

A Bicameral  
Legislature  
for  
Bangladesh?

Reinvigorating  
Public  
Accounts  
Committees

ACU View:  
Democracy,  
Parliaments  
and  
Universities

Parliaments  
at the  
Frontline  
of Climate  
Change

Could Norway  
have joined the  
Commonwealth?

# TheParliamentarian

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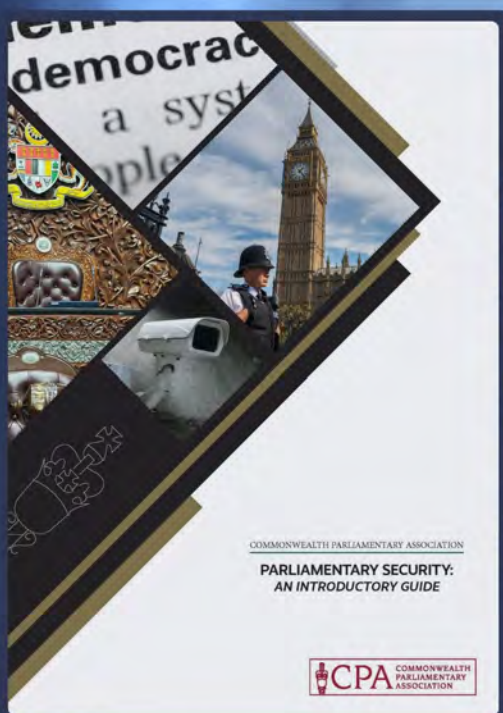
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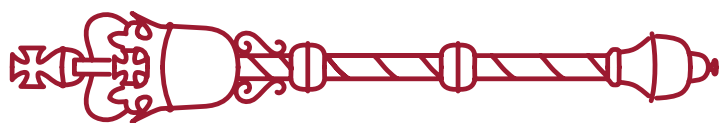
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# THE PARLIAMENTARIAN

## 2025 ISSUE THREE



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### Note from the Editor

This issue of *The Parliamentarian* features a wide range of articles on topics relevant to today's Parliaments. A Malaysian MP examines how to engage in Disaster Risk Management, and a Bangladeshi journalist looks at parliamentary reforms there that may result in a Bicameral Legislature. A Pakistani expert looks at gender equality in Commonwealth Legislatures with a case study on progress in Pakistan.

Two new resources are highlighted – a former New Zealand MP writes about *Parliamentarians for Global Action's* latest publication on promoting inclusion for diverse sexual orientations in the Pacific Region and The *International Parliament Engagement Network* (IPEN) shares a new set of guides to explore the benefits of parliamentary public engagement.

Contributors from the *Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services* (PIPS) and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Assembly explore the impact of climate change on Pakistan's budget planning and on the legislative resilience required to face the challenges that arise.

Financial expert Geoff Dubrow looks at the importance of 'reinvigorating' Public Accounts Committees and a Member from Prince Edward Island shares his Private Members Bill that promotes standardised registration for service/assistance dogs for disabled people.

The *Association of Commonwealth Universities* (ACU) asks how Parliaments and Universities can promote democracy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Commonwealth and to mark their 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the *Commonwealth Local Government Forum* (CLGF) explain how 'all politics is local'. A historical perspective asks 'Could Norway have joined the Commonwealth in 1955?' and our Canadian correspondent looks at Parliamentary cookbooks published around the world.

Jeffrey Hyland, Editor, *The Parliamentarian*

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We invest in people Silver



# NEW CPA STATUS AND CONFERENCE PREPARATIONS



The Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Stephen Twigg  
E: [Stephen.Twigg@cpahq.org](mailto:Stephen.Twigg@cpahq.org)

Preparations are now well-advanced for the 68<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) in Barbados this October. I am immensely grateful to the Parliament of Barbados for hosting our conference and I am confident that it will be a vibrant, engaging and enjoyable opportunity for all participants.

The 68<sup>th</sup> CPC comes at a momentous time for our Association and its membership as we will have our new international legal status conferred on us by the end of 2025. This new status will provide a strong foundation for our future development. This foundation will underpin the new Strategic Plan 2026-2029 for the CPA which will be presented at the conference for discussion and adoption. I am grateful to all those who have participated in the consultation process for this Strategic Plan.

We will meet in Barbados against a backdrop of global uncertainty in which multilateralism, democracy and human rights are under threat. It is a backdrop that challenges us all but provides an opportunity for the Commonwealth to once again demonstrate its relevance. The CPA can play an important role as part of the Commonwealth family. That

is why partnerships and the promotion of Commonwealth values feature prominently in the draft Strategic Plan alongside a reaffirmation of our core commitment to parliamentary strengthening.

In promoting these key objectives, we will have an opportunity to reaffirm our key CPA themes of gender equality, disability inclusion, representing small jurisdictions, empowering young people and supporting Parliaments to address sustainable development, climate change and technology.

I have been pleased to have had the platforms to discuss our strategic priorities at the 54<sup>th</sup> CPA Africa and 54<sup>th</sup> CPA British Islands and Mediterranean Regional Conferences this year hosted respectively by the National Assembly of The Gambia and the Senedd in Wales. The Deputy CPA Secretary-General, Jarvis Matiya also spoke about these priorities at the 61<sup>st</sup> CPA Canada Regional Conference in Québec and will do so at the 47<sup>th</sup> CPA

Below: The CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg speaks at the opening of the 54<sup>th</sup> CPA Africa Regional Conference hosted by the National Assembly of The Gambia in August 2025.

Image credit: The National Assembly of The Gambia





## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Updated as at 1 September 2025

### 2025

#### September

- 5 to 13 September 2025: 47<sup>th</sup> CPA Regional Conference of the Caribbean, Americas and the Atlantic (CAA) Region, The Bahamas
- 8 to 10 September 2025: 11<sup>th</sup> CPA India Regional Conference, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India
- 15 September 2025: International Day of Democracy
- 20 to 26 September 2025: Commonwealth Magistrates and Judges Association (CMJA) 20<sup>th</sup> Triennial Conference, Banjul, The Gambia ([www.cmja.biz](http://www.cmja.biz) for details)
- 22 to 26 September 2025: CPA Benchmarks Assessment for the Turks and Caicos House of Assembly
- 25 to 28 September 2025: 45<sup>th</sup> CPA Canadian Parliamentary Seminar (for CPA Canada Branches only), New Brunswick

#### October

- 1 to 3 October 2025: G20 Parliamentary Speakers' Summit (P20), Cape Town, South Africa
- 5 to 12 October 2025: 68<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, Barbados including 41<sup>st</sup> CPA Small Branches Conference; 9<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Conference; Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) meetings; 2025 CPA General Assembly; CPA Executive Committee meetings; and 59<sup>th</sup> Society-of-Clerks-at-the-Table (SoCATT) meetings.
- 14 to 16 October 2025: Commonwealth Climate Forum, London, UK - Ahead of COP30 (CPA UK event)
- 19 to 23 October 2025: 151<sup>st</sup> IPU Assembly, Geneva, Switzerland

#### November

- 28 to 30 November 2025: CPA Conference on '*The Role of Parliament in Shaping the Future of Responsible Artificial Intelligence*', Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

#### December

- 3 December 2025: International Day of Disabled Persons
- 7 to 12 December 2025: CPA Parliamentary Academy Residency Programme for Members (Practice & Procedure), Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago
- 10 December 2025: UN Human Rights Day

### 2026

- TBC 2026: 28<sup>th</sup> Conference of Speakers and Presiding Officers of the Commonwealth (CSPOC), Delhi, India
- 9 to 13 February 2026: Commonwealth Law Ministers' Meeting (CLMM), Denarau, Fiji (Commonwealth Secretariat)
- 8 March 2026: International Women's Day
- 9 March 2026: Commonwealth Day
- 9 to 13 March 2026: 74<sup>th</sup> Westminster Seminar on Effective Parliaments, London, UK (CPA UK event)
- 23 July to 2 Aug 2026: 23<sup>rd</sup> Commonwealth Games 2026, Glasgow, Scotland [www.glasgow2026.com](http://www.glasgow2026.com)

For further information on any events, please email [hq.sec@cpahq.org](mailto:hq.sec@cpahq.org) or visit [www.cpahq.org](http://www.cpahq.org).

Regional Conference of the Caribbean, Americas and the Atlantic (CAA) Region in The Bahamas. I look forward to similar discussions when I attend the CPA India Regional Conference in September.

As well as the adoption of a new strategic plan, the 68<sup>th</sup> CPC will also conduct key elections for the positions of Treasurer and the Chairperson of two of our CPA networks – the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) and the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD). I am immensely grateful to the three CPA Officers who have held these important roles since the 65<sup>th</sup> CPC in 2022 - respectively Hon. Anurag Sharma, MP (India Union), Hon. Zainab Gimba, MP (Nigeria) and Hon. Laura Kanushu, MP (Uganda).

