

BARBADOS



Looking ahead to the 68th Commonwealth
Parliamentary Conference in Barbados

'THE COMMONWEALTH: A GLOBAL PARTNER'



68th Commonwealth
Parliamentary Conference
5-12 OCTOBER 2025 | BARBADOS

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68th Commonwealth
Parliamentary Conference
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68th COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE BARBADOS

5 to 12 October 2025 (inclusive of arrival dates)

CONFERENCE THEME: *'THE COMMONWEALTH: A GLOBAL PARTNER'*



Image credit: CPA Secretariat

- One of the largest annual gatherings of Commonwealth Parliamentarians. Hosted by the Parliament of Barbados and the CPA Barbados Branch.
- Over 500 Parliamentarians, parliamentary staff and decision-makers from across the Commonwealth for this unique conference and networking opportunity.
- CPA's global membership addressing the critical issues facing today's modern Parliaments and Legislatures.
- Benefit from professional development, supportive learning and the sharing of best practice with colleagues from Commonwealth Parliaments together with the participation of leading international organisations.

During the **68th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference**, there will also be several additional conferences and meetings including: **41st CPA Small Branches Conference**; **9th Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Conference**; meetings of the **Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) network**; **2025 CPA General Assembly** and debate; meetings of the **CPA Executive Committee**; presentation of the **2025 Commonwealth Parliamentarian of the Year** awards; the **3rd Lifaka Lecture**; and the **59th Society-of-Clerks-at-the-Table (SoCATT)** meeting. At the 68th CPC, eight learning and development workshops will be held during the main Conference with four additional workshops during the CPA Small Branches Conference and four additional workshops during the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Conference.

This year, delegates at the Conference will also elect the Chairpersons for the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) and the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) networks as well as appoint a CPA Treasurer and a CPA Vice-Chair.

Visit the **68th CPC Hub** for more information - www.cpahq.org/68-cpc or email cpc@cpahq.org.

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Barbados: Host of 68th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC)



Image credit: Barbados Tourism

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PARLIAMENT AND THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF BARBADOS

A historical perspective of the Barbados Parliament and its membership.

The Barbados Parliament, organised as the House of Burgesses by the Englishman Governor Henry Hawley in 1639, ranks as the third oldest in the Americas behind the Assemblies in Virginia (1619) and Bermuda (1620). Its first meeting on 26 June 1639, with 16 landowners came just after twelve years of English occupation. In 1652, when Thomas Modyford became the first Speaker of the House of Assembly, the Legislative Council and Assembly met separately. The English settlers therefore modelled their Parliament on the Westminster system with a bicameral arrangement.

While the initial English settlement was made in Holetown, by 1628, Bridgetown had emerged as the main commercial site, with its wide bay (later dubbed Carlisle Bay and its roadstead - the Careenage). With no settled building in these early days, Parliament convened in shops along Marhill Street, a stone's throw from the present site which now houses an impressive Gothic structure opened in 1874.

From the 17th century to 1938, the life of the Assembly was one year, extending to two years in 1938, three years in 1948 and five years in 1956.

In the 1630s, the English settlers introduced a slave system to obtain labour for their expanding sugar plantations. Parliament was used to pass special laws for the maintenance and preservation of the system. To this end, the brutal 1661 Slave Code, which later became the blueprint for other Anglophone colonies in the Americas, was passed in the Barbados Parliament. When slavery finally ended in 1838, Parliament also passed a suite of legislation that included the *Master and Servants Act*, the *Vagrancy Act* and the *Emigration Act* to control the lives of the formerly enslaved.

From the 17th century to 1950, Members of the Barbados House of Assembly were elected based on property and income qualifications. For most of the slavery period, this also excluded persons of mixed race, many of whom owned enough property to meet the qualifications but who, on account of their skin colour, were denied the vote. Thus, on 6 June 1843, when Samuel Jackman Prescod won a seat for Bridgetown, there were jubilant scenes in the city as this was the first time a non-white man would be elected to the House of Assembly.

Yet, this election did not necessarily open the flood gates for blacks and persons of mixed race, as the property qualifications retarded democratic progress, leading to a system where the planters and merchants, dominated both the

Assembly and the Legislative Council. They used this control to create legislation to further their interests without enough consideration for the black majority with respect to housing, education and health care. This unbridled power by the planter-merchant elite troubled the British Government, who in the 1840s expressed a desire to abolish the Assemblies in the Anglophone Caribbean in favour of a Crown Colony system of government. This was enacted in Jamaica in 1865 following the bloody Morant Bay rebellion.

Barbados' turn would come in 1875-76 when the new Governor, John Pope Hennessy arrived with mission to introduce a confederation with Barbados and the Windwards Islands and abolish the Barbadian Assembly. The planter-merchant class protested vehemently, formed an organisation called the *Barbados Defense Association*, held political meetings against the Governor's Confederation plan and sent letters and delegations to the United Kingdom to complain of undue interference of a system that had worked well. After four days of rebellion in April 1876 by the oppressed workers, many of whom were plantation labourers, necessitating the deployment of troops to suppress the revolt, the imperial government intervened. Governor Hennessy was transferred to Hong Kong and the House of Assembly remained intact. However, a compromise was reached, paving the way for the formation of the Executive Committee, which gave the Governor increased control over policy. On this Committee was Sir Conrad Reeves, Member of the House of Assembly and the first black man to be knighted in Barbados. He would later serve as Chief Justice until 1902.

Another widespread, bloody workers' rebellion took place in July 1937 and the tireless campaign of black middle-class leaders such as Grantley Adams and Wynter Crawford for franchise reform, led to the reduction of the franchise in 1944 from 50 to 20 pounds. In addition to these progressive changes, in 1948, Mrs Muriel Hanschell became the first woman to be appointed to the Legislative Council and Parliament. Also, in 1948, the House of Assembly received its first black Speaker when Kenmore Husbands was chosen by Grantley Adams for the position. Parliament had always reflected the racial bias of the slavery and post-slavery period, and it took 296 years for a black person to sit in the Speaker's Chair in Barbados.



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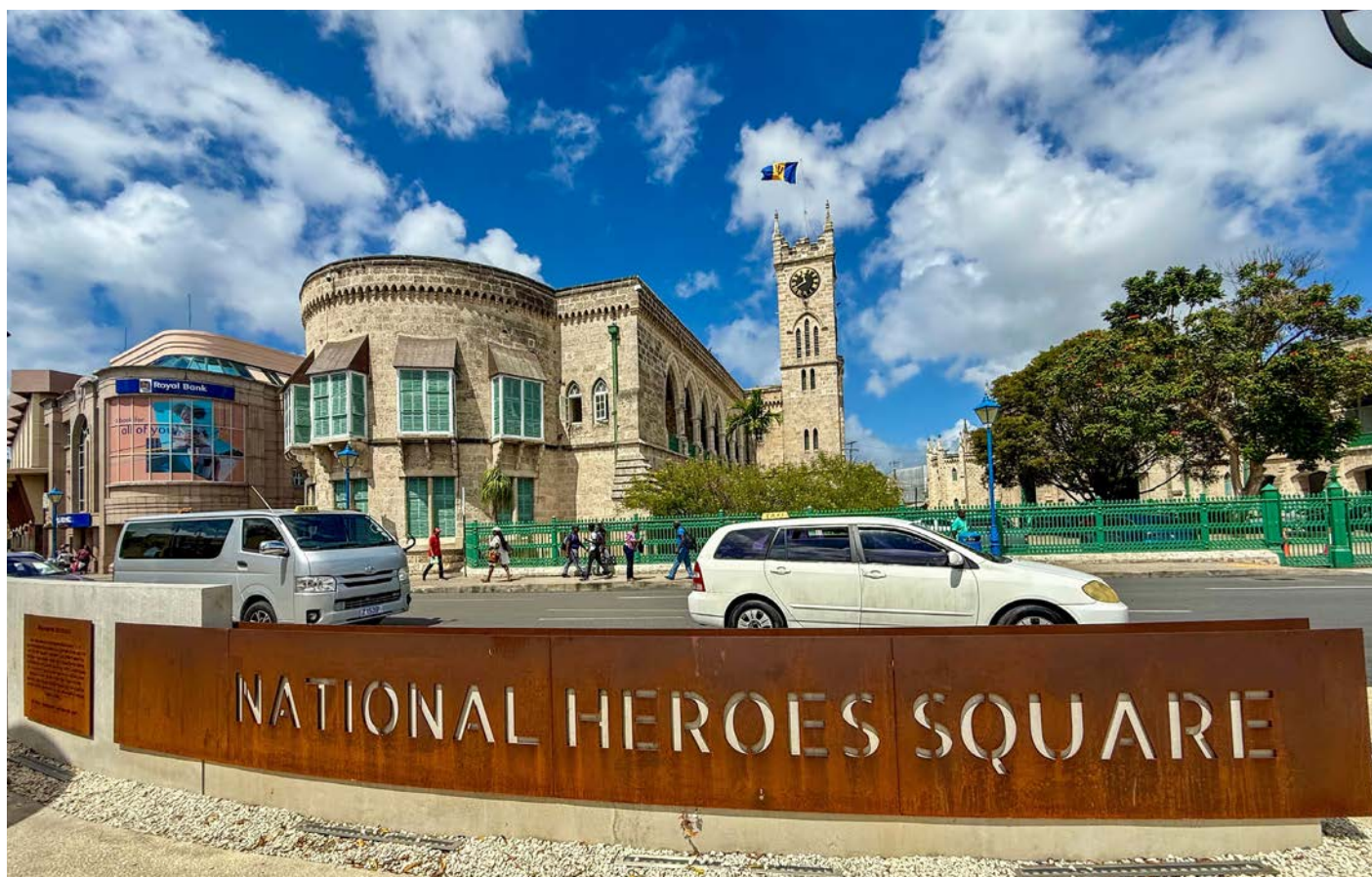


Image credit: Shutterstock 258890561/Barbados/credit_JT Tucker.

However, the movement for the democratisation of Parliament reached its zenith in 1950 with the abolition of the property and income franchise requirement. Thus, in the first election under Universal Adult Suffrage in December 1951, approximately 100,000 persons were eligible to vote, whereas in 1935 only 3,500 persons were on the voting register. December 13, 1951, is therefore a 'red-letter date' for the history of Barbados and its Parliament, as it effectively brought an end to the political exclusion of the working class.

Entering the House in 1951 for the first time was a woman, Dame Edna Ermytrude Bourne, one of the representatives of the parish of St Andrew. Universal Adult Suffrage also changed the composition of the Assembly, as from the period after the 1950s, the masses voted consistently for the black middle class-led Barbados Labour Party formed in 1938 and the Democratic Labour Party established in 1955. There was therefore no room for Barbados Electors Association, also known as the Conservative Party.

With the entrenchment of black politicians in the House and later the Senate, more progressive legislation was brought for the diversification of the economy and the improvement of the social condition of the populace. In the 1950s, Parliament passed the *Pioneer Industries Act* to encourage light manufacturing, therefore creating the second plank in the economy. Similar legislation was enacted to expand the tourism sector (the third plank) which, for the last forty years,

has been the country's main economic driver. In addition, as early as 1965, legislation for the development of the offshore sector (the country's fourth plank) was enacted.

While these pieces of legislation have had far-reaching social impacts, significantly improving the lives of Barbadians, other profoundly impactful enactments were passed in the period 1961 to the late 1980s. The legislation to support national insurance came in 1967 followed by the Tenantry's *Freehold Act* of 1981 which broke the back of the tenantry system that had been established in 1838. This Act passed by the 'Tom' Adams-led Barbados Labour Party Government, allowed tenants to purchase tenantry spots that they were occupying and for which their families had been paying rents for decades, for the peppercorn rate of 10 cents per square foot.

