarians in the discussion of key issues before such are made into policy or binding instruments in particular like international conventions that require ratification by Parliaments. On issues of safety and security as well as peace-building and maintenance, it is important to involve the Legislatures and Parliaments so as to enforce pro-active laws rather than re-active ones. To strengthen Parliamentarians work, adequate resources for research and capacity building of Parliamentarians remains key.

While thanking my colleagues for placing their confidence on my modest person to lead the CPA, I wish to reiterate my commitment to work in close collaboration with the CPA Secretary-General and his team, the nine regions that make up the Association and all other strands of the Commonwealth to push forward our agenda.

Finally, I wish to thank the CPA UK Branch for inviting me to this very important gathering which, judging from the selected themes promises to be very enriching.

Chairperson,

Fellow Panellists,

Honourable Members,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to thank you all for your kind attention.

**ENDS**