They have served in leadership roles through a very significant period for the CPA as we finally saw progress on our legal status. Their legacy is strong as we have healthy finances and vibrant networks – reflected in the strong commitments to gender and disability inclusion in the new draft Strategic Plan. I wish them well for the future and I look forward to working with their successors.

Last year, at the 67<sup>th</sup> CPC in Sydney, Australia, delegates elected a new CPA Chairperson and a new CPA Small Branches Chairperson, and the CPA Executive Committee elected a new CPA Vice-Chair. It has been a privilege to work with Hon. Dr Christopher Kalila, MP (Zambia), Hon. Valerie Woods, MNA (Belize) and Hon. Carmel Sepiuloni, MP (New Zealand) and I thank them for their service.

2025 has already been a busy year for the CPA with Regional Conferences, a Mid-Year CPA Executive Committee meeting in London and a wide range of programmes activities including the CPA Small Branches and CWP Workshops and two CPA Parliamentary Academy residencies. I am fortunate to work with a dedicated team of CPA Secretariat staff most of whom will be attending the 68<sup>th</sup> CPC.

Let me finish by returning to the issue of status. When I was interviewed for this job in 2020, I made a promise to the nine Parliamentarians who interviewed me – that I would make it a personal priority to take forward the longstanding matter of the CPA's legal status. There have been 'ups and downs' along the way but I am very pleased that we are almost there now after the passage of primary legislation by the UK Parliament earlier this year.

This new status is a collective achievement of the CPA's entire membership, and I believe it is truly a moment for us to celebrate but also an opportunity to further strengthen and enhance our work. I look forward to meeting many of you in Barbados where we can discuss further how best the new CPA can assist Parliaments and Parliamentarians across the Commonwealth as we address the challenges of global insecurity, climate change, conflict and economic uncertainty.



# INTERSECTIONAL POWER

## The Politics of Identity with the youngest woman MP in Karnataka



Shrimati Nayana Motamma, MLA is a Member of the Karnataka Legislative Assembly in India.

Shrimati Nayana Motamma is the youngest woman in the Karnataka Legislative Assembly in India. A legal professional and trailblazing Dalit woman who is redefining Indian politics from high powered boardrooms to grassroots political campaigns. Her story reflects courage, identity and generational legacy.

In Karnataka, she won her parliamentary seat in 2023 in the same constituency that former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi won a by-election in 1978 that returned her to front-line politics. Shrimati Nayana Motamma has been an entrepreneur and a practicing lawyer at the High Court of Karnataka. Her mother, C. Motamma, was a Minister of Women and Child Welfare in Karnataka.

**Q: We're going to begin by talking about your journey into politics and the influence of your mother, and to learn what made you make that transition from law to politics.**

A: I always knew I wanted to get into politics. I think law was sort of a background and I thought it was important to study politics. I set a foundation for myself as a lawyer and then decided to get into politics. I think it was just a matter of time. I would have wanted to plunge into politics at a much younger age, but that did not happen. I wasn't really encouraged at home, even though I come from a political family. My mother is a veteran politician, but nobody encouraged me at home to do this. They wanted me to continue to be a lawyer or to go into the Indian Civil Service. My parents thought that I would be a better fit to that, but when I saw my mother very closely in her political career, I saw how she could influence people's lives.

When you are a politician, you will touch many lives and affect many different things like health, education, infrastructure, and even legal disputes. So, that's the kind of influence that you could have when you're a politician in India, which I felt would be satisfying to the soul for me. So, I knew at a very young age that I wanted to do this and it's a very rewarding career for me.

**Q: What does your identity as an Indian woman in politics mean to you and how do you navigate the complexity of owning multiple identities? And did your identity help you to connect with voters in your constituency?**

A: So, I say this with a lot of conviction that I am not a conventional politician. That's because politicians are viewed in a particular manner, especially in the Indian context. They need to dress in a particular manner, they

need to speak in a particular manner. They need to interact with the public in a particular manner. I think I did it a little differently. I didn't use the conventional methods because that would mean trying to change myself and how I presented myself.

I am elected from a rural setup. I went there, seeing that I have all of this educational background and I have a bit of 'urbanness' in me because I've lived a significant part of my life in the cities. Then I went back to where I originally came from, and I told them that this is what I am. I am able to weave the two things together, the rural setup and a bit of a more modern outlook, which is a great way of connecting. I identified the groups that I wanted to work with in the constituency – women and youth.

**Q: How do you see the progress on women's representation in politics?**

A: In Karnataka, the Indian state that I come from, there are about 224 Legislative Assembly constituencies and there are only 11 women MLAs, so the numbers are still very small at state level. It's not even 10%. It's a little better at national level where I think that there are about 74 women Parliamentarians out of a House of 545 Members, which is close to about 15%, I think if I have my maths right. So, it's still challenging to be a woman politician because there is always a level of acceptability. You need to have a lot of rigor to be in this and to be made of steel, to be able to face politics because it comes with a lot of public scrutiny and criticism, by being in the public space. It is very difficult, especially for women. You need to have all of the resources including money and family support. As a woman politician, it was a bit challenging, but I think I was always mentally prepared for it.

**Q: How do you see Indian women reshaping politics in the coming years and breaking the political glass ceiling?**

A: I think to some extent we have already broken the glass ceiling because we have a system which starts at the local bodies (we call it *gram panchayat* in India or village councils) that have reservations for 50% women. Most of the Indian states have adopted between 33%- and 50%-women's representation. So in a way, you have already broken the glass ceiling as women are already participating in the political process at that local level.

The political baton passing to the State Legislature and to Central Government has seen less women's participation, because we do not have mandatory women's reservation in all areas. I think it is soon going to come into force, I think by



the next general elections. There are certain preconditions for it to become effective, and the census needs to happen in India as constituencies with more women's population will get reserved seats for women.

That's not to say India is far behind any other developed countries because we've had many women Chief Ministers heading states and also had a woman Prime Minister. I think the country's on track, but I think a little more representation in the State Legislature and in the National Legislature is going to help.

**Q: Given your experiences with social media, particularly the criticism that you faced regarding your attire and your personal life, it seems that women in politics are often subjected to a level of scrutiny that male politicians are perhaps not. How do you view this dynamic, and can you share with us your experiences?**

A: As I said earlier, I said about not being a conventional politician and that's the point I was always driving at. The fact that I anticipated public scrutiny because I pretty much live my life quite openly. Of course, there's a clear demarcation between the personal life and the political life, but I do not

completely hide my private life, in the sense that I'm on social media. I do share the space with people about the fact that I have a daughter or that we're celebrating something. I put it out there to show people that I'm as normal as you are.

This is seen as different as the conventional way of doing politics for most politicians, at least in India, is that they do not display their private life because that is scrutinized so much more.

I am responsible for the public life, and I understand that. If I'm leading my private life in a responsible manner, I think that's fine too. I think it needs to be accepted. Even today, I still face criticism. I have a private Instagram account, and I see that suddenly my followership has gone up a lot. Compared to my public Instagram account, which documents my entire political journey and the work that I'm doing. I get much criticism there too, but 80% of the comments are positive and it's only about 20% which are negative.

When people have reached that level, it's acceptance. I'm not saying that I've been able to change the world, but I think if I'm able to change even 1%, I think that's a great thing. Like I said, when I came into politics, I knew all of this, that as a woman, I'm going to face much more criticism, much more scrutiny.

**Q: What would you say is your key message to the future generation of women leaders in India?**

A: I think most women leaders should not think that we have limitations. These are limitations and boundaries that sometimes we put on ourselves and that society puts on us. You do it in your own way and do not believe that just because you are a woman, you have to do it in a particular manner. That's my message. I think, individual and personal to you, how you decide to go forward. And, you know, we're just as capable as doing the same things as men.

This is an extract from a wider conversation with CPA Secretariat's Miral Pankhania during a CPA Podcast episode recorded at the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Workshop in The Bahamas in May 2025.

## Parliamentary Conversations in the Commonwealth

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

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

## PARLIAMENTARY CONVERSATIONS IN THE COMMONWEALTH



CPA COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION



## Image Gallery: Parliamentary Diplomacy

Right: Delegates from 15 Legislatures attended the CPA British Islands and Mediterranean (BIM) Regional Conference in Cardiff, Wales from 17 to 20 June 2025 on theme of *'Addressing the Needs of a Modern Parliament'* and were welcomed by Hon. Elin Jones MS, Llywydd (Presiding Officer) of the Welsh Parliament (Senedd).

Below right: Members of the Falkland Islands Legislative Assembly, Hon. Peter Biggs, MLA and Hon. Mark Pollard, MLA visited the Parliament of Canada where they met with MPs led by CPA Canada Federal Branch Chairperson, Hon. Alexandra Mendès, MP, Assistant Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons.