Since the 1960s, minor changes have occurred to various arms of Parliament. In 1964, there was a change of name from the Legislative Council to the Senate, and the age of voting was lowered to 18. In 1971, double-member constituencies were abolished giving way to 24 single-Member constituencies. This number was increased to 27 in 1980, 28 in 1990 and now stands at 30.

When in 2014, Parliament celebrated its 375th anniversary with pomp and ceremony, it did so with the knowledge that while the institution had been used to pass oppressive laws, in the last 80 years, it has enacted legislation that has enhanced the development of Barbados and the lives of Barbadians.



BARBADOS PARLIAMENT TODAY

The national Legislature of Barbados is the bicameral Parliament of Barbados, consisting of an appointed Senate and an elected House of Assembly. The Parliament is one of the oldest Legislatures in the Commonwealth having been established on 26 June 1639.

An appointed Legislative Council of Barbados administered the island for many years until Barbados attained full internal self-government in 1961. Barbados became an independent Commonwealth Realm in 1966 when the Barbados Independence Act was passed by the Parliament of the United Kingdom and the Second Session of the Parliament commenced after this. The Legislative Council was replaced by the Senate of Barbados and the elected House of Assembly was created. In 2021, Barbados became a Parliamentary republic with an appointed President as Head of State. Today, sittings of the Parliament of Barbados usually occur every month with the Senate hosting 21 Senators and the House of Assembly sitting with 30 Members of Parliament in addition to the Speaker of the House. Barbados joined the Commonwealth in 1966, following independence, and the CPA Barbados Branch was formed in 1933.

Parliament Building

The Parliament Buildings (also known as The Public Buildings) are located in the capital city of Barbados, Bridgetown, on the north bank of the Constitution River. The Parliament Buildings were constructed between 1870 and 1874 in a Neo-Gothic architectural style. Both Houses of Parliament meet at the Parliament Buildings. The two wings that make up the buildings have both undergone several renovations. In 2006, to mark Barbados's 40th year of Independence, the West Wing was refurbished to include a National Heroes Gallery as well as a Museum of Parliament. In February 2020, work began to consider the refurbishment and repairs of the East Wing, due to environmental concerns. A historic clock tower of coral-limestone is a prominent feature of the Parliament Buildings, located on the West Wing and featuring the Barbadian flag which flies from a mast at its peak.

The Barbados' Coat of Arms, which was originally presented to the then President of the Senate in 1966, can be seen prominently on the Independence Arch close to the Parliament Buildings. Its shield features two Pride of Barbados flowers and a Bearded Fig Tree, common to the island at the time of settlement, and carries the motto 'Pride and Industry'.

Images: Parliament of Barbados.



The House of Assembly

The House of Assembly of Barbados comprises 30 Members elected by adult suffrage on the first-past-the-post system. The life of a Parliament is for five years from its first sitting after a general election. The Presiding Officer of the House of Assembly is the Speaker. Visitors to the public gallery are called 'Strangers'. The House of Assembly usually meets on Tuesday, but if there is urgent business a meeting can be called on any other day.

The Speaker's Chair in the House of Assembly is a gift from the Government of India to the People of Barbados on attainment of its Independence



Images: Parliament of Barbados.

on 30 November 1966. The stained-glass windows, which were manufactured in the 1870s by Clayton and Bell of the UK, feature the British Monarchs from 1603 to 1636, including Oliver Cromwell who was Lord Protector 1653-1658.

The Senate

The Senate of Barbados comprises 21 Senators. Senate usually sits on Wednesdays. The Senate Members are appointed by the following process:

- Appointed by the Prime Minister.
- Appointed by the President at their discretion to represent various interests in the community such as religious, economic, social or other such interests; and
- Appointed by the Leader of the Opposition.

Senators may also be appointed as Ministers or Parliamentary Secretaries. The Senate meets chiefly when there is business from the House of Assembly. The Presiding Officer of the Senate is the President, who

Above: The House of Assembly Chamber.

also sometimes performs the functions of the office of President where the incumbent is away from their post.

The Senate Chamber features an oval mahogany table which is part of the original furniture of the Chamber. The stained-glass windows in the Senate feature the Coats-of-Arms of former Speakers of the House and Presidents of the Legislative Council which preceded the Senate. The Chandeliers are made of Waterford Crystal and were a joint presentation by Lord Wedgwood of Barlston, England and Mr Geoffrey Cave of Cave Shepherd, Barbados's main department store, to the people of Barbados for the 350th anniversary of Parliament in 1989.

Website: www.barbadosparliament.com

Information source: Parliament website and Wikipedia.

Below: The Senate Chamber.





THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE BARBADOS PARLIAMENT

How can we increase the numbers of women in political roles in Barbados?

The general election of December 1951 was Barbados' first under adult suffrage, with all adults over 21 years old obtaining the right to vote, irrespective of gender or property ownership which, up to that point had been a requirement. This 1951 election was significant and historic for another reason, the rural constituency of St Andrew, elected a petite articulate woman, Edna Ermytrude Bourne, later Dame Ermie, to be its and the country's first female Parliamentarian. Mrs Bourne served two consecutive parliamentary terms from 1951 to 1961, losing her seat in a major defeat of her party, the Barbados Labour Party (BLP), by the Democratic Labour Party (DLP).

The participation of women in the democracy and electoral process of Barbados may be considered robust, but is not without some elements of concern, particularly at the level of representative politics. Indeed, the role of women in political organisations and electoral politics in Barbados provides us with a tale of two realities.

To better understand these realities, let us go back to the earlier point of women in electoral politics. After Dame Ermie, it was a decade before another woman was elected, Gertrude Eastmond in 1971, serving one term only. In 1976, Billie Miller, later Dame Billie, was elected, losing her seat in 1986 General Election but which saw another woman, Maizie Barker-Welch later Dame Maizie, elected to Parliament, only to serve a single term. In 1976, Dame Billie also became the first woman to serve in a Cabinet in Barbados. She would lose in 1986, and win again in 1994.

You will note from this information that despite the early promise of female presence in electoral politics, that female parliamentary presence was often singular or absent from the Barbados House of Assembly. It was not until 1994, that more than one woman was elected to sit in the Parliament of Barbados at the same time when Billie Miller, Mia Mottley and I all won seats. Billie was appointed Deputy Prime Minister and Mia (now Barbados Prime Minister Mottley) and I were also appointed to the Cabinet. Since then, there has consistently been more than one sitting female MP, usually three on average and from 2018, there have been 8 women out of 30 elected Parliamentarians in the Barbados Parliament. It must be mentioned that they all belong to the same political party.

In interrogating the issue of female electoral participation at all levels, it is noteworthy that the Reports of the Electoral

and Boundaries Commission of Barbados, indicate that of the women who constitute approximately 50% of the Barbados' electorate, female voter turnout in both national general and by-elections, constitutes an average 60% of those voting. Moreover, while political parties do not disclose their membership, if anecdotal and visual evidence is to be believed, both major political parties in Barbados, BLP and DLP, have large female memberships who participate vigorously in the activities, canvassing and life of their preferred political organisation. Nonetheless, women do not often hold elected senior positions within the party structure and their presence as candidates or elected Parliamentarians is even more rare.

Of the 14 women elected to Parliament in Barbados since 1951, 11 have come from the same political party (BLP) and of these, 10 have at one time or another held Cabinet positions. Both of the two major parties have had one female political leader, but only one party has fielded a leader who has won at the polls, Mia Mottley. The other female political leader contested two general elections unsuccessfully. On the other hand, Prime Minister Mottley has not only won her seat in consecutive elections since 1994, she has led her party to two unprecedented, general-election victories winning all the seats in the House of Assembly.

It cannot be underestimated that the presence of young, bright, articulate women on the political platforms, engaging in vigorous national debate, championing transformative policy agendas and their clear articulation of gender sensitive policy and legislative approaches, have exerted positive pressure and served to attract larger numbers of women to the political fray. The visionary policy advocacy on climate change and reform of the global financial architecture of Prime Minister Mottley as the leader of a small island developing state, have earned her a global profile and following which has enabled girls worldwide to gain a glimpse of a new political possibility and positioning. However, is this enough?

The, what appears to be, randomness with which women appear to get, or not get, elected in Barbados is of concern



H.E. Senator and Ambassador H. Elizabeth Thompson is the Deputy President of the Barbados Senate and a former UN Assistant Secretary-General and Executive Coordinator for Rio+20 and former Minister for Energy and Environment of Barbados.

Image credit: United Nations_ UN774539_Mark Garten.



and raises two questions. The first is - does the party which has had overwhelming success with its female candidates possess a culture and support mechanisms which foster female participation, help women get elected and remain in politics? The second question is – is there the need for more formal architecture to ensure the participation of women at the level of candidates and to promote their election in the Barbados political system?

The current process from aspirant, to candidate, to Member of Parliament in Barbados leaves it open to women to come forward and offer themselves as candidates, and for political parties to actively seek them out and, for female MPs to personally undertake to mentor other women, encouraging them to stand for election. However, in a society where female Parliamentarians are held to a higher standard, where patriarchy is entrenched, where there are few family support mechanisms outside of paid child/family care and reliance on extended family beneficence, in which the level of reticence or fear induced by the perception of politics as a 'blood sport' serves as a disincentive to female participation, while growth in the number of female Parliamentarians has been organic, is not consistent and may not even be sustainable without deliberate mechanisms to ensure participation.

Despite a background of dubious opportunity and doubtful sustainability of women in Parliament, the idea of formal structures to ensure female representation in Parliament has been stoutly resisted by a majority of the public, including by female Members of Parliament themselves, and most recently, in the *Report of the Commission on Parliamentary Reform 2024*, except for a single minority opinion. This resistance must be considered in the larger Caribbean and international context.

Perhaps however, the introduction of formal or affirmative action measures may have beneficial results. By way of example, these could include voluntary quotas within political parties, legislated quotas, specific recruitment and/or mentorship strategies at the party level, initiatives including child/elder care facilities made available to Parliamentarians, provisions for maternity/paternity leave for Parliamentarians and crèches at Parliament for the children of Parliamentarians and Parliamentary staff.



Image credit: United Nations, UN793347, Loey, Felipe.

Above: Henrietta Elizabeth Thompson (left) presents her credentials as the Permanent Representative of Barbados to the UN in August 2018 to United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres. She has been a Member of both Houses of the Parliament of Barbados, previously the House of Assembly and now the Senate.

By 2024, the *Beijing Platform of Action* championed by the United Nations, had yielded within that organisation only 21% female Permanent Representatives (Ambassadors). The number of women in Caribbean Parliaments generally ranges between 10-25%, despite women in our region comprising the majority of university graduates, and internationally, women constitute an average 27% of those elected to Parliaments.

The *Gender Gap Report* of the World Economic Forum notes that it will take 162 years to close the gender gap and achieve full social and economic empowerment. *So what is the time required for women's full political participation, representation and empowerment in Parliaments across the globe?* According to the Report, that gap will be bridged in 135 years.

If this colossal gap still exists between men and women socially, politically and economically 30 years after the establishment of the Beijing Platform intended to advance the cause of women, does this not suggest that more formal mechanisms for bridging the gap and bringing more women into the corridors of political power is not just desirable, but essential? Alas, despite the unquestionably favourable performance of female Parliamentarians globally, in the Caribbean and in Barbados, some still say, 'No'.



‘POLITICAL FIRSTS’

A profile of the Prime Minister of Barbados, Hon. Mia Mottley

On 25 May 2018, Hon. Mia Amor Mottley, SC, MP became Barbados' eighth and first female Prime Minister. It was the culmination of a meteoric rise in political life to become the leader of the Government as Prime Minister as well as being the Minister of Finance, Economic Affairs and Investment and the Minister of National Security and the Public Service

Mia Mottley come from a political family as she is the granddaughter of Ernest Deighton Mottley (1907-1973), a real estate broker and politician who was the first Mayor of Bridgetown (1959) and represented Bridgetown in the House of Assembly (1946 to 1971). Her uncle, also named Ernest Deighton Mottley, became the political leader of the short-lived Christian Social Democratic Party (CSD) in 1975, while her father, Elliott Deighton Mottley was a barrister who sat in the House of Assembly for a short time, vacating the seat to become Consul-General in New York.

Mia Mottley studied at Queen's College (Barbados) and later at the London School of Economics and was awarded a law degree from the University of London in 1986. She became an Attorney-at-law and was called to the Bar of England and Wales, becoming the youngest ever Queen's Counsel (QC) in Barbados.

Mia Mottley's political career in Barbados began in 1991 when she lost an election race in St Michael North East in a close defeat of fewer than 200 votes. Between 1991 and 1994, she was one of two Opposition Senators in the Senate of Barbados, where she was Shadow

Minister of Culture and Community Development. During that time, she served on numerous Parliamentary Joint Select Committees on areas including Praedial Larceny and Domestic Violence.

Following the Barbados Labour Party's victory in the 1994 general election, Mia Mottley was elected to the House of Assembly and was one of the youngest persons ever to be assigned a Ministerial portfolio when she was appointed as Minister of Education, Youth Affairs and Culture from 1994 to 2001. In 1996 and again in 1997, she was Chair of the CARICOM Standing Committee of Ministers of Education. She is also credited with being the visionary behind the Education Sector Enhancement Programme, popularly known as 'EduTech', which aims to increase the number of young people contributing to the island's sustainable social, cultural and economic development. She later served as Attorney-General and Deputy Prime Minister of Barbados from 2001 to 2008 and was the first woman to hold that position.

In 2008 following the incumbent Government's election defeat, Mia Mottley was elected as Leader of the Barbados Labour Party, the first woman to lead the party, as well as the country's first female Opposition Leader.

Below: In September 2020, the CPA hosted a virtual Post-Election Seminar for the House of Assembly of Dominica due to COVID restrictions in place at the time. A key highlight of the seminar was the

notable contribution from the Prime Minister of Barbados, Hon. Mia Amor Mottley, QC, MP, who joined the Prime Minister of Dominica, Hon. Roosevelt Skerrit, the Premier of Anguilla, Dr Ellis L. Webster, and other delegates via video link at the workshop for Government Ministers on how to effectively balance important government business with parliamentary and constituency responsibilities.

Image credit: CPA Secretariat





Image credit: COP26/UK Government.

However, former prime minister Owen Arthur became Opposition Party Leader from 2010 to 2013, before Mia Mottley was returned as Leader of the Opposition in February 2013.

In the 24 May 2018 general election, the Barbados Labour Party won the biggest majority government in Barbadian history, winning more than 70% of the popular vote and all 30 seats in the Legislature. Mia Mottley was sworn in as Barbados's first female Prime Minister the following day.

Mia Mottley came to global attention during her many significant speeches to the United Nations General Assembly and the COP international meetings which centred on climate change, economic and technological inequality, unfair distribution of COVID-19 vaccines and their effects on Barbados and other Caribbean nations.

In 2020, Mia Mottley's Government announced that the Barbadian monarchy would be abolished, making Barbados a republic. It would become a Parliamentary republic, with a ceremonial President as head of state and the process was completed by November 2021, the 55th anniversary of Barbados independence.

Following her party's landslide victory in the 2022 general election, Mia Mottley was sworn in as Prime Minister for a second term on 20 January 2022.

Above: At the COP26 climate conference in Glasgow in November 2021 attended by representatives of almost 200 countries, Barbados Prime Minister, Rt Hon. Mia Mottley, MP came to global attention when she delivered a stark warning on the effects of a rise in global temperature on small island nations like Barbados and stated '*Two degrees is a death sentence*' for island nations. due to rising sea levels and more extreme weather.

During her career, Mia Mottley has been given several lectures – including the inaugural Kofi Annan Memorial Lecture and the Nelson Mandela Annual Lecture – and many awards including 'Person of the Year' by Caribbean National Weekly, a United Nations Foundation Global Leadership Award as a 'Champion for Global Change', and the 2025 Zayed Award for Human Fraternity announced by the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Rt Hon. Patricia Scotland, KC.

Mia Mottley has also been named on the lists of 'most influential people' and 'most influential women' by *TIME Magazine*, the BBC, the *London Financial Times* and *Forbes Magazine*.

Information sources: Barbados Government website and Wikipedia.

Content written by the CPA Editor, Jeffrey Hyland.

BARBADOS BECOMING A REPUBLIC IS AN HISTORIC NECESSITY

The legal ramifications of becoming a republic.

The Legal Reality of becoming a Republic

On 11 October 2021, the *Constitution (Amendment)(No.2) Bill, 2021* that provides for “*Barbados to become a republic with a President who shall be the Head of State of Barbados*” was proclaimed and is now an Act of Parliament. On 20 October 2021, both Houses of Parliament, in a joint session, elected Dame Sandra Mason, a native Barbadian, as the first President of Barbados. So, Barbados is now de jure a Republic.

However, the existing Constitution is still, basically, the original legislation of 1966 consisting of ten Chapters and fashioned after ‘the Westminster model’ of parliamentary democracy. Chapter IV formerly dealt with the appointment, powers and functions of ‘the Governor-General’. But, since 11 October 2021, the words ‘Governor-General’ are replaced throughout Chapter IV and, wherever else they appear in the Constitution, by the words ‘the President’. The amending Act also makes provision for:

- transfer of the functions of the Governor-General to the President;
- the procedure for electing and removing a President;
- the 4-year tenure of the President;
- certain consequential changes in nomenclature e.g. replacing ‘the Crown’ with the words ‘the State’ in legislation.

No new and separate republican Constitution has been enacted but the Government has to hand the *Report of the Constitutional Reform Commission* (20 June 2022) chaired by retired Justice of Appeal, the Most Hon. Christopher Blackman (the *Blackman Commission Report*). It is widely believed that this Report will provide the basis for a new republican Constitution that is autochthonous (indigenous).

Official Discussions about Republicanism

It is appropriate to sketch the history of official discussions concerning republicanism. Since 1966, when the UK Parliament passed the *Barbados Independence Act*, in which responsibility for the governance of Barbados was vested solely in the Government of Barbados, there have been two Commissions of Enquiry established to take soundings from the people, *inter alia*, on the desirability or otherwise of becoming a republic. In 1977, the Barbados Labour Party (BLP) government of the late J.M.G.M. “Tom” Adams appointed a

Commission chaired by the late Sir Mencea Cox (the Cox Commission).

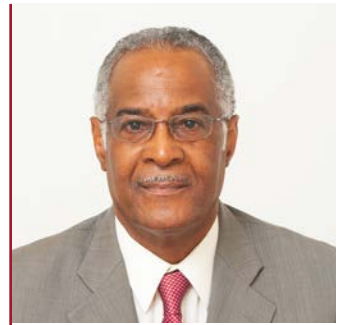
Then, in 1996, the BLP government led by the late Owen Arthur, appointed the late Sir Henry Forde QC, to chair the second

Commission (the Forde Commission). Whereas the Cox Commission recommended retention of the monarchical system, the Forde Commission recommended that “*our system of government should be a parliamentary republic with the Head of State being a President*”. (p.42)

In 2005 during Arthur’s last term as Prime Minister the question of “*whether Barbados should become a parliamentary republic with the Head of State being a President who is a citizen of Barbados*” was included in a Referendum Bill which was passed but never proclaimed. It is, however, included in the Laws of Barbados as Chapter 11A.

The Prime Minister’s actions in 2021

On 26 July 2021, the present Barbados Prime Minister, Hon. Mia Mottley QC, MP, announced to the people of Barbados that Barbados would become a republic on 30 November 2021. *Inter alia*, she said that the Cabinet had accepted the recommendations of the Forde Commission that the President would be non-executive. Very importantly, she indicated the unique methodology to be used to attain republican status. Instead of appointing another Commission to discuss and examine the issue of republicanism followed by the enactment of a new Constitution creating a republic, the Prime Minister announced that amendments would be made to the existing Constitution. Thereafter, a Commission would be appointed to discuss the contents of a new republican Constitution with Barbadians at home and abroad. The Prime Minister said: “*We will make amendments to the Constitution to allow for the swearing-in of the President on 30 November.*” With regard to the enactment of a new republican Constitution, she said: “*From December 1st, we begin the journey of settling a new Constitution*”. By October 2021, the existing Constitution was indeed amended, and Chapter IV of the Constitution is now radically different from the original version.



Hon. Sir David Simmons
served in the Parliament
of Barbados for 25 years,
was twice Attorney-General
(1985-86 and 1994-2001),
and was the 12th Chief
Justice of Barbados (2002
-2010).



Public Concerns and Criticisms

The bifurcation of the process towards republicanism has not sat comfortably with many Barbadians, although I believe that the vast majority of the population support the change. The main criticism of the process was that there had not been sufficient public discussion of the implications and nuances of ‘going republic’. Some commentators are of the opinion that there should have been a referendum before committing to a republic. Political scientists, and some of us who have observed the results of referenda in the Commonwealth Caribbean in the last 50 years, warn that the main issue in some referenda is often blurred by considerations extraneous to the main issue. A referendum is often an unruly horse!

Was the transition to republicanism warranted?

While the population waits for the implementation of the recommendations of the Blackman Commission, there can be little doubt that the transition from a monarchical system to republicanism was overdue. Ever since Barbados became independent on 30 November 1966, the principal qualification for being Head of State of Barbados was that that person was born into the Royal Family of Great Britain. The Head of State has previously been automatically the person who is Monarch of Great Britain.

Two legal fictions

Two legal fictions, rooted in constitutional theory, have been happily swept away by the Act of October 2021. Section 35 of the Constitution contained the following provision: “35. *There shall be a Parliament of Barbados which shall consist of Her Majesty, a Senate and a House of Assembly.*”

And, at section 63(1) there was this: “63(1) *The Executive authority of Barbados is vested in Her Majesty.*”

The reality was, of course, that The Queen had no direct role in respect of legislation passed in the Parliament of Barbados, although the Governor-General, as her representative, assented to legislation.



Image credit: Barbados Government Information Service.

Above: The President of Barbados, Her Excellency The Most Honourable Dame Sandra Mason (centre) reviews a ceremonial parade for Independence Day in November 2024.

Allegiance

To put the abolition of the monarchical system beyond doubt, the Oath of Allegiance in Barbados has been changed. Formerly, it required “*true allegiance to her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Her Heirs and Successors*”. The Oath now requires: “*True Allegiance to Barbados, according to law.*”

Conclusion

Barbados becoming a Republic was an historic necessity. It is arguable that, having regard to the constitutional realities of contemporary Barbados, it was a *de facto* republic already even if that was not the *de jure* position. Nevertheless, substituting a native Barbadian as Head of State in lieu of the British Monarch is important symbolism. Symbolism finds resonance at an emotional and cerebral level, and hopefully, the symbolism implicit in having a native Barbadian as Head of State will convey a subliminal message to the youth and be an inspiration to them.

For too long, the overlay of the colonial condition has imbued Commonwealth Caribbean people with a heavy dose of self-doubt and a lack of self-confidence. Fortunately, however, the governments of Owen Arthur and Mia Mottley have given the lie to the misconception that Barbados was weighed down by reactionary and conservative attitudes.

Becoming a republic following the de-linking from the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in 2005 and acceding to the two jurisdictions of the Caribbean Court of Justice completes the independence of Barbados – a matter of celebration for all ‘right-thinking’ Barbadians.



Q&A

Senator Crystal Drakes: Transitioning from a monarchy to a republic and what it means for democracy in Barbados

Recorded at the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) in New South Wales in November 2024, this is an extract of a CPA Podcast with Senator Crystal Drakes from Barbados speaking with Marshall Tisdale, Programmes Officer at the CPA Secretariat.