Opposite page - Above: The CPA held a Post Election Seminar for the Belize National Assembly from 4 to 6 June 2025 in partnership with ParlAmericas following elections in March.

Opposite page - Below left: The Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee, Hon. Dr Christopher Kalila, MP (Zambia) addressed delegates at the 57<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly Session of the Southern African Development Community Parliamentary Forum (SADC PF) hosted by the Parliament of Zimbabwe from 31 May to 7 June 2025.

Opposite page - centre right: A two-person CPA delegation visited the Parliament of Vanuatu from 1 to 4 July 2025 as part of a CPA Democratic Benchmarks self-assessment exercise and met with Vanuatu Clerk, Maxime Banga.

Opposite page - bottom right: The Speaker of Tuvalu Parliament, Hon. Sir Iakoba Italeli visited the Parliament of Fiji on 15 July 2025 where he met with the Fiji Speaker, Hon. Filimone Jitoko. Tuvalu Acting Clerk, Ms Faitootoa Kulene and Secretary-General of Fiji Parliament, Mrs Jeanette Emberson joined the meeting.



Image credit: Welsh Parliament (Senedd).



Image credit: Falkland Islands Legislative Assembly/Parliament of Canada.





Image credit: National Assembly of Belize/Belize Government Press Office.



Image credit: SADC Parliamentary Forum/Parliament of Zimbabwe.



Image: Vanuatu Parliament



Image: Fiji Parliament





# Image Gallery: Parliamentary Diplomacy

Right: In June 2025, the Speaker of the House of Representatives at the New Zealand Parliament, Rt Hon. Gerry Brownlee visited Japan's National Diet (Parliament) at the invitation of the Japanese Speaker, Mr Fukushima Nukaga.

Below right: The CPA India Regional Chairperson, Hon. Shri Om Birla, Speaker of the Lok Sabha at the Parliament of India opened the CPA India Region Zone-II Conference in Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh, which took place from 30 June to 1 July 2025.

Opposite page - Above: The CPA held a Post Election Seminar (PES) from 24 to 25 June 2025 for the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago in Port of Spain in partnership with ParlAmericas and following recent elections in April 2025.

Opposite page - centre: Over forty Commonwealth Clerks and parliamentary officials attended the CPA Advanced Residency Programme for Leadership in Parliament in New Zealand from 7 to 11 July 2025. This was the second Residency Programme held for Clerks as part of the CPA Parliamentary Academy.

Opposite page - Below left: The Speaker of the British Columbia Legislative Assembly, Hon. Raj Chouhan, MLA and Assistant Deputy Speaker, Hon. Lorne Doerksen, MLA with Clerk, Kate Ryan-Lloyd met with CPA Secretary-General Stephen Twigg on 23 June 2025 during a parliamentary visit to the UK and Scottish Parliaments.

Opposite page - Below right: On 3 June 2025, the Speaker of the Victorian Legislative Assembly, Hon. Maree Edwards, MP welcomed the Speaker of the Australian Federal Parliament's House of Representatives, Hon. Milton Dick, MP to the Victorian Parliament in Melbourne.



Image credit: New Zealand Parliament/Japan Diet.



Image credit: Himachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly.





Image credit: Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago.



Image credit: New Zealand Parliament



Image credit: CPA Secretariat.



Image credit: Parliament of Victoria.





## Image Gallery: Parliamentary Diplomacy

**Right:** The President of the Australian Senate, Senator Sue Lines visited The Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh to meet with the Presiding Officer, Rt Hon. Alison Johnstone, MSP followed by a visit to the Welsh Parliament (Senedd Cymru) to meet with the Llywdd (Speaker), Rt Hon. Elin Jones MS.

**Below right:** Over 100 MPs and Parliamentary Clerks examined parliamentary democracy and strengthening Legislatures at 61<sup>st</sup> CPA Canada Regional Conference in Québec City, Québec from 20 to 24 July 2025.

**Opposite page - Above:** The seventh Commonwealth Secretary-General, Hon. Shirley Botchwey was welcomed to her new role by the UK Foreign Secretary, Rt Hon. David Lammy, MP at a Lancaster House reception on 5 June 2025. She is the first African woman and second person from the African continent to lead the association of 56 countries.

**Opposite page - centre left:** The Speaker of the Karnataka Legislative Assembly in India, Hon. Abdul Khader Ali Fareed Ullah Thota, MLA visited the Parliament of Malaysia on 17 June 2025 where he was received by the Speaker of the Malaysia House of Representatives (Dewan Rakyat), H.E. Tan Sri Dato' Dr Johari bin Abdul.

**Opposite page - below left:** The Speaker of the Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly, Hon. Mark Parton, MLA welcomed Members of the Business Committee of the Kiribati Parliament (Maneaba ni Maungatabu) from 23 to 24 June 2025.

**Opposite page - Below right:** A Tonga Parliament delegation visited their twinning partner at the Parliament of South Australia as part of a wider Australia visit to enhance regional cooperation from 21 to 28 June 2025.



Image credit: The Scottish Parliament.



Image credit: National Assembly of Québec.





Image credit: Commonwealth Secretariat.



Image credit: Parlimen Malaysia.



Image credit: Parliament of South Australia.



Image credit: ACT Assembly.





## Image Gallery: Parliamentary Diplomacy

Right and centre: From 10 to 16 August 2025, Commonwealth Parliamentarians from across Africa met in Banjul, The Gambia for 54<sup>th</sup> CPA Africa Regional Conference. Hon. Fabakary T. Jatta, Speaker of the National Assembly of The Gambia was elected as Chairperson of the CPA Africa Executive Committee in succession to Hon. Catherine Gotani Hara, MP, Speaker of the Parliament of Malawi, who also became President of the CPA Africa Region as host of the 55<sup>th</sup> CPA Africa Regional Conference due to take place in Malawi in 2026.

Bottom right: More than 25 Presiding Officers, Speakers and Clerks from 18 Parliaments in the Pacific and Australia Regions attended 54<sup>th</sup> Presiding Officers and Clerks Conference (POCC), hosted by Parliament of Nauru from 8 to 10 July 2025.

Opposite page - Above: The Parliaments of Singapore and Malaysia jointly organised the CPA South-East Asia Regional Clerks' Conference on 10 July 2025 held in Singapore.

Opposite page - centre and below right: Speakers of Parliament from across the world gathered in Switzerland from 28 to 31 July 2025 for the 6<sup>th</sup> World Conference of Speakers, organised by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and United Nations. The Conference has taken place every five years since its foundation in 2000.

Opposite page - below left: The Speaker of the Western Cape Provincial Parliament, Hon. Daylin Mitchell, MPP, and the Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Khalid Sayed, MPP met with CPA Secretary-General Stephen Twigg during a visit to the UK Parliament on 23 June 2025 where they signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to continue its parliamentary reforms in line with the CPA's Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures.



Image credit: National Assembly of The Gambia.



Image credit: National Assembly of The Gambia.



Image credit: Parliament of Nauru.





Image credit: Parliament of Singapore.



Image credit: Inter-Parliamentary Union.



Image credit: CPA Secretariat.



Image credit: Inter-Parliamentary Union.



# ENGAGING MPs IN DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT

## The work of the All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia for Disaster Risk Management (APPGM-DRM)

The All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia (APPGM) is a platform that brings together Members of Parliament from various political parties in Malaysia. The group encourages cooperation and dialogue among politicians from different parties working on a common and agreed goal. Thus, ensuring holistic, comprehensive and effective approaches to national challenges for better governance and policy outcomes.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia – Disaster Risk Management (APPGM-DRM), one of the seven APPGMs established on 27 November 2024, is an initiative that fosters collaboration among various stakeholders including Members of Parliament from different political parties, experts and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to identify and discuss issues of national significance and propose solutions to address the unique challenges faced in managing disaster risks in Malaysia. This initiative reflects a commitment to create a more resilient society by promoting inclusive strategies that consider the diverse needs of the population when preparing for and responding to disasters.

The APPGM-DRM appointed the Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Centre (DPPC) of the Malaysia-Japan International Institute of Technology-Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (MJIIT-UTM) as its Secretariat, highlighting the importance of continuous advocacy in disaster education and the dissemination of awareness regarding Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR). This initiative helps to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and best practices related to Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and the Humanitarian Development Nexus (HDN), which are crucial for building

resilience in communities. Continuous advocacy and awareness programmes play a key role in educating individuals and organisations on how to better prepare for and respond to disasters.

The APPGM-DRM is not just a discussion forum, but also plays a role in formulating policies, strengthening legislation and promoting dialogue among key stakeholders, including academic institutions, NGOs and the private sector. Thus, can lead to a more comprehensive and effective strategies for addressing disaster risk and reduction issues.