CPA/Marshall: So welcome to an episode of 'Parliamentary Conversations in the Commonwealth', the CPA's Podcast. We are thrilled to have with us, Senator Crystal Drakes, a Senator from the Barbados Senate. As well as being a politician, Senator Drakes is also an economist interested in sustainable development and environmental action. Crystal is also the co-founder of the Blue Green Initiative, Incorporated, a research-driven non-profit organisation aimed at executing sustainable projects in the Caribbean. Crystal has served in the Senate since 2018 and has been part of a cohort of leaders that has overseen the transition of Barbados from a constitutional monarchy to a republic. So before we get into the recent political and constitutional changes in Barbados, let's talk a bit more about yourself. You've had a rich and diverse career before entering politics, so if you could share with us just a bit more about your life before Parliament, and then how you actually ended up becoming a Senator.

Senator Crystal Drakes: Before entering into politics, I have a background in International Development. I worked for a number of development agencies, primarily in Economic Development across the region in the Caribbean, in multiple countries, working on sustainable projects. And then in 2014, I transitioned from purely Economic Development to looking more at how the environment is incorporated into Economic Development policy. That led me on a very long journey into sustainable development and how the economic paradigm for small island developing states needs to shift, so that we become more sustainable as island countries. So before coming into Parliament, I was heavily involved in International Development.

CPA/Marshall: Thank you for that. And you entered the Senate in 2018, which is right on the cusp of the sort of landmark changes we've seen over the last couple of years in Barbados with the transition from constitutionality

to being a republic. And I just want to gauge your feelings around the transition. How did you feel during that period of serving as a representative and also just your own feelings towards monarchy and republicanism?

Senator Crystal Drakes: So we have a long standing history as it relates to constitutional reform in Barbados. In the late 1990s, we had what was called the 'Ford Commission' which outlined a number of recommendations as relates to parliamentary reform. One of those recommendations was the transition towards Republican status, so for me it is a case of the country continuing the evolution of democracy for Barbados. It is not necessary that we are turning our backs on a constitutional monarchy, but it was very clear that the Prime Minister Mia Mottley was very clear on how we transition.

It is a case of Barbados continuing a very deep, long-standing relationship with the United Kingdom, particularly England, but also establishing a new political and social identity for Barbados by becoming a republic. So, I see the transition as something that has been long in coming, but the government of the day right now has the political will to take us over the line.

I believe that the engagement with the public will also continue because we transitioned officially to a Parliamentary Republic in 2021 and we are awaiting a number of reports from our Constitutional Reform Commission and our Parliamentary Reform Commission. I believe that those reports will continue to have public dialogue around what is this new type of democracy that we are ushering in in the 21st century for Barbados.

CPA/Marshall: It's very much an ongoing transition and I'm sure in the coming years there'll be lots to learn from um what's been happening in Barbados and its fascinating work because it hasn't happened for a while, especially in the Commonwealth. So this is maybe building a new era for the Commonwealth Nations. I wanted to speak more about the significance of the transition in Barbados and for those who might not fully understand the shift, what are some of the symbolic and practical changes that have come with moving from a monarchy to a republic?



PARLIAMENTARY CONVERSATIONS IN THE COMMONWEALTH



Image: Barbados Today



Senator Crystal Drakes: So one of the major changes coming out of the transition on November 30th, 2021 - we conferred upon the Governor-General, who at the time was the head of state and was a representative of The Queen, we moved to a President who was a national of Barbados. We conferred upon Dame Sandra Mason to be the President of Barbados, and I think that having a Barbadian as the head of state really signalled to the country that this is a shift in the way in which our political landscape will be changing. I think that symbolism for us was significant as a society knowing now that we no longer had a representative of The Queen, but we now have one of our own in Dame Sandra Mason, who is now the President of Barbados. That a Barbadian can be the head of state and we can guide our own affairs in that regard.

CPA/Marshall: It is a very important thing in terms of national identity as well and you mentioned the 30th of November as that day of transition, which is also the Independence Day of Barbados, so it seems like a deliberate choice to coincide. I'm wondering if that has reignited a new sense of national identity and something to celebrate these coinciding events the Independence of Barbados as well as the transition to Republic, and what that may have done to the sense of national identity and national pride. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Senator Crystal Drakes: Yes, I think one of the things that the transition to a Parliamentary Republic has brought up in public discussion is who are we as a people, outside of the post-colonial trappings and all that comes along with it. The question of national identity and how do we as a people can construct our own affairs as it

relates to democracy, political representation, and even things like our Judiciary.

There's a lot of public discussion about how do we make the transition and what does that transition look like and how do we effectively have a consensus around the Barbados of the 21st century given the domestic objectives that we have. Still taking into account the external factors of what's happening to you politically as well.

I think that it is a healthy discussion for us to have given

the challenges that we are facing as it relates to things like climate change and how we present ourselves to the world as a democracy and as a country that is taking a step towards self-identity in a modern world. I think that is important for Barbadians and small island nations like ourselves to have an assessment of how we go about one, advocating for ourselves on the global stage as well as reinforcing who we are as a people.

CPA/Marshall: So, you mentioned this is important transition moment. There are going to be lessons learned in the coming years and I'm thinking about other countries around the world that are constitutional monarchies or monarchies in other forms who might be considering a constitutional change and what message do you think Barbados's experience says to those nations?

Senator Crystal Drakes: I think that it sends the message that the independence project is never over. You always, as a country, need these times of self-reflection on how your political structures are serving the needs of a population and a society. I think it sends a message to other countries and other jurisdictions that the idea of independence, of sovereignty is one that is a continuous evolving process and it's not necessarily one that has both net negative or net positive, but seeing it as an evolutionary process that is supposed to fit the needs of a population and of a society.

I think that's the message that it sends because one of the things coming out of our transition is that it is clear that this is not a definitive point for us, but it is an ongoing process in terms of how we discuss matters of democracy in Barbados.

‘WALKING THE TIGHTROPE’: BALANCING GRAND DESIGN AGAINST EVERYDAY REALITIES IN BARBADOS

Self-determination is widely considered the grundnorm¹ of every country’s political philosophy and journey, but it is of little weight against the *sine qua non*² of necessity.

In a 2006 address, ‘*Walking the Tightrope*’, Hon. Mia Mottley - then Deputy Prime Minister of Barbados - warned that, “*We are not going to lie prostrate while others reinterpret the obligations of our States, deeming us non-compliant without our active participation or agreement. This is the tightrope we must walk.*”³ Fifteen years later, as Prime Minister, her Administration transitioned Barbados from monarchy to republic.

Of course, republicanism in Barbados predates the Mottley Administration. Rt Excellent Sir Grantley Adams, the West Indies Federation’s only Prime Minister from 1958 to 1962, pursued it through regional union. For Rt Excellent Errol Barrow, Barbados’ first Prime Minister from 1966 to 1971, it was through individual independence, declaring, “*My Government will not be found loitering on colonial premises after closing time.*”⁴ Now a republic, a new tightrope appears for Barbados: Balancing grand design against everyday realities.

Grand Design

The grand design of a State is concretised in its legal structure as an incorporated person or corporation defined as, “... *an artificial being, invisible, intangible and existing only in contemplation of law. Being the mere creature of law, it possesses only those properties which the charter of its creation confers upon it.*”⁵ With incorporation in-tow the State, as a perpetual actor, may live forever for betterment of the governed.

Per Blackstone, “*Corporations are of two sorts: aggregate and sole. The latter consists of one person only and his successors, in some particular station, who are incorporated by law, in order to give them some legal capacities and advantages, particularly that of perpetual succession, which in a natural person is impossible.*”⁶

The same applies to countries: For example, monarchies are corporations sole while republics are corporations aggregate. The main difference being that ultimate power in monarchies resides in one Office while in republics the Masses, usually through multiple institutions of equitable weight, are collective the ultimate authority.

In monarchy, the State is a corporation sole called the Crown. Each successive Monarch wields the power of the

Crown without which the Monarch is nothing. Thus, the Crown is the State, and the wearer the director thereof. Clearer becomes Blackstone: “... *the king is the universal lord and original proprietor of all the lands in his kingdom and that no man doth or can possess any part of it, but what has mediately or immediately been derived as a gift from him.*”

In a republic, the State is a corporation aggregate called by its own name without any single directorate above the People themselves who act through their government however it is devised. The government, usually divided into either equal or equitably weighted institutions, wields parts of the People’s power on their behalf. Hence, Blackstone that, “... *Corporations aggregate consist of many persons united together into one society, and are kept up by a perpetual succession of members.*”

However, the point about corporation ‘sole’ or ‘aggregate’ may be moot considering Pollock that, “*The greatest of artificial persons, politically speaking, is the State. But it depends on the legal institutions and forms of every Commonwealth whether and how far the State or its titular head is officially treated as an artificial person. In England we now say that the Crown is a corporation: it was certainly not so when the king’s peace died with him, and ‘every man that could forthwith robbed another.’*”⁷

Again, perhaps more concretely, Maitland, “*our sovereign lord is not a ‘corporation sole’, but is the head of a complex and highly organised ‘corporation aggregate of many’ - of very many. I see no great harm in calling this corporation a Crown. But a better word has lately returned to the statute book. That word is Commonwealth.*”⁸

Regardless of whether the Crown directs in its own right as corporation sole or for a larger corporation aggregate of the People, this debate uncovers the unrelenting power of the Masses who, even as mere subjects, are recognised as a necessary part of practical governance. As a result, those such as Simeon McIntosh argued that Independent Caribbean



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State as parliamentary monarchies were already republics in function.⁹

Nonetheless, doubt remained given the legal structure as a parliamentary monarchy. Now, grand design must translate into everyday material gains for the average person as they now surely constitute the State for the first time.

Everyday Realities

Pan-Africanist Amílcar Cabral instructs us to, *“Always remember that the people are not fighting for ideas, nor for what is in men’s minds”* but *“to gain material advantages, to live better and in peace, to benefit from progress, and for the better future of their children.”*¹⁰

Similarly, former Barbados Prime Minister, Rt Hon. Owen Arthur urged us, *“not to look for grand designs”* since *“We live in a place that is impatient for progress. Our people, locked into networks of global communications, are being acculturated to expect a standard of living that bears a direct.”*¹¹ These insights – born from political struggle and hardnosed leadership – capture the essence of serious political transformation.

Consequently, when reflecting on Barbados becoming a republic and the attendant constitutional and parliamentary reforms, the real inquiry does not centre on the political timing or procedural ethics or legality but on the material gains of the Masses.

In a region perennially plagued by an *“implementation deficit disorder”* now sweeping the wider world, there is this creeping cynicism among the Masses that becoming a republic is at best wishful thinking or meaningless and, at worst, a mere distraction from pressing historical and contemporary issues:

- Pit toilets remain;
- Standpipes are still necessary for some;
- Cost-of-living persistently mounts;
- Violent crime is reaching worse levels;
- Corporate mismanagement is creating serious social displacement;
- Courts must increasingly respond to social and not just legal issues; and
- We continue the worst of western political economy by taxing pensions.

Consequently, ordinary Barbadians question the relevance and value of republicanism and its associated reforms in relation to their daily lives. Particularly relating to balancing the equitably values of grand symbolism against grounded practicality.

The answer here will be answered over the next few to many decades as Government – through its various Administrations – addresses and makes good on the promise of the republican virtue by tackling material conditions which



Image credit: Shutterstock.

have negative social and economic effects. This, however, is not unimaginable because, this has been the way of successive post-Independence Administrations.

It is highly foreseeable for it to continue. However, the measuring stick becomes not only quantitatively different but qualitatively distinct because the promise of republicanism has now – rightly or wrongly- instilled within the Public – as the aggregate power – a view that *their* government will more quickly respond to their needs and not a global agenda which shares various colonial features.

Yet, we live in a global world, having global tastes, needing global production to improve national development. Herein, lies the thinnest tightrope for any Government as mediator to walk in moderation while its new legal master wants it to run!