Some of the main areas of focus for the APPGM-DRM include disaster risk reduction, climate change, public health and sustainable development. With an evidence-based approach and comprehensive participation, the group strives to ensure that the nation's resilience is strengthened to face various current and future challenges. The APPGM-DRM aims to effectively address these challenges by using an evidence-based approach and fostering comprehensive participation.

As a cross-party platform that unites Members of Parliament from various political backgrounds, the APPGM-DRM acts as an intermediary, connecting public policies with best practices in disaster risk reduction (DRR). The APPGM-DRM recognises that climate change has increased the frequency and impact of natural disasters in Malaysia, with average annual losses reaching RM18 billion due to floods, landslides and extreme weather phenomena. Thus, addressing the challenges posed by climate change and the associated costs from natural disasters is vital for the country's resilience and sustainability.



Hon. Ir Ts Zahir Hassan, MP is a Member of the Malaysia Parliament since November 2022 and is the Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia for Disaster Risk Management (APPGM-DRM).

The priorities outlined at the recent APPGM-DRM meeting are critical for improving disaster risk reduction (DRR) efforts. These include: -

**a. Strengthening DRR legislation and policies:** A robust national strategy is essential to manage systemic risks and address the potential for multiple and/or cascading disasters. This can involve creating legal frameworks that mandate risk assessments, funding for disaster preparedness, recovery, mitigation and guidelines for effective response strategies.

**b. Enhancing coordination among agencies:** Effective disaster response requires seamless collaboration among government entities, private sector organisations, NGOs and local communities. Establishing clear communications channels and defined roles can significantly improve operational efficiency and response times during a disaster.

**c. Harnessing technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI):** Implementing cutting-edge technology in disaster monitoring and data analysis will enhance the ability to predict, prepare for and respond to disasters. AI can improve decision-making processes by providing real-time data and forecasts, leading to more operational strategies that are informed by evidence.

**d. Strengthening community resilience:** Engaging communities in disaster risk reduction empowers them and increases their ability to withstand and recover from disasters. This can be achieved through awareness campaigns, training sessions and the





development of local disaster response plans that involve community members.

These priorities collectively aim to build a comprehensive approach to disaster risk reduction that not only mitigates risks but also prepares communities for the challenges ahead.

The APPGM-DRM will refer to the United Nations Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) Parliamentary Guidelines, aligned with its commitment to the Sendai Framework 2015-2030 and the National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy 2030. Additionally, at the regional level, the APPGM-DRM will continue to strengthen cooperation within the ASEAN Framework for Disaster Management.

As an initial step, the APPGM-DRM is taking a proactive approach to enhance DRR in Malaysia and will initiate three actions as outlined below:

**a. Empowering DRR policies and planning within national development strategies:** This action emphasises the integration of DRR into broader national development plans. Malaysia can ensure that resilience to disasters is a key component of sustainable development by embedding DRR into these strategies.

**b. Strengthening the role of Members of Parliament:** This

initiative aims to elevate the involvement of Parliamentarians in local, regional and global discussions on disaster management. Malaysia can strategically position itself in addressing disaster issues and advocate effectively for policies that address disaster risks and allocate resources to mitigate these challenges by empowering MPs with the necessary tools and platforms.

**c. Developing capacities and knowledge products:** This focuses on building awareness and educating both policymakers and the public about disaster preparedness. The understanding of DRR can be enhanced, leading to more informed decision-making and community preparedness by creating effective knowledge products (such as toolkits, guidelines and training) and establishing workshops or campaigns.

Together, these actions can create a strong framework for improving disaster resilience in Malaysia and fostering a culture of preparedness among communities and leaders.

The APPGM-DRM has organised its first programme; DRR Intellectual Discourse 2025 which was held on 17 February 2025, in Kuala Lumpur. The intellectual discourse involved various stakeholders and provided valuable

**Above: Participants on the Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Intellectual Discourse held in February 2025, organised in partnership with the All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia for Disaster Risk Management (APPGM-DRM)**

discussions, insights and knowledge sharing.

With the support of all parties, the APPGM-DRM are confident that Malaysia will be better prepared to face future disasters. It is believed that through an integrated approach grounded in evidence and science, along with comprehensive participation from all levels of society, the APPGM-DRM will be able to strengthen the nation's resilience together. This highlights the importance of collaboration across various sectors of society, the need for evidence-based strategies and the role of community participation in enhancing national resilience.

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- i. CDEMA, 2014. Disaster Risk Reduction to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.
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# BANGLADESH MOVES CLOSER TO TRANSITION TO BICAMERAL LEGISLATURE



Kamran Reza Chowdhury is a journalist, researcher, author, columnist and political commentator based in Bangladesh.

**Following the democratic upheaval and widespread protests in 2024, Bangladesh is looking to embark on a series of constitutional and parliamentary reforms**

Fifty-four years after independence in 1971, the second largest economy in South Asia, Bangladesh has embarked on a massive democratic reform since the August 2024 fall of authoritarian premier, Sheikh Hasina who ruled the country with an 'iron hand' since January 2009.

The initiative of overhauling the country's existing democratic system - reforming the constitution and the electoral system - has apparently received widespread public support as the deposed former Prime Minister had changed the country's charter in June 2011 to hold elections under her government instead of a non-party caretaker system that she had envisaged in the mid-1990s when she was the Leader of the Opposition.

The abolition of the caretaker system from the Bangladesh Constitution enabled Sheikh Hasina to hold three consecutive polls in 2014, 2018 and 2024 that were widely considered to be a foregone conclusion, and she held on to power by destroying constitutional institutions like the Election Commission and politicising the police, civil administration and the judiciary.

Hasina's rule marginalised the opposition through hundreds of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances, establishing a secret prison at the intelligence facility, jailing a three-time Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in two false corruption cases, making the Legislature a 'one-party show', and scuttling freedom of expression and the freedom of the

press by enacting repressive digital security laws.

In the Freedom House report 2024,<sup>1</sup> Bangladesh scored 40 out of 100 on political rights and civil liberties.

Bangladesh cannot be separated from the Westminster model of democracy for many historic reasons.

The Bengali nationalist movement led to the first of the six-point demands (1966) that Bangladesh must be *"federal and parliamentary, in which the election to the federal legislature and to the legislatures of the federating units shall be direct and on the basis of universal adult franchise."*<sup>2</sup>

Sheikh Hasina backpaddled on the question of parliamentary democracy for Bangladesh and failed.

An unprecedented wave of nationwide protests, popularly known as July-August uprising, led by the students demanding the abolition of the quota system in public service, started in early July 2024 and continued for two months with massive scale violence involving the police, the intelligence apparatus and the ruling party loyalists against the protesters.

On 5 August 2024, Hasina hurriedly boarded an Air Force helicopter which took her to India for refuge as the marchers from all sides streamed to occupy her official residence *Gono Bhaban*.

Hasina, the eldest daughter of Bangladesh's founding President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, becomes the first head of government to leave the country in the face of mass upsurge.

According to the UN fact-finding mission, a staggering 1,400 people

may have died, many of them minors, with thousands more injured in the two-month protest.

On 8 August 2024, Nobel Laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus formed an interim administration in Bangladesh. Political parties extended unwavering support to Yunus calling for an end to future 'fascism'.

Yunus promised to reform all of Bangladesh's democratic institutions, including reform of the Constitution, before holding the next general elections between December 2025 and June 2026.

Dr Ali Riaz, a Bangladeshi-born American Professor of Political Science at the Illinois State University, headed the first ever Constitution Reform Commission which submitted over 100 recommendations to Professor Yunus.

Professor Riaz said that the recommendations were made to 'remove fascism' from the present Constitution of Bangladesh, which *"concentrated unchecked power on the Prime Minister"*, although some experts attributed Hasina's authoritarianism to lack of political consensus and violent political culture.

The Riaz Commission's remarkable recommendations include the introduction of a dual Chamber in Bangladesh.

According to the recommendations, the Lower House, to be known as Jatiya Sangsad, will consist of 400 Members of Parliament (MPs) directly elected by adult franchise. Out of the total of 400 seats, one-hundred constituencies would be reserved



The Parliament of Bangladesh, also known as Jatiyo Sangsad, was designed by American architect Louis Kahn and opened in 1982.



Image credit: Parliament of Bangladesh.

for women, and they will be directly elected by popular votes.

Currently Bangladesh's 350-strong unicameral Parliament consists of 300 MPs directly elected by the voters from 300 constituencies while 50 seats are reserved for women. The MPs from the reserved seats are indirectly elected by the MPs through a proportional representation system.

The proposed Upper House, or Senate, will comprise 105 seats - 100 seats would be filled according to the proportional representation system while the President will nominate five Senators. Thirty percent of seats in the Senate must be preserved for women.

Political parties cannot nominate their party members for more than 50% of their due share of the Senate membership. They must nominate the other 50% of seats on a non-partisan basis: from different professional groups such as citizens, educationists,

scientists, philanthropists, labour representatives, women development workers, cultural figures and people from other segments of society.

Law making in the Bangladesh Parliament draws criticism from many experts and civil society groups, as MPs are observed to invest more time in praising their leaders than examining the laws placed before the Chamber, although MPs at the Parliamentary Standing Committees scrutinise every single law before its passage in the Legislature.

The introduction of an Upper Chamber is likely to make law-making in Bangladesh more people-oriented and exhaustive as the Members of both Chambers will enjoy freedom to vote against their parties, with few exceptions.

However, a proposed second Chamber does not always meet with universal approval:

*"The absence of checks and balances in a single chamber may lead to hasty and poorly considered decisions, to technically deficient legislation or to excessively partisan legislation that makes no concession to strongly held minority views. For these reasons, many countries have a second legislative chamber - often with a distinct composition, function and powers - in order to complement and balance the primary chamber. In many contexts, however, a second chamber may add additional complexities, delays and costs for little additional benefit; a properly designed single-chamber legislature, with extra-parliamentary checks and balances, may be more appropriate."*<sup>3</sup>

The Bangladesh Constitution Reform Commission further recommended dropping three out of four fundamental principles - Nationalism, Socialism and Secularism





# PARLIAMENTARY REFORMS IN BANGLADESH



Image credit: Parliament of Bangladesh.

Above: The current Chamber in the Parliament of Bangladesh has 350 seats with 300 MPs directly elected by the voters from 300 constituencies with 50 seats reserved for women.

- from the Constitution and replacing them with Democracy, Equality, Human Dignity, Social Justice and Pluralism as the fundamental principles of the New Constitution.

The Commission further recommended the creation of the National Constitutional Council (NCC) that will recommend names to the President for the appointees to different posts. This will curtail the unlimited power of the Prime Minister over government appointments.

The Commission also recommended that the Prime Minister must not hold the posts of the Leader of the House and the ruling party chief at the same time. Its conclusion was that holding all three posts at the same time gives an individual unchecked power that must be curtailed with a constitutional bar.

It further said that the same person cannot become Prime Minister for more than two terms.

The National Consensus Commission formed by Professor Yunus has been holding talks with the political parties for the implementation of the recommendations made by the Constitutional Reform Commission and the Election System Reform Commission.

The presumptive winner in the next general elections and Bangladesh's largest party, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) - which has formed four governments since its formation on 1 September 1978, under the aegis of the popular military ruler Major General Ziaur Rahman - has already unveiled its 31-point reform proposals that included introducing a bicameral Legislature.

While different political parties have different views on the recommendations of the two commissions, the introduction of a bicameral Parliament has garnered support from all political parties and

this reform may be introduced in the near future.

Kamran Reza Chowdhury is a journalist, researcher, author, columnist and political commentator based in Bangladesh. He achieved M.Phil. in 2002. In his journalism career of over 27 years, he has devoted most of his time writing about parliamentary politics and the political parties in Bangladesh for different media outlets at home and abroad. He was the General Secretary of Bangladesh Parliament Journalists' Association for eight years (2014-2022) and Editor of the association's bilingual publication, *Parliament Journal*. He is regarded as having one of the longest institutional memories regarding parliamentary politics in Bangladesh.

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<sup>2</sup> Siddiqui, Kalim, 1972. 'Conflict, Crisis and War in Pakistan'. MacMillan Press Ltd. London.

<sup>3</sup> Bulmer, Elliot, 2017. 'Bicameralism', Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. Stockholm, Sweden.



# GENDER EQUALITY AND INCLUSIVITY IN PARLIAMENTS

## Progress and gaps in the Commonwealth

Ensuring gender representation in political processes is a fundamental criterion for the functioning of democracy and enhances governance in all its facets, promoting inclusivity, efficiency and stability. This edict from the Commonwealth has been consistently reaffirmed at the highest leadership levels.

In 2011, the late Queen Elizabeth II shared her thoughts as Head of the Commonwealth, urging support for women and girls, saying: *"Let us all give a thought to the practical ways in which we, as individuals or as groups, can provide help to girls and women - enable them to have a chance of a fuller and more rewarding life, no matter where they happen to be born."*

In that same speech, Queen Elizabeth highlighted the significant roles that women play as *'agents of change in so many ways,'* emphasising their involvement across every aspect of life and culture within the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth Charter recognises this shared vision in **Principle 13**, which states: *"We recognise that gender equality and women's empowerment are fundamental constituents of human development and human rights. Women's education and the advancement of their rights are important fundamental prerequisites for effective and sustainable development."*

### Promoting Inclusive Parliaments

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and its Commonwealth Women

Parliamentarians (CWP) network are committed to advancing democratic governance and institutional development. One of the main focus areas for the CPA is ensuring that Parliaments reflect the diversity of the societies they represent, with specific emphasis on encouraging the equitable participation of women.

The Commonwealth Secretariat has also shown a commitment to bringing gender equality to the forefront for Commonwealth Leaders.

*"The Commonwealth's guiding principles and values in the 1991 Harare Declaration, reaffirmed in the 2011 Perth Commonwealth Heads of Governments Meeting (CHOGM), emphasised improving gender equality and women's empowerment in the Commonwealth, and called on Heads to demonstrate commitment by entrenching measures to advance women's political participation and leadership at all levels of decision-making."*<sup>1</sup>

### Current Status of Gender Representation across the Commonwealth and the Persistence Challenges

There have been notable strides in equitable representation for women across the Commonwealth. The increasing presence of women in national and subnational Legislatures across several countries in the Commonwealth demonstrates that gender parity in political representation is not only possible but already a reality in certain contexts. According to *CWP Statistics* (September 2024), **Rwanda** leads

with 63% female representation in the lower House of its Parliament. In addition, **Australia Federal** (47%), **New Zealand** (45%) and **South Africa** (44%) show that sustained political commitment and institutional reforms can result in near-equal participation of women in governance. Countries like **Mozambique** (43%), **Canada** (42%), and the **United Kingdom** (34%) have also made gains in women's representation in Parliaments. These examples can serve as models for other jurisdictions where women's political representation remains significantly low, reinforcing the argument that equitable participation is not merely aspirational, but achievable through strategic reforms and accountability.<sup>2</sup>

### Gaps and Challenges

Despite ongoing efforts to offer technical assistance to member countries through skills training, knowledge exchange workshops, capacity-building initiatives and monitoring and evaluation, substantial gaps remain in translating these efforts into long-term impactful change on gender equality. Some crucial areas such as women's economic empowerment, the eradication of violence against women and girls, addressing the gendered impacts of climate change, and recognising women's roles as peacemakers in conflict resolution still face significant challenges.

In many Commonwealth jurisdictions, including Pakistan, the majority of women enter Legislatures through reserved seats, which are typically filled via

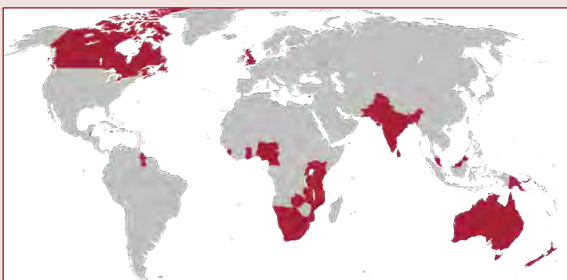


Nighat Paristan is a Director (Library and Research) at the National Assembly of Pakistan





# GENDER EQUALITY IN THE COMMONWEALTH



The Commonwealth is made up of 56 independent countries working together to pursue common goals, which promote development, democracy and peace. It has a combined population of 2.7 billion, of which more than 60% is aged 29 or under.

The past century has witnessed the greatest advances for gender equality in human history. From New Zealand becoming the first self-governing country in 1893 to allow women to vote in parliamentary elections to Sri Lanka electing the world's first female prime minister in 1960, the gender gap has never narrowed so quickly. However, there is still much ground to be gained for a girl born today to be on an equal footing with a boy.

To assess and accelerate progress, the Commonwealth measures the progress made by its 56 member countries in four areas: women in leadership, women's economic empowerment, ending violence against women and girls and gender and climate change.

**Women in leadership:** In the Parliaments of 15 Commonwealth countries, 30% or more of their Members are women.

- Rwanda and New Zealand are among the six countries worldwide to have achieved gender parity in Parliament.
- Only one in five Commonwealth Parliamentarians is a woman.
- The Parliaments of Europe, Africa and the Caribbean and Americas Region have on average almost 25% female Members.
- Nineteen Commonwealth countries have achieved the target of 30% or more women Ministers.
- In the Caribbean and Americas Region, nearly 40% of seats in local government are held by women, which is significantly higher than the Commonwealth average of 27%.
- Across the Commonwealth, women now hold nearly 38% of management roles.

indirect selection by political parties. This process limits women's direct accountability to voters and restricts their political autonomy. For those contesting general seats, the obstacles are even greater - ranging from inadequate campaign financing and minimal party backing to entrenched patriarchal attitudes that hinder their electoral prospects. The under-representation of women's participation is mostly symptomatic of persistent low literacy levels, lack of job security in politics, the absence of female role models, politically motivated violence, corruption and a lack of training for political participation. As a result, many women are reluctant to compete in politics.