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'THE COMMONWEALTH AT 75'

Inspired, Exulting, Free: A youth view from Barbados

The Commonwealth has been and continues to be the bedrock of parliamentary democracy and good governance for almost three billion people globally for over seventy-five years. I therefore join the international community in extending the highest commendations to the Commonwealth on reaching this great milestone.

It has been five years since I participated in CPA's 10th Commonwealth Youth Parliament in India and created life-long friendships with young, bright and passionate people. This opportunity has allowed me to have a greater appreciation for the work of the Commonwealth Secretariat and its associations like the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Parallel to this, when I sat on the Editorial Advisory Board of the CPA's Journal, *The Parliamentarian*, I was given equal opportunity for input and was able to extend invitations to other young people from across the CPA Caribbean, Americas and the Atlantic Region to submit articles to the publication. During this time, I was able to coordinate a series of 'Commonwealth Youth Voices' which exemplified the importance of youth engagement in the Commonwealth. This genuine inclusion of young people is commendable and will be critical to the sustainability and vibrancy of this community.

Unequivocally, the Commonwealth is a pillar of peace and multilateralism, which are paramount, especially for small island developing states. The Commonwealth's Election Observer missions have contributed to the peace, stability, security and legitimacy of countless

elections. This work is pivotal in ensuring that the fundamental rights of citizens are not compromised and that elections are free and fair, amidst corruption and other threats to democracy.

As a young citizen of Barbados, the Commonwealth is a beacon of hope for my generation, it is the symbol of peace, equity and inclusion. The Commonwealth is a champion in the fight for gender equality and the rights of the most vulnerable, such as the disabled community. Parliamentary democracy at its core must equally include the voices of women and other marginalised sections of our societies.

Moreover, as members of the Commonwealth, we must now look 75 years ahead and envision what parliamentary democracies may look like for future generations in the face of rapid technological advancements and other global threats. As the Commonwealth community, which is now more than 75 years strong, we must, in the words of Barbados' national anthem, '*upward and onward we shall go, inspired, exulting, free. And greater will our nations grow in strength and unity*'.

Ms Rashana Jones is a youth campaigner and former Barbados Youth Parliament representative. She also represented the CPA Caribbean, Americas and the Atlantic

Region on the Editorial Advisory Board of the CPA's Journal, The Parliamentarian.



Left: Youth activities like the Commonwealth Youth Parliament emphasise the modern connections across the Commonwealth and bring citizens together. Here, Rashana takes part in the 10th Commonwealth Youth Parliament hosted by the Delhi Assembly in India in 2019.



CONNECTING THE DEAF AND HEARING WORLD: BRIDGING THE GAP FOR EQUALITY IN BARBADOS

Charity campaigner and former Miss World Barbados shares the experience of working with the deaf community.

One of the most life-changing experiences is to dive in the underwater world. The state of complete submersion takes you deeper to an untaught, unspoken understanding and appreciation of the language and way of the sea. Without instruction, we communicate and interact with this world; we are invited to feel an unforced connection. We use our eyes and capture the essence of this underwater life which reveals the beauty and diversity of its species, the fragility of its ecosystems, and the sheer strength and power of this force of nature.

The underwater world is an inspiring portrayal of the deaf community in the island of Barbados. The Barbadian deaf community is a culture-rich group of incredibly close-knit, caring individuals from various religions, races, and backgrounds. Society, however, has embedded vulnerabilities among the deaf population through the social, economic and political constructs that simply do not allow this community to thrive. Yet, the deaf continue to be among us and share as much of their gifts and skills to as many people as possible. The good news is, we too can communicate and connect with this world – the deaf world – and dive into our next life-changing experience!

The deaf world is not one that is easily perceptible to the unsensitised eye. Deafness is often referred to as the 'invisible disability' because it is one of the few physical disabilities where any form of its existence in an individual can go completely unnoticed in everyday life. Sadly, the unseen nature of deafness has become a state of being for many individuals. Deaf people continue to go unnoticed in their societies and are marginalised. The fight for even basic human rights is ongoing (White 2021).

There are no current official statistics or data on the deaf population. The numerical reality of the deaf populace in Barbados cannot be adequately measured at this time since the latest statistical data conducted on the Deaf demographic within the island was carried out over a decade ago, testament to the lack of forward-thought and consideration in relation to the deaf. How does a government adequately and equally plan for support to a group that it has not accounted for? Tracing deaf history on the island is an impossible task outside of anecdotes from the deaf themselves. It is almost as though

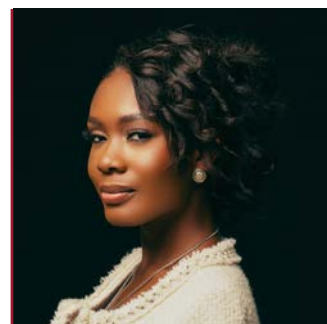
the deaf do not exist! How do we learn and understand more about this diverse group of our own Barbadian people? How do we bridge the gap?

To bridge the gap, we must first understand what the gap is and how it was created. Misperceptions and misunderstandings of the deaf have been built on the fact that they speak a completely different language. That is the problem in its essence - communication. For decades, the language barrier has separated deaf and hearing communities, and created increasing distance between 'us' and 'them'. Without communication, the language barrier will continue to separate the deaf linguistic minority as a marginalised, isolated group within society. Without communication, they cannot become equal, participating members of society. We need more persons to immerse themselves in the language and, by extension, culture of a people whose story remains largely untold because we have failed to learn to communicate and understand it.

However, the tides have changed, and a tangible sense of optimism now flows from the community. The establishment of *The Deaf Heart Project* (DHP) in 2019 as the first non-profit organisation in Barbados with a primary focus on deaf awareness and empowerment for the local community has created a platform to highlight and tackle deaf issues at the forefront. Since its inception, DHP has supported the Barbadian deaf community in standing up for deaf rights as their human rights.

Barbados cannot promote the attainment of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and not include a redress of the persistent deaf issues in the country.

Quality education is not available for the deaf in Barbados and is the primary point of reform needed on the island for this community. As a member of the deaf community shared, *"The education of deaf people in Barbados, even though conducted in sign language, leaves a lot to be desired. Deaf*



Ms Ché Amor Greenidge is a former Miss World Barbados and represented Barbados at the 69th Miss World pageant held in 2019. She has been praised internationally for her passion and vision behind her charitable work with the deaf and is the Founder of The Deaf Heart Project aiming to realise visibility, empowerment and success for deaf individuals on the island of Barbados.



Image credit: Jeffrey DeKock/VSO, ICS

children attend the [local deaf school] from primary until secondary level and for the most part, they graduate with hardly any skills to help them to earn a decent living and support themselves and their families” (White 2021).

Official reports also indicate that regional academic qualifying exams, e.g. *Caribbean Secondary Examination Certificate* (CSEC), are not offered to students at the main public school for the deaf. Why is this? Why is the option or chance to sit the same exam as their hearing counterparts not on the table? Are we suggesting in Barbados that deafness is synonymous with an inability to learn?

The topic of deaf education in Barbados remains a complex, undocumented, unstudied issue that is dominated by hearing people who determine deaf people’s educational altitude and ultimate (lack of) success. We cannot try to create solutions for deaf people without their input and guidance. Who are more qualified leaders on deaf issues other than the deaf themselves? If we really want, in practice and not just speech, to achieve meaningful change for a more inclusive society, we will engage more consultation with the deaf community to address their needs.

The following are my proposed recommendations on an inclusive approach to national deaf education reform in Barbados:

1. Include deaf representation for special needs education at the Ministry of Education in Barbados;
2. Form a Sub-Committee of trained deaf professionals, teachers, and deaf leaders to examine and amend the

Above: Pupils from the Kapsabet School for the Deaf joining a deaf awareness march in Kenya, organised by Deafway ICS volunteers.

existing deaf curriculum to include and improve teaching in both sign language and English;

3. Introduce preliminary CSEC syllabuses of Mathematics and English Language at deaf schools;
4. Introduce the teaching of Sign Language throughout the primary and secondary schools across Barbados, much like Spanish or French or German. This language is even more critical as it can be used in everyday life with local deaf communities and so many ways, even apart from working with the deaf. The introduction of sign language in all schools will do more than promote the use of sign language and facilitate interaction and communication between deaf and hearing students. This effort would create a new generation of interpreters who could begin to bridge the communication gap with the deaf and make the society a more inclusive place;
5. Increase training and sensitisation of both teachers and parents in deaf education teaching skills;
6. Provide support to parents of deaf children to learn sign language to stimulate more communication and practice at the home. These parents should have access to free sessions led by deaf persons to educate them on deafness, growing up deaf and how to better understand their deaf child. Moreover, parents of deaf children should also have free and open access to sign language



teachings. Without the constant use of sign language in the home setting, deaf children will have increasing difficulty grasping their first language – sign language. As a result, their learning abilities will be delayed significantly which, in most cases, is a downward spiralling effect on their futures.

On the other hand, significant attention must also be given to the scores of deaf adults who have been out of the school system for decades and never acquired basic educational skills. Interactions with older deaf adults demonstrate their lack of understanding of the English language in their ability to only construct written sentences in a signed language structure as opposed to an English language structure. Additionally, there are words in English that do not have a corresponding sign in translation. Thus, reading can be a challenge for the deaf when they do not know what some words mean. The struggle to understand English is by no means a reflection of deaf intelligence but a matter of not being taught. Now it is important to note that there are some deaf individuals in Barbados with very strong English proficiency, some impressively better than native English-speakers! However, these deaf individuals all received education and training outside of Barbados and the Caribbean region. Thus, it is recommended that classes for Continuing Education in English be offered to all interested deaf adults.

Moreover, by improving access to language and communication we open the door to better opportunities for decent work and employment for the deaf. We should provide greater incentives to corporations to employ the use of interpreting services, and employ persons with disabilities. Commonwealth governments should also legislate for reasonable accommodations for the deaf, particularly in the area of employment of persons with disabilities, to reduce discrimination and inequality. As a signatory of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Barbados should adopt this stance to stay true to its international pledge much like its climate action pledge by 2030. The benefits to society of creating employment for the deaf, and other persons with disabilities, far outweigh the costs of the incentives and initiatives. New job and career opportunities in such scenarios will lead to economic benefits of GDP gain and economic growth by financing and empowering a previously disadvantaged group to become functioning, contributing citizens with a new sense of self-determination. Governments would be able to reduce

income support to these individuals and save on budgets. Furthermore, the economic ease on these individuals, and all those directly and indirectly related to these individuals, i.e. family members, neighbours, friends, social workers, charity workers, will have a positive effect on their wellbeing and mental health and, by extension, the economy.

With the recommendations shared on how to build the bridge of access to language and communication, now we must take the next step to cross it by building the connection between peoples. We should make sign language an official language in our countries. By legislating this requirement, we acknowledge and legitimise the plight of the deaf. Deaf people have experienced decades of neglect from mainstream society and were denied their existence in the country they too call home. Officiating sign language would have a huge impact on the deaf community in Barbados. Barbados would be claiming its deaf citizens as its own. Barbados would now belong to deaf Barbadians. This would create a culture of inclusion. Their cause would move to the forefront of the movement of inclusion. It would be something to be proud of, a stake in the ground. As Barbados moves towards republicanism, the move to officiating sign language as an official language would “give [deaf] people a different sense of themselves and who they are” (Barbados Prime Minister, Rt Hon. Mia Mottley quoted in British Vogue). Imagine what life could be like for the next generation of the deaf – beautiful, diverse, empowered, liberated. Sign language as the second language of Barbados is highly ambitious, progressive step that will reshape the social development of a beautifully sophisticated, bilingual society.

Today we each can help change the course of the future of the deaf. Use the information learned in this article to educate yourself further, learn sign language and reach out to the deaf in your community. If you don't know sign language, they will be more than happy to teach you. In your respective areas of influence, use this knowledge to create space for the deaf and make inclusive decisions and considerations where possible. With these considerations, we can all come together with one purpose to do better than those in the past and rewrite the future with promise and hope for a better life for all.

- To find out more about the Deaf Heart Project visit Instagram @deafheartbarbados.
- This article was first published in *The Parliamentarian* 2021 Issue Four.

“Barbados cannot promote the attainment of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and not include a redress of the persistent deaf issues in the country.”



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).¹

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 policy² 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 practise 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.

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.



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Figure 1: Sustainable Development Goals, United Nations 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 2.6 billion people and roughly one-third of the world’s population within 56 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).³

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)⁴ 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 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGM), held every two years, are perfect opportunities 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 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,



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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 21st century.

- This article was first published in *The Parliamentarian* 2022 Issue One.

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- ⁴ Individually, countries such as the UK and India may be influential, however as a grouping their trade prowess is left wanting.

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35th COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE IN BARBADOS IN 1989

After a 36-year interval, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) returns to Barbados in October 2025. This article examines the events and debates that took place when the CPC was last held in Bridgetown in 1989.

35th CPC Opening Ceremony

On 9 October 1989, the CPA President and Speaker of the Barbados House of Assembly, Hon. Lawson A. Weekes, opened the 35th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in the Frank Collymore Hall, Bridgetown.¹ The Conference theme was *'Threats to Democracy – The Commonwealth Response: The 1990s and Beyond'*.² This theme drew awareness to both enduring and developing threats in the wider Commonwealth at the time, such as white-minority rule in South Africa and the reemergence of economic protectionism, respectively. Other prominent topics included the survival and rights of children, the environment and the illicit drug trade. Outside of the Commonwealth, the theme also reflected recent political developments in the Cold War in which support for democracy was rekindled in Eastern Europe.

The CPC also marked a significant celebration in Barbados: the 350th anniversary of parliamentary democracy. Remarking on the anniversary, the Prime Minister of Barbados, Rt Hon. Lloyd Erskine Sandiford retraced the foundations of democracy in Barbados to the 'Roebuck Tavern' where in 1639, then Governor-General Henry Hawley, first held a Parliament

session. In recognition of the occasion, Sandford had unveiled a monument on Roebuck Street in June 1989 honouring the site of the first Barbadian Parliament.

Sandford also spoke of the involvement of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)



Image credit: The Parliamentarian/CPA Secretariat.

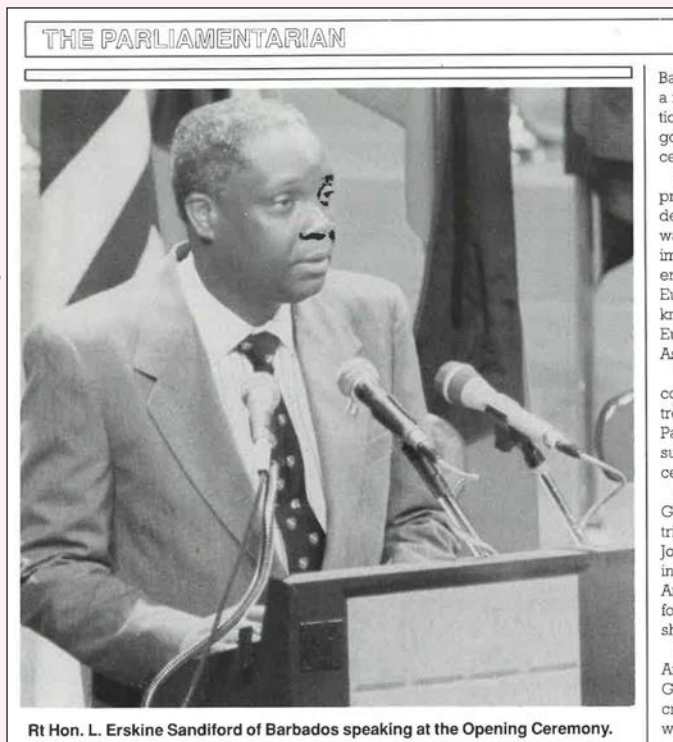
in the Caribbean Region, as Barbados became the fourth country to host the annual conference from the Region after Trinidad and Tobago (1969), Jamaica (1964 & 1978) and The Bahamas (1968 & 1982), a fact that he likened to his nation's role as no.4 in the infamous West Indian batting lineup.³

Adding to this, His Excellency the Governor-General of Barbados, Sir Hugh Springer, praised the Conference delegates, who represented almost 100 Commonwealth Parliaments, for their commitment to freedom and liberty.

From beyond the CPA, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, His Excellency Shridath S. Ramphal, who was himself from Guyana in the Caribbean, spoke to delegates about the significance of the CPC in Barbados and what he intended to discuss at the upcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia.⁴ Ramphal noted how only the Parliaments of the UK and Bermuda were older than Barbados in the Commonwealth.

1989 heralded a significant moment in Commonwealth history as it marked 40 years since the London Declaration (1949), the founding of the so-called 'modern Commonwealth', in which republics were permitted as members. Following this, Ramphal pivoted to his main point: South Africa. Hailing progress made at Commonwealth summits in Nassau (1985) and Vancouver (1986), which put political and economic sanctions on South Africa, Ramphal noted the need to go further. He lamented Britain for its inaction, warned of South African President De Klerk's duplicity, and called for the release of political prisoner, Nelson Mandela. He finished his speech

Image credit: The Parliamentarian/CPA Secretariat.



Rt Hon. L. Erskine Sandiford of Barbados speaking at the Opening Ceremony.



with a remark on the strengths of the Commonwealth: its shared language, its advancement of science, tolerance and harmony.

First Plenary - 9 October 1989

The first plenary of the 35th CPC took place on 9 October 1989 on the topic of decolonization, the end to racism, apartheid and foreign occupation.⁵

The issue of South Africa was brought by Mr Manolis Christofides, MP (Cyprus) within the context of sanctions, discrimination and freedom. Christofides reminded delegates of the Commonwealth's legal and moral obligation to liberate South Africa. The plenary agreed that apartheid posed a threat to democracy and discussed how to bring it to an end.

Delegates suggested that white South Africans should be given the choice to participate in a future multi-racial democracy with their property rights assured. Adding to this, Hon. Charles Kileo, MP (Tanzania) urged Parliamentarians that they had an urgent duty to protect South Africa from civil war, describing it as a 'time bomb'.

On the international stage, the UK delegate condemned his government's decision to stand alone in the Commonwealth against full economic sanctions on Pretoria. He praised the Commonwealth's stronger measures agreed at Okanagan in 1987 which built on Nassau and Vancouver. Support for increasing sanctions against South Africa were voiced by delegates from Kerala, Maharashtra, Haryana and Mizoram. On a personal level, a Zambian MP offered to speak to constituents in British Conservative seats to urge them to see past the apartheid-government propaganda.

Beyond South Africa, conference delegates discussed self-government and foreign occupation. The Gibraltarian delegate spoke of his concern that the Commonwealth might impose self-determination on his country. He urged the Commonwealth to develop a nuanced approach to self-determination and listen to citizens' views. A 1985 British Government Memo, which stated that Gibraltar would be returned to Spain upon independence, would cause further alarm should the Commonwealth continue its course. On foreign occupation, the Cypriot delegate Christofides reinforced the plenary of the illegal Turkish invasion of his island nation in 1974. As such, 37% of the island remained under occupation protected by a 200,000 strong army, a greater population than Cyprus itself. Adding to this, the same Gibraltarian stated that Cypriots suffered to the same extent as the black majority in South Africa.

With that the plenary ended with its results indicating continued support for sanctions against South Africa, and a rejection of the Turkish occupation of Cyprus and the need for greater dialogue over self-determination.

Second Plenary – 10 October 1989

The following day, CPC delegates took part in the second plenary which concerned how worsening economies in

the developing world threatened democracy.⁶ The ensuing debate saw a divide between delegates from the developed and developing world as the topics of colonialism and neo-colonialism were discussed.

Championing the developing world, Hon. Gloria Henry, MP (Trinidad and Tobago) blamed economic deterioration on colonial rule which attached countries to the export of primary products. As for the present situation, Henry attacked neo-colonialist terms of trade and stringent lending practices which continued developing nations dependence on the developed world. In this way, Henry's statements echoed the opinions of Eric Williams, the late Trinidadian Prime Minister, in *'Capitalism and Slavery'* (1944).⁷

Similarly, African delegates claimed that political independence had not been followed by economic independence as nations remained tied to former rulers. To remedy this, delegates suggested that the developed world held a responsibility to train like-minded individuals in developing countries. Furthering this, representatives of smaller states added that they had become victims of international economic forces beyond their control. Delegates from the Cayman Islands suggested that small states should invest in health, education and social programmes rather than attempt to influence larger economies.

In response, delegates from the developed world relayed the initiatives that their countries had made to alleviate economic problems in developing countries. For example, the UK delegate spoke of how his government had provided extensive debt rescheduling programmes and converted loans into aid provisions. This provision gained the support of Zimbabwe, Sierra Leone and Sri Lanka. A UK delegate criticised the current state of UK aid obligations whilst another UK delegate argued that conditions on aid must continue. A delegate suggested that a Commonwealth initiative of £1.5 billion could revive the economies of the Global South and repay a debt of more than £1.2 billion owed.

Whilst this plenary divided delegates, it provided necessary debate on the negative effects that worsening economies can have on democracies.

Panel C – 11 October 1989

Much of the proceeding debate fed into Panel C's discussion regarding the impact of the forthcoming European Single Market on the Commonwealth termed *'Europe after 1992'*.⁸

Panel C was chaired by Sir Peter Hordern, MP (UK) with Mr Manolis Christofides, MP (Cyprus) and Mr J.B Mildren, MP (Australia) serving as panellists. Opening the panel, Hordern warned that the European single market would not automatically improve countries outside of it and add pressure to the Lome Convention (1975).⁹

The panel took questions from the delegates which included: whether new markets would develop others, how hard would



Right: The commemorative stamp released to mark the 35th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Barbados in 1989 (CPA Archival Photograph).

the UK fight for the Commonwealth, did this beckon a new age of protectionism, and what would the implications of 'Fortress Europe' be.

From this, delegates provided assorted lists of positives and negatives to come from 'Europe 1992'. The positives included that it would foster unity and strength (Cayman Islands and Grenada), freedom of labour (Mauritius), open new markets (UK) and promote tourism (British Virgin Islands). However, negatives were that outsiders would have no voice and that it may return protectionism (Canada), UK obligations to the Commonwealth may be blindsided (Australia) and developing countries may lose out to Europe (Sierra Leone). This data provides an interesting trend which demonstrated that larger states were more fearful of the European single market, perhaps as they had the most to lose, whilst smaller states, along with UK support, saw it as an opportunity for growth.

This trend was further reflected in the delegates' suggestions on how to adapt to the single market. For instance, the representative for Tanzania suggested the creation of regional economic groupings. This was not a new idea, however, as Tanzania had previously been a member of the East African Community, which fostered regional economic integration, from 1967 until its collapse in 1977. The EAC was re-established in 2000, only eleven years after the 35th CPC.¹⁰

In contrast, smaller states took a more independent approach to adapt to the single market. For example, the delegate from Trinidad and Tobago claimed that it was the duty of nations to secure their special relationship with Britain, rather than Britain's duty to care for the Commonwealth. Furthermore, Western Samoa's representative suggested that the Commonwealth could create friendships with the European market through sport and tourism. After this, agreement was met with Panel C and delegates alike that the CPA must study the consequences of 'Europe 1992'.

Panel E – 11 October 1989

On the same day, Panel E convened to discuss the arms race and economic development.¹¹ This was chaired by Hon. Hashim Halim (Speaker of the Legislative Assembly in West Bengal), who was joined by Hon. Branford Taitt, MP (Minister for Health, Barbados) and Rt Hon. Lord Irving of Dartford (UK).