Moreover, women in politics frequently face harassment, both online and offline, which undermines their participation and silences their voices. A recently published joint report by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), and the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA) - with contributions from the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) network - revealed the widespread nature of sexism, harassment and violence against women in Parliaments across several CPA regions, including Asia, South-East Asia, Australia and the Pacific with 60% of women MPs from these Regions reporting online gender-based violence.<sup>3</sup>

### Areas for improvement

To drive further progress toward gender equality, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) must intensify its efforts in several critical areas which include strengthening women's leadership, advancing women's economic empowerment, effectively addressing violence against women and girls, and incorporating gender perspectives into climate change policies.

### Conclusion

Inclusive Legislatures are prerequisites of democracy. The Commonwealth has made critical advancements, but achieving gender equality in decision making processes in all tiers of governance is an ongoing effort on the part of every Member of Parliament. The CPA's role in leading, assisting and linking Legislatures for the attainment of the higher goal of gender equitable Parliaments is fundamental within the process.

### References:

<sup>1</sup> Commonwealth Secretariat report: Women's Political Participation in the Commonwealth: Issues and Challenges, [www.thecommonwealth-ilibrary.org](http://www.thecommonwealth-ilibrary.org)

<sup>2</sup> CPA website: Numbers of Women in Parliaments across the Commonwealth (as at September 2024)

<sup>3</sup> CPA website: New study reveals 60% of women MPs from Asia-Pacific report online gender-based violence, 25 March 2025, [www.cpahq.org](http://www.cpahq.org)



## Case study: Women's Political Participation in Pakistan: Historical, Legal and Contemporary Analysis

Analysis by Nighat Paristan from the National Assembly of Pakistan.

Pakistan has had a long and evolving history of women's political participation. From the outset in 1947, women were granted the right to vote and contest elections. However, their representation in legislative bodies remained limited for decades. A turning point came with the 2002 electoral reforms, which introduced a significant allocation of reserved seats - 60 in the National Assembly and 17 in the Senate - along with similar provisions in the Provincial Legislatures. These reforms marked a shift from token representation to more structured and measurable inclusion of women in national decision-making processes.

Today, Pakistan stands among the Commonwealth countries with one of the highest proportions of reserved seats for women, providing a critical pathway for female political engagement. Prominent women leaders have emerged from this framework, including Benazir Bhutto, the first woman to lead a Muslim-majority country as Prime Minister, and Dr Fehmida Mirza, the first female Speaker of Pakistan's National Assembly. At the Provincial level, three of Pakistan's Assemblies are currently led by female Speakers and there are two state Ministers and 8 Parliamentary Secretaries who are women - an encouraging sign of progress in subnational leadership.

Pakistan has also contributed significantly to international forums within the Commonwealth. For instance, Kashmala Tariq chaired the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) from 2007 to 2010; Dr Nafisa Shah served as Vice-Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee in 2011 and 2012; and Shandana Gulzar Khan led the CWP from 2019 to 2022, enhancing Pakistan's visibility in the global discourse on gender and governance.

Legislatively, women in Pakistan's Parliament have been instrumental in initiating and championing reforms on critical issues such as domestic violence, workplace harassment, reproductive health and inheritance rights. The establishment of cross-party women's caucuses has provided an important platform for bipartisan collaboration on gender-sensitive policy development.

Recent findings from the Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) further underscore the substantive role women are playing in parliamentary processes. Although women constituted only 17% of total membership in 2024–2025, they contributed nearly 49% of the total parliamentary agenda. In particular, female Members of the National Assembly (MNAs) sponsored 55% of agenda items, while female Senators initiated 31% - outpacing many of their male counterparts in legislative activity.

Moreover, women Parliamentarians demonstrated higher participation rates: female MNAs attended 75% of sittings, compared to 63% for male MNAs. Similarly, female Senators attended 67% of sessions, slightly surpassing the 64% attendance rate of male Senators. These figures reflect not only their commitment to governance but also challenge traditional narratives that marginalise women's contributions in political spheres.

Despite these achievements, challenges remain, particularly in ensuring that women's legislative contributions are addressed meaningfully in assembly debates and policymaking. Nonetheless, the trajectory of women's political performance in Pakistan, as evidenced by both historical milestones and contemporary data, reflects a robust and growing influence that continues to reshape the country's democratic landscape.



Left: Dr Fehmida Mirza was the first female Speaker of Pakistan's National Assembly serving as the 18<sup>th</sup> Speaker from 2008 to 2013. She was also the Federal Minister for Inter Provincial Coordination from August 2018 until April 2022.

Right: Benazir Bhutto was a Pakistani politician and stateswoman who served as the 11<sup>th</sup> Prime Minister of Pakistan from 1988 to 1990, and again from 1993 to 1996. She was the first woman elected to head a democratic government in a Muslim-majority country. She also chaired or co-chaired the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) from the early 1980s until her assassination in 2007.



Images: Parliament of Pakistan.



# LEGISLATING FOR EQUALITY: A PACIFIC TOOLKIT WITH GLOBAL LESSONS



Louisa Wall is a former Member of the Aotearoa New Zealand Parliament and former Ambassador for Pacific Gender Equality. She also represented her country in both netball and rugby.

In April 2024, a cross-section of Pacific Parliamentarians gathered in Nadi, Fiji for the *Third Pacific Human Rights Conference on Pacific Islanders of Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Expressions, and Sex Characteristics* (PIDSOGIESC+). Amid the spirit of *talanoa* (open dialogue and inclusive dialogue), a crucial need emerged — the desire for a practical, culturally resonant resource to support legislators advancing inclusive, rights-based governance across the island nations of the Pacific that we collectively refer to as the Blue Pacific Continent.

Just over a year later, I am proud to welcome the release of *Promoting Inclusion for People of Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Expressions, and Sex Characteristics: A Toolkit for Legislators in the Pacific Region*, published by Parliamentarians for Global Action. More than a guide, this Toolkit is a strategic instrument designed to empower legislative leadership that is both regionally grounded and globally principled, leadership that honours our cultures while upholding the universal values of human rights, dignity and equality.

As a former Member of Parliament and Ambassador for Gender Equality, I understand the responsibility

that elected representatives bear. Parliaments are more than legislative forums. They are spaces for moral leadership, public accountability and cultural transformation. This Toolkit equips Parliamentarians with the knowledge, tools and courage to legislate for those who are too often criminalised, marginalised or silenced.

What distinguishes this resource is its grounding in our region's lived realities, ensuring its relevance and resonance with local contexts. Developed in close partnership with Pacific Parliamentarians, civil society organisations and human rights advocates, the Toolkit affirms that people of diverse SOGIESC+ identities have always been integral to our communities. Cultural identities such as *fa'afafine*, *palopa*, *takatāpui*, *leiti* and others reflect our long-standing acceptance and recognition of gender and sexual diversity. The Toolkit goes beyond theoretical advocacy by offering practical insights that are directly informed by our cultural practices and values. In doing so, it creates a space where the contributions, histories and identities of PIDSOGIESC+ individuals are not only validated but actively celebrated as a fundamental part of our shared heritage.

## Reclaiming our cultural identity through legislative action

Many of the laws that criminalise and exclude us - including sodomy laws, discriminatory criminal codes and the absence of anti-discrimination protections - are colonial imports. These legal frameworks are not of our making. Repealing them is not simply a legal task; it is an act of cultural reclamation and political justice.

This Toolkit supports Parliamentarians in navigating that journey. It offers:

- Culturally grounded definitions that affirm local language and understanding
- Legislative models and policy pathways to enable decriminalisation, anti-discrimination and equitable access to health services
- Case studies from Fiji, Vanuatu, Samoa and Aotearoa New Zealand
- Guidance on building coalitions with civil society, traditional authorities and faith-based communities
- Insights on the intersection of climate justice and the vulnerabilities of PIDSOGIESC+ people

**“Legislators play a pivotal role in creating inclusive societies, but the pathways, arguments and legislative steps necessary to achieve those outcomes are not always evident. This Toolkit provides a blueprint for dismantling the harmful legal structures that continue to oppress and exclude and offers a roadmap for action.”**



- A resounding call to action for legislators to lead with integrity, courage and compassion.