Opening the panel, Halim spoke of the need to impress on the Commonwealth Heads of Government that arms spending was unconscionable. These voices were necessary to convey that arms expenditure was unaffordable to developing countries which should prioritize funds elsewhere. Adding to this, Taitt explained that the arms race

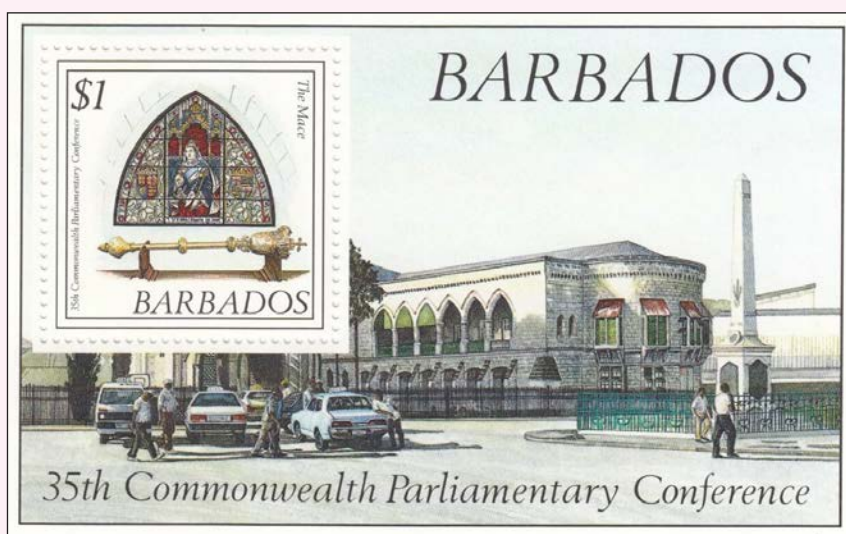


Image credit: The Parliamentarian/CPA Secretariat.

had a sinister effect on developing countries and that they had spent over US\$300 billion in the Cold War. Irving made clear that as the Cold War was ending, practical proposals needed to be put into action for governments to transfer funds from disarmament to development.

Beyond the panel, delegates discussed the causes and effects of militarism. Members from the Caribbean said that insecurity promoted militarism. The Jamaican delegate noted the vicious cycle of military spending in which when one nation's rose another rose to match with it. The Guyana delegate added that their government had spent \$280 million on arms in 1988, a largely unaffordable sum. However, both agreed that progress was attainable evidenced by discussions on the Caribbean being declared a zone of peace.

A Canadian delegate discussed the effects of militarism. For instance, whilst an oil spill in Alaskan and British Columbian waters saw no action, a nuclear free zone was agreed in the Pacific with signatories including New Zealand, Canada, Australia, Russia and China. Whilst this development demonstrated ample progress in one security realm, it conveyed the inaction of another, the delegate claimed.

Overall, Panel E proved useful to the overall CPC theme of 'Threats to Democracy' as it clearly outlined that most delegates, especially from smaller states, were in favour of channelling military spending towards funding other areas of government as the Cold War came to an end.

Third Plenary – 12 October 1989

The third plenary on 12 October discussed the role of Commonwealth Parliaments in promoting the survival and rights of children.¹² There was widespread support for the adoption and implementation of the United Nations Draft Convention on the Rights of the Child and agreement that governments should place a high priority on children's rights.¹³ However, delegates divided themselves on the necessary approach to achieve their objective with one side favouring government action whilst the other focused on legislative action.



There was support for government action on disease prevention, parental rights and the role of the family. Delegates from Grenada, Jamaica, Guernsey, The Gambia, Sierra Leone, Kenya and Jersey agreed that governments must pay ample attention to the provision of health, education and welfare services. The Gambia's delegate, Hon. L. J. Sonko, mandated that governments must be responsible for providing children with immunization against fatal or crippling diseases. The Caribbean provided a guiding example of this policy, with Sonto noting that Barbados spent 15% of the annual government budget on healthcare with immunization a high priority. Opposition to this proposal was quashed by Papua New Guinea which suggested that finances could be diverted from military expenditures to healthcare, an opinion voiced previously in Panel E. Retaining parental rights and promoting the role of the family unit, instead of increasing the rights of children, were proposals put forward by Zimbabwe and the UK. The Zimbabwean delegate argued that parents must be allowed to control their children if they were to enact a right in a harmful way, whilst Derek Conway, MP (UK) said that parental rights to discipline their children must remain.

Delegates in favour of a legislative approach suggested the need for greater female participation in Parliaments, the strengthening of child abuse laws and the movement against capital punishment. The Trinidad and Tobago delegate argued that more women were needed in Parliaments to manufacture new legislation on childcare, adoption and fostering. The delegate blamed the lack of female insight in Parliaments on the fact that not every nation had ratified the UN Convention on Discrimination against Women.¹⁴

The delegate from New South Wales suggested that a legislation backed by Commonwealth initiatives could be used to counter rising child abuse committed against Aboriginal children. Adding to this, Derek Conway, MP (UK) stated that the British Government had strengthened child abuse laws in the *Children's Act 1989*.¹⁵ Finally, the New Zealand delegate challenged Barbados on its use of the death penalty against those convicted when they were minors. Hon. Branford Taitt, MP (Minister of Health, Barbados) rejected this challenge and disagreed with external interference in Barbadian criminal law.

In all, however, it was a combined approach that won the support of the plenary speaker, Hon. Branford Taitt, MP. This approach argued that *"Parliaments must press their governments both to improve services and to present legislation to provide a better life for all children."*¹⁶ (P,39) This was supported by delegates from The Bahamas, Barbados, Sri Lanka and the Cook Islands.

Overall, this third approach was representative of the blend between the Executive and legislative powers in Westminster style democracies. As such, it provided a

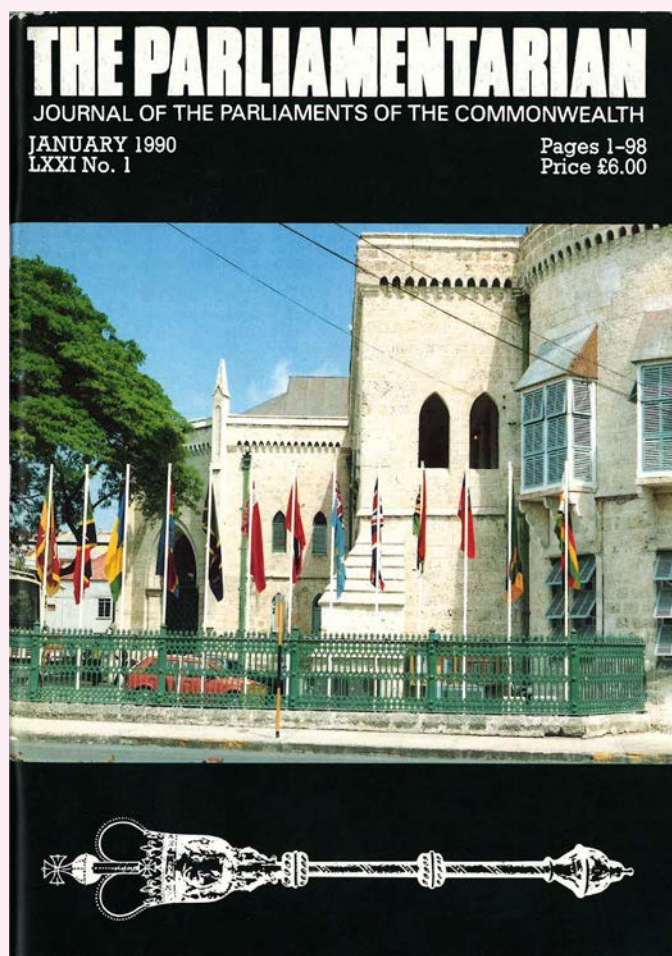


Image credit: The Parliamentarian/CPA Secretariat.

realistic approach to promote the survival and rights of children and diminish a potential threat to democracy.

General Assembly – 13 October 1989

The CPA General Assembly at the 35th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference took place on 13 October 1989, at the Dover Convention Centre. The CPA General Assembly brings together delegates from all CPA Branches. Opened by the CPA President and Speaker of the Barbados House of Assembly, Hon. Lawson A. Weekes, the CPA General Assembly covered elements of the CPA Constitution, branch governance, the Ninth Small Countries Conference (held from 5 to 6 October 1989), officers' elections and saw the development of women's participation groups (which later established the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) network).

The creation of the roles of Patron and Vice-Patron of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association marked a new development in the CPA Constitution. The status of Patron was reserved to *"an exceptional person of particularly high stature, deeply interested in and dedicated to the Commonwealth."*¹⁷ This office was accepted by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II on 7 July 1989 who described it as the *"greatest possible pleasure."*



The CPA General Assembly also saw widespread support for continuing to challenge the apartheid government of South Africa. At the 1988 CPA General Assembly meeting in Canberra, the CPA Executive Committee had written to President Botha of South Africa. Botha's response comprised a point-by-point rebuttal of the GA debate and attempted to "muddy the waters."¹⁸ Delegates at the CPA General Assembly agreed that had they not replied to it, it could have been seen as a victory for South Africa and so responded together in Bridgetown. This motion was led by Mr Bill Blaikie, MP (Canada Federal) and Hon. Charles Kileo, MP (Tanzania).

The CPA General Assembly in 1989 also saw CPA Branch formation and suspensions discussed. The CPA Executive Committee agreed that the CPA Gibraltar Branch could increase its delegation to two at plenary conferences following a double payment. The three Indian Sub-national Branches of Mizoram, Nagaland and Tamil Nadu were reinstated following state elections whilst the Australian Capital Territory was given CPA Branch status following its elevation to Territory status in Australia. The CPA Secretary-General, Hon. Dr David Tonkin reported that Pakistan's membership could not be retained yet due to only rejoining the Commonwealth in October the previous/same year.

The CPA General Assembly report from Barbados also included details of the Ninth Conference of Members from Small Countries (*later the CPA Small Branches Conference*) which took place between 5 and 6 October 1989. Beginning in 1981, Barbados was the ninth occasion on which members from small jurisdictions (those with less than 500,000 inhabitants), could join to discuss specific issues.¹⁹ In all, 29 Parliaments were represented with 70 delegates attending (14 of whom were women) for discussions on the European single market, waste and land management, and the debt crisis.

As was CPA practice, the CPC in Barbados saw the election of the President of the Association for the coming year. On this occasion, Hon. Didymus Noel Edwin Mutasa, the Speaker of the House of Assembly of Zimbabwe, was elected as CPA President in preparation for the 36th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference due to be held in Harare in 1990.

1989 also marked progress in women's participation in the CPA. The CPA General Assembly's minutes document that Hon. Gloria Henry (Trinidad and Tobago) asked if the Conference would discuss women's participation. However, as no CPA Branch had suggested it, the discussion did not make the agenda. Despite this, progress was made as an informal group called the 'Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians' was founded in 1989 initiated by Senator Norma Cox Astwood (Bermuda).²⁰ This group intended to increase the numbers of women elected in Parliaments and Legislatures across the Commonwealth and would later be constituted as the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) network.

Summary

In summary, the 35th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Barbados in 1989 saw several topics discussed in relation to the theme: 'Threats to Democracy - The Commonwealth Response: The 1990s and Beyond'. As such, the response to the enduring apartheid government of South Africa took centre stage, with the first plenary suggesting methods to bring its downfall and the CPA General Assembly responding to President Botha.

Other threats included economic threats to democracy, in which the second plenary's debate centred on historic and present forms of economic colonialism, whilst Panel C considered the implications of 'Europe 1992.' Panel E discussed arms and development, and the Third Plenary debated the methods to promote the survival and rights of children. As well as this, developments within the CPA saw Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II made Patron of the Association whilst the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) was also established. With that the 35th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Barbados came to a close, with the CPA and wider Commonwealth ready to embrace the challenges of the forthcoming decade.