Legislators play a pivotal role in creating inclusive societies, but the pathways, arguments and legislative steps necessary to achieve those outcomes are not always evident. This Toolkit provides a blueprint for dismantling the harmful legal structures that continue to oppress and exclude and offers a roadmap for action.

Among its key legislative recommendations are:

- Repealing laws that criminalise same-sex intimacy and target gender expression
- Enacting comprehensive anti-discrimination protections across employment, education, housing and healthcare
- Mandating inclusive and responsive climate policies that recognise the distinct vulnerabilities of PIDSOGIESC+ communities in climate-related emergencies
- Strengthening human rights institutions and ensuring parliamentary oversight to promote equity and inclusion
- Supporting inclusive education initiatives and public campaigns that challenge stigma and foster acceptance.

What is perhaps most valuable in having a resource of this kind is that it models inclusivity while preserving an understanding of the distinct cultural identities that represent our communities. It draws from the context and collective experience of the people of the Pacific even as it honors the uniqueness of our island nations. In doing so, it makes the case that the protection and recognition of PIDSOGIESC+ identities are not foreign concepts but are in fact deeply aligned with our collective history and distinct cultural values.

### A resource to benefit other Commonwealth nations

While tailored for the Pacific, this Toolkit speaks powerfully to other Commonwealth nations. Many

post-colonial societies face similar challenges, where antiquated legal systems continue to harm people under the guise of tradition or religion. These laws are not rooted in indigenous values but in the legacy of colonialism. In many instances, these laws are a distortion of local traditions, which historically embraced inclusive understandings of gender and sexuality.

Across the Commonwealth, 30 countries continue to criminalise same-sex intimacy, and many still offer no legal protection for gender-diverse people. This Toolkit presents a framework that can be adapted globally — from the Caribbean to Sub-Saharan Africa, from South Asia to the Mediterranean.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association has a critical role to play in this effort. It can amplify tools like this, foster peer learning among legislators, and help build the political momentum needed for bold and principled reform.

### The power of Parliamentary movements and community

As Women's Chair of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) Oceania and Co-Chair of the Pacific LBQ+ Working Group, I have seen the leadership of Indigenous, queer and feminist voices shifting our region's political discourse. In my role as Chair of the Pacific Decriminalisation Committee, I work alongside courageous PIDSOGIESC+ community members and allies to ensure our laws reflect who we truly are, not what was imposed upon us.

Inclusion is not foreign to the Pacific. Our cultural values, including *manaakitanga* (respect and care), *whanaungatanga* (kinship), and *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship and collective responsibility) are foundational to human rights and social justice. They are the bedrock of inclusive governance.

Parliamentarians are part of a growing collective of allies, activists and communities worldwide who are pushing for meaningful change, often in the face of adversity. This sense of

solidarity is crucial, as it strengthens the resolve of Parliamentarians, providing them with the support needed to challenge unjust laws, confront societal prejudices and work towards creating a more just world. Such solidarity and support are at the heart of *Parliamentarians for Global Action* and its mission, and this Toolkit serves as a powerful illustration of what can emerge when we are provided with safe spaces for constructive dialogue, for learning and for coordinated action.

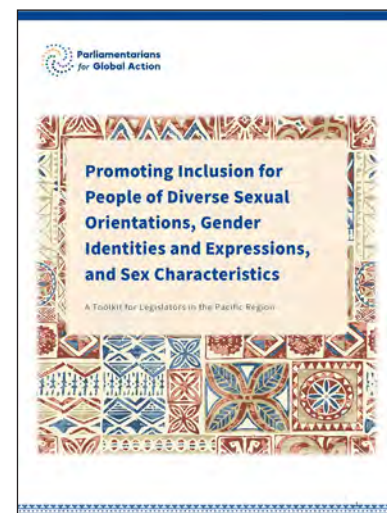
This Toolkit reminds Parliamentarians that they are not alone. They are part of a regional and global movement committed to dignity, equality and inclusion.

To all legislators: we stand at a pivotal moment. We can remain silent, or we can choose justice. We can preserve outdated, exclusionary laws, or we can enact reforms that align with our peoples, cultures and values.

This Toolkit charts a path forward, one shaped by Pacific leadership, strengthened through solidarity, and driven by our shared commitment to equality.

Let us use it. Let us act. Let us lead.

To download a copy of the *Parliamentarians for Global Action* publication: 'Promoting Inclusion for People of Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Expressions, and Sex Characteristics: A Toolkit for Legislators in the Pacific Region' please visit <https://www.pgaction.org/news/sogi-pacific-parliamentary-toolkit.html>



# BRINGING CITIZENS' VOICES INTO PARLIAMENT

Professor Cristina Leston  
Bandeira is the Chair of IPEN  
and Professor of Politics at  
the University of Leeds and  
Dr Elise Uberoi is Deputy  
Chair of IPEN and Head  
of Social Policy Section at  
the UK House of Commons  
Library.

## New set of guides to explore the principles, challenges and benefits of parliamentary public engagement

In a context of declining political trust and increasing political disengagement, Parliaments around the world are trying out new ways to connect with their citizens. To help them develop effective public engagement activities, the International Parliament Engagement Network (IPEN) has partnered with *Inter Pares / Parliaments in Partnership* to develop a set of eight *Guides on Citizen Engagement for Parliaments*.

Citizen engagement can help Parliaments make better decisions and legislation by enriching their debates with information about what life is like for citizens from different groups, and what they need to thrive. It can also help Parliaments build greater understanding of their own role, work and purpose, contributing to greater trust and democratic legitimacy. For citizens, engaging with Parliament may help them shape the rules that govern their lives, and feel a sense of ownership and belonging in the country they live in and its institutions.

There are many ways in which Parliaments can invite their citizens to contribute, participate or learn, and each comes with its own challenges and benefits. These new guides are designed to guide Parliamentarians

and parliamentary officials in deciding which activities to develop, and how to design and deliver them in a way that works for their specific context. They present insights from academic research and practical knowledge from Parliaments from across the world, with ample examples showing how activities can be approached in different ways to achieve meaningful results in both well- and less well-resourced Parliaments.

This suite of eight guides covers a wide range of parliamentary public engagement activities, with each guide focusing on a specific topic.

The first two guides define key concepts and considerations that are threaded through the other guides. The first guide sets out eight core principles which should guide all parliamentary public engagement programmes. The second guide explains how Parliaments can engage underrepresented groups, which is crucial in developing meaningful pathways of engagement that go beyond the 'usual suspects'. The remaining six guides focus on the following methods of engagement: *Petitions and Citizens' Initiatives*; *Public Consultations*; *Deliberative Engagement*; *Youth Engagement*;

*Education Programmes*; *Parliaments as a Space and Place*.

Each guide follows a similar structure. This includes an overview of key approaches to each method of engagement. For example, the *Guide on Public Consultations* identifies four types of approaches to consultations: hearings, online call for views, discussion-based methods and citizen or civil society presence in Committees, with examples from all of the following and more: Benin's National Assembly, the Brazilian Congress, Chile's Chamber of Deputies, Irish Oireachtas, Nigerian House of Representatives and Serbia's National Assembly of the Republic. As this illustrates, each guide includes plenty of examples from across the world, across different types of political systems and parliamentary institutions.

The guides cover benefits and challenges in the use of each type of citizen engagement method covered, and being practice-oriented, each guide includes a section on '*How to put it into practice*', which goes into the details of each method. All the guides also include a section on evaluation, as a key dimension for Parliaments to understand how well their programmes work. The guides finish with a checklist that practitioners can use to ensure they are meeting the eight principles of parliamentary public engagement.

The activities covered in the guides range very widely therefore from education programmes to more active forms of participation, such as the different models for engaging young

***“There are many ways in which Parliaments can invite their citizens to contribute, participate or learn, and each comes with its own challenges and benefits.”***





people with parliamentary business covered in the guide on *Youth Engagement*. This guide highlights the importance of ‘meaningful engagement’, which empowers participants by giving them real opportunities to directly contribute to parliamentary business.

The guide notes that many Parliaments offer some engagement activities aimed at young people, who are often less likely to vote, but hold a key stake in the long-term outcomes of parliamentary decisions and legislation. These activities can take the form of Committees, reference groups, or even Parliaments made up

of young people representing other young people.

A key challenge for youth engagement, as well as many other engagement activities, is to manage expectations and communicate clearly about the potential impact participants may have on parliamentary work: MPs do not have to act on the input from participants, but they should consider it and respond by explaining why some ideas are taken forward or not. This is often referred to as ‘closing the feedback loop’, another key concept addressed in the guides.

Another activity many Parliaments already deliver is tours of their building. The *Guide on Parliament as*

*a Place and a Space* explains how inviting citizens into the parliamentary building can help demystify the work and role of Parliament, and help citizens feel connected with their Parliament’s work and history. This can be a relatively easy way to deliver citizen engagement, as all Parliaments have a building with spaces that can be used for tours, visits, art exhibitions and other activities. However, this guide also showcases how some Parliaments are creating meaningful spaces outside of their parliamentary buildings, for example through the use of mobile buses that travel the country to disseminate the work of Parliament such as in Germany, Trinidad and Tobago and Zambia, or through the creation of parliamentary constituency offices, as in South Africa.

Petitions and citizens’ initiatives constitute a well-established method of engagement, with a long history. In many cases, petitioning is the oldest form of political participation, often pre-dating voting. The *Guide on Petitions and Citizen’s Initiatives* gives an overview of how petitions and citizens’ initiatives systems can take different forms by focusing on systems in the Parliaments of Costa Rica, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, New Zealand, Nigeria and Thailand. It also presents case studies to show how petitions and citizens’ initiatives have led to change, including change contrary to the initial petition in Spain’s example.

The suite of eight guides presents rigorously researched and practically oriented information on a range of citizen engagement methods. Throughout, their focus is on ideas that help ensure engagement activities are effective and meaningful. The guides are free to use and available online.

The full list of guides is as follows:

- *Principles of Parliamentary Public Engagement* gives an overview of key ideas to consider when developing, delivering and evaluating public engagement activities
- *Youth Engagement* shares different ways of engaging young people in a meaningful way



- *Public Consultations* explores different ways to elicit information from the public to inform parliamentary work
- *Parliament as a Space and a Place* shows how Parliaments can use their spaces to enhance citizens' relationships with Parliaments as places of key importance for democracies
- *Petitions and Citizens' Initiatives* explores different ways through which citizens can make suggestions for policy change
- *Education Programmes* shows how Parliaments can work with schools and other organisations to teach children, young people and adults about Parliament
- *Deliberative Engagement* explores how Parliaments can use deliberative methods to find possibilities for public consensus on thorny issues
- *Engaging underrepresented groups* explores how Parliaments can ensure their citizen engagement activities are accessible and inclusive and reach the right audiences.

For more details and access to all eight guides visit [www.inter-pares.eu/en/publications/guides-on-citizen-engagement-for-parliaments](http://www.inter-pares.eu/en/publications/guides-on-citizen-engagement-for-parliaments). If you have any questions or can share your story of how you have used the guides, then please email: [IPEN@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:IPEN@leeds.ac.uk).

The International Parliament Engagement Network (IPEN) brings together parliamentary officials, academics and third sector representatives working on public engagement in parliaments around the world. <https://ipen-network.org/>

*Inter Pares | Parliaments in Partnership*, implemented by International IDEA, is the European Union's global initiative aiming to foster representative and inclusive democracy worldwide through strengthening global parliamentary development and inter-parliamentary cooperation.

# SUPPORTING LOCAL DEMOCRACY

## As it marks its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) explains why 'all politics is local'

The Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) is very proud to be celebrating thirty years of working with local government stakeholders from across the Commonwealth to deliver democratic, accountable and efficient local government and local services across the 56 member states.

CLGF was set up in 1994 at a time of major geopolitical change, with the ascendancy of democratic values and peaceful cooperation, including through moves towards greater decentralisation, with many governments looking to decentralise planning, decision-making and service-delivery to local communities.

In recognition of that, and of the different actors who play a critical role in effective decentralisation, CLGF's members uniquely include individual cities and local governments; regional and national local government associations; and Ministries of local government. Members are committed to working together to promote and support local democracy and good governance; to strengthen the capacity of local government to deliver for citizens; and to exchange and share research, knowledge and good practice.

CLGF Secretary-General, Lucy Slack explained: *"Our diverse membership closely reflects the ethos of CLGF, namely that everything is more effectively achieved if approached collaboratively, and through partnership working with other agencies and disciplines. This diversity is something we very much value and welcome, and we believe this gives CLGF its legitimacy to serve as a voice for Commonwealth local government."* The academic and research dimension is seen by CLGF as vital in bringing about informed

innovation and improvement, based on both empirical evidence and data.

CLGF was welcomed as the voice of local government by Commonwealth Heads of Government at their meeting in Auckland in 1995 and further reinforced in the Commonwealth Charter, which affirmed the *Aberdeen Agenda - Principles on Good Practice for Local Democracy and Good Governance* and was signed by the late Queen Elizabeth II as Head of the Commonwealth in March 2013.

CLGF's work builds on delivering these core commitments and includes a broad range of advocacy; capacity building and training; research and policy making; as well as networking, learning and exchange. CLGF has a network of regional offices in Southern, West and Central and East Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

Partnership is at the heart of how the organisation works. We take a national approach to planning, programming and delivery of with our members, supported by programme offices in the Commonwealth regions listed above. This ensures that what we are working on - whether it is local economic development, support for decentralisation, waste management, sustainable urbanisation, or local finance - is contextually relevant and it gives us the opportunity to test or pilot approaches at the local level, and then to work with the national associations of local government and the relevant Ministries to use that learning to strengthen policy and to roll it out more widely.

Regular regional and international meetings and conferences then provide a platform for members to share experience and good practice and to formulate the policies that underpin our Commonwealth and global advocacy, ensuring a strong



## LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN THE COMMONWEALTH

voice for local governments and the communities that they serve.

There are obvious linkages with CPA's work and a growing partnership between the two organisations, both of which are recognised as Associated Commonwealth Organisations and committed to closer collaboration. The role of Parliamentarians is closely linked to the work of local government and the cross-over of mayors and local councillors into legislative roles in Parliament and vice-versa is a regular occurrence.

Women's participation in local government leadership stands at an average of 27% in the Commonwealth but varies from 3.8% to 56%. In recognition of the importance of inclusive local government for better and more responsive decision making, CLGF has worked consistently to support the political empowerment of women at the local level. This work has included training and capacity building, for example CLGF's '*Local Elected Leadership*' programme (LEL) in the Pacific; its '*Women as Local Legislators*' programme in India and the wider South Asian countries; and the '*Joining the Dots*' programme which supported the establishment of networks of women in Local Government in Eswatini, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Lesotho; as well as research and policy work, for example on the benefits of mentoring, and the importance of economic empowerment to enable women to stand for council.

The Commonwealth Women in Local Government Network was launched in 2017 to provide a platform for women leaders from within the organisation to come together to work together to support each other and the organisation towards the commitments set out in the 2030 Agenda and specifically, SDG5 on achieving gender equality and empowerment for all women and girls.

Collectively CLGF and CPA have worked together with the Commonwealth Secretariat to keep gender equality in political leadership on the Commonwealth's agenda – particularly at the Commonwealth

Women's Forum - and it is increasingly clear that there are systemic challenges across the Commonwealth which affect women in leadership at all levels, opening up further opportunities for collaboration.

Most recently, we ran a joint webinar – an initiative of CLGF's *Commonwealth Women in Local Government* and CPA's *Commonwealth Women's Parliamentarians* (CWP) network on the importance of political parties in achieving a more equitable political landscape. The discussion brought together mayors, councillors and MPs from across the Commonwealth to share their experiences, how they have mobilised to push for greater equality, and how to draw inspiration from those already working in politics, to ensure that political parties can be true allies in fighting for equality in political representation.

We look forward to working more closely with the CPA to take the recommendations of the webinar further, whether that is to strengthen legislation; strengthen women's caucuses; implement quotas or address campaign financing; and to amplify the voices from our respective networks to support change and to ensure we redouble our efforts to support women in leadership and to accelerate progress towards SDG5 in the Commonwealth.

As part of CLGF's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, we are championing women in local leadership from all corners of the Commonwealth – the women who tirelessly serve and work with their communities and their local administration to ensure that local government delivers basic services; enables economic development; offers social support; and protects the environment – all the essential ingredients for more liveable cities, towns and villages for all. Many of their stories can be found on CLGF's website.

Looking to the future, post-2025, it is clear that local government remains vital – we hear the mantra 'all politics is local' so often. Inevitably, citizens



Lucy Slack is the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum and has worked for the CLGF for more than 20 years.

look to their local leaders to deliver and at a time of economic, political and environmental uncertainty in many countries, this is even more the case.

Many of the major global challenges have local implications and require local action - there are already some easily identifiable priorities. Climate change, biodiversity loss, and achievement of Net Zero emissions; managing rapid urbanisation and sustainable development; achieving the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, including around gender equality; as well as the transformation of economies to take account of the impacts of rapid technological change are all very much on local governments, and CLGF's, agenda. Local government recognises the value of working together to address the challenges communities face, and how we do this and how we work more collaboratively as government and with other stakeholders will define how successful we are in managing this change.

With the undermining of fundamental democratic values and the rule of law by autocrats and populists on the increase, safeguarding democracy at local, regional and national levels will be an ongoing challenge in the coming decades and one that we need to work collaboratively to achieve. CLGF