- This article was written and researched by Samuel Sallybanks during his internship with the CPA Headquarters between January and April 2025.

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Barbados: Key Facts

Introduction

Barbados is an island country in the Caribbean located in the Atlantic Ocean.

Geography

Barbados is part of the Lesser Antilles archipelago of the West Indies and the easternmost island of the Caribbean region. It lies on the boundary of the South American and Caribbean plates. It is 21 miles (34 kilometres) long and up to 23 km (14 mi) wide, covering an area of 439 km² (169 sq mi). The island rises gently to the central highland region known as Scotland District, with the highest point being Mount Hillaby 340 m (1,120 ft) above sea level.

In Barbados forest cover is around 15% of the total land area, equivalent to 6,300 hectares (ha) of forest in 2020, which was unchanged from 1990.

In the parish of Saint Michael lies Barbados's capital and main city, Bridgetown, containing one third of the country's population. Other major towns scattered across the island include Holetown, in the parish of Saint James; Oistins, in the parish of Christ Church; and Speightstown, in the parish of Saint Peter.

Heritage

Inhabited by Kalinago people since the 13th century, and prior to that by other Indigenous

peoples, Barbados was claimed for the Crown of Castile by Spanish navigators in the late 15th century. It first appeared on a Spanish map in 1511. The Portuguese Empire claimed the island between 1532 and 1536, but abandoned it in 1620.

An English ship, the Olive Blossom, arrived in Barbados on 14 May 1625;

its men took possession of the island in the name of King James I. In 1627, the first permanent settlers arrived from England, and Barbados became an English and later British colony. During this period, the colony operated on a plantation economy, relying initially on the labour of Irish indentured servants and subsequently

African slaves who worked on the island's plantations. Slavery continued until it was phased out through most of the British Empire by the *Slavery Abolition Act 1833*.

Political system

On 30 November 1966, Barbados moved toward political independence and assumed the status of



Image credit: Wikipedia/Barbados-2022_english.



Image credit: Barbados Parliament.

The historic Parliament building in Bridgetown, Barbados is the location for the House of Assembly and the Senate.

a Commonwealth Realm, becoming a separate jurisdiction with Elizabeth II as the Queen of Barbados. On 30 November 2021, Barbados transitioned to a Parliamentary republic within the Commonwealth, replacing its monarchy with a ceremonial President.

Barbados has a parliamentary system based on the Westminster system. There are 30 Members within the House of Assembly, the lower chamber of Parliament. In the Senate, the upper chamber of Parliament, there are 21 Senators.

The Constitution of Barbados is the supreme law of the country. Legislation is passed by the Parliament of Barbados but does not have the

force of law unless the President grants assent to that law. The right to withhold assent is absolute and cannot be overridden by Parliament.

Barbados is a full and participating member of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME), the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), the Organization of American States (OAS), the Commonwealth and the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ). In 2005, Barbados replaced the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council with the Caribbean Court of Justice as its final court of appeal.

Population

Barbados's population is predominantly of African and European/British ancestry. The estimated population in 2023 was 281,998 people.

Languages

English is the official language of Barbados, and is used for communications, administration and public services all over the island. For most Barbadians, however, Bajan Creole is the language of everyday life, despite remaining primarily oral and not having a standardised written form.

Environmental issues

Barbados is the twentieth most water stressed

country in the world and is susceptible to environmental pressures. As one of the world's most densely populated islands, the government has focused on integrating Barbados sewage treatment to reduce contamination of offshore coral reefs and to preserve the cleanliness of the underground springs which provide the island's drinking water.

Barbados has nearly 56 miles (90 kilometres) of coral reefs offshore and two protected marine parks have been established off the west coast. Overfishing is another threat which faces the island.

Barbados lies outside the Main Development Region for tropical cyclone



Image credit: Shutterstock_1726245436 credit Eleanor Scriven.

activity in the Atlantic Ocean and is often spared the worst effects of the region's storms during the rainy season.

Economy

Barbados is the 52nd richest country in the world in terms of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) per capita, with a well-developed mixed economy and a moderately high standard of living. According to the

World Bank, Barbados is one of 83 high income economies in the world.

Despite this, a 2012 self-study in conjunction with the Caribbean Development Bank revealed that 20% of Barbadians live in poverty and nearly 10% cannot meet their basic daily food needs.

Historically, the economy of Barbados was dependent on sugarcane cultivation and related

activities, but since the late 1970s and early 1980s it has diversified into the manufacturing and tourism sectors. Offshore finance and information services have become important foreign exchange earners.

Tourism

Barbados remains a popular destination due to its tropical climate, calm west coast beaches, and vibrant east coast surf. Tourist arrivals were about

1.05 million people in 2023 equating to roughly US\$87 million revenue.

The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) estimates the total contribution of tourism to be around 31% of GDP, supporting 33% of jobs. Barbados is estimated to have an informal sector of around 30% to 40% of GDP, much of which is likely supported by tourism.

Symbols of Barbados

The flag

The flag of Barbados was designed by Grantley W. Prescod and was officially adopted to represent Barbados on 30 November 1966, the day the country gained independence. The flag was chosen as part of a nationwide open contest held by the government with Prescod's design winning over a field of one thousand entries.

The flag is a triband design, with the outermost stripes coloured ultramarine, to represent the sea and the sky, and the middle stripe coloured gold, to represent the sand. Within the middle band is displayed the head of a trident. This trident is meant to represent the trident of Poseidon, most visibly held by Britannia in Barbados' colonial coat-of-arms. The fact that it is broken is meant to

represent the breaking of colonial rule in Barbados and independence from the British Empire.

The Coat of Arms

The coat of arms of Barbados was adopted on 14 February 1966, by a royal warrant of Queen Elizabeth II. The coat of arms of Barbados was presented to the then President of the Senate of Barbados, Sir Grey Massiah. Like several other former colonies in the Caribbean, the coat of arms has a helmet with a national symbol on top, and a shield beneath that is supported by two animals. The arms were designed by Neville Connell, for many years curator of the Barbados Museum, with artistic assistance by Hilda Ince.

Other official emblems

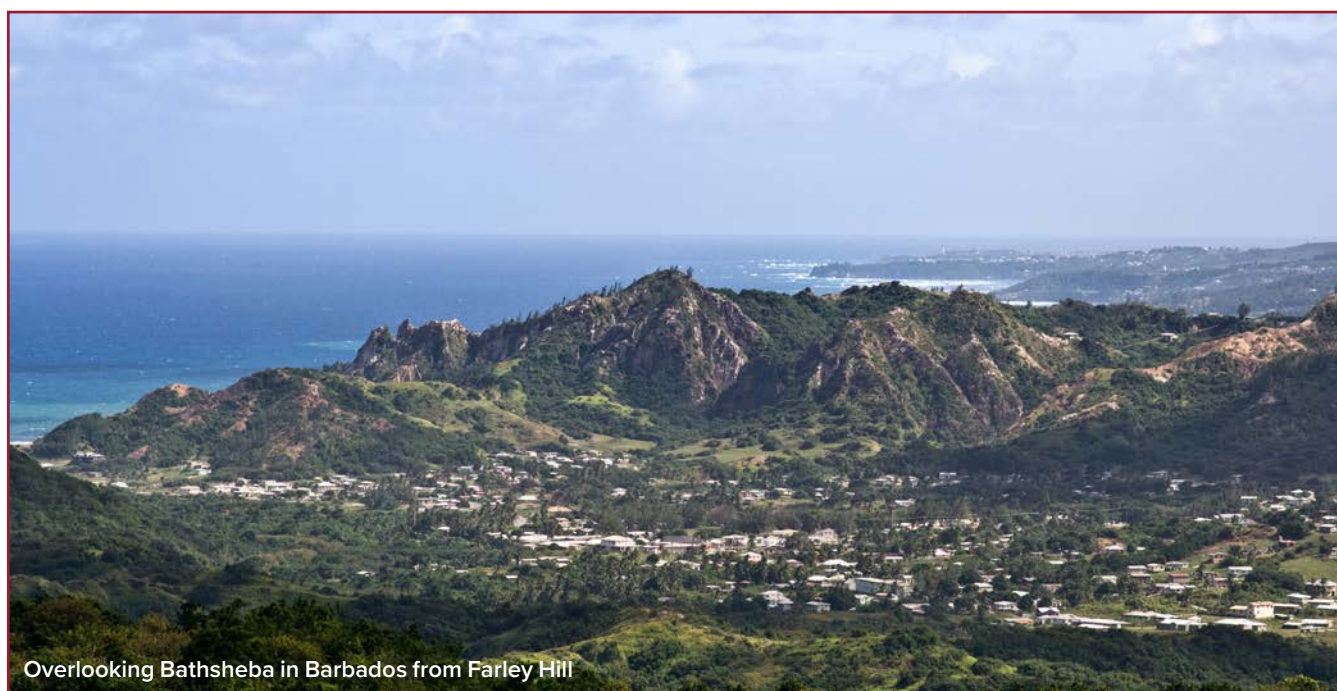
The other symbols of Barbados are:



- Motto: 'Pride and Industry'
- National anthem: 'In Plenty and In Time of Need'
- National dish: Cou-Cou and Flying Fish
- Floral emblem: the Pride of Barbados (*Caesalpinia pulcherrima*)
- National bird: Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*)



Sources: Barbados Government website and Wikipedia



Overlooking Bathsheba in Barbados from Farley Hill

Image credit: Shutterstock

Barbados and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

- Barbados first established its CPA Branch on 1 January 1933.
- The CPA Barbados Branch is one of the 19 Branches of the CPA Caribbean, Americas and the Atlantic Region.
- The current Joint Branch Presidents of the CPA Barbados Branch are Senator Hon. Reginald Farley JP, President of the Senate of Barbados and Hon. Arthur Holder, MP, SC, Speaker of the House of Assembly at the Parliament of Barbados.
- Senator Hon. Reginald Farley also became the CPA President (2025), on behalf of the CPA Barbados Branch, ahead of the 68th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.
- The CPA Barbados Branch supports initiatives including the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP), the CPA Small Branches and the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) network.
- Hon. Marsha K. A. Caddle, MP is a Member of the Barbados Parliament and has been nominated as President of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) network for 2025 to preside at the 9th CWP Conference due to take place in Barbados.
- The CPA Barbados Branch previously hosted the 35th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in 1989.
- In July 2025, the Parliament of Barbados met with a delegation from the CPA to undertake a CPA Democratic Benchmarks self-assessment exercise which provide a framework for excellence in Commonwealth parliamentary and legislative practice.



Image credit: CPA Secretariat.

Above: Hon. Arthur Holder, Speaker of the House of Assembly of Barbados (left), met with the CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg (right) and the Deputy Secretary-General, Jarvis Matiya (centre) in London in March 2024, one of many occasions that the Speaker has attended CPA events and conferences. He is also one of the three representatives of the CPA Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region on the CPA International Executive Committee and has held the position of Vice-Chairperson and Acting Chairperson.



Image credit: CPA Secretariat.

Above: The CPA Barbados Branch released postage stamps to commemorate their hosting of the 13th Regional Conference of the CPA Caribbean, Americas and the Atlantic Region in 1977.

Left: Canadian Parliamentarians visited Barbados as part of a Caribbean tour in March 2024. The CPA Canada Federal Branch Chairperson, Hon. Alexandra Mendès, MP, Assistant Speaker to the Canadian House of Commons, led a parliamentary delegation on a visit to Barbados where they were welcomed by Hon. Arthur Holder, Speaker of the Barbados Parliament and the President of the Senate, Senator Hon. Reginald Farley as well as other Barbados Members. Discussions focused on parliamentary procedure, the environment and the effects of climate change on Barbados as well as opportunities for academic exchange, tourism and the economy.



Image credit: Barbados Parliament.



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The Carriageway area of Bridgetown in Barbados.

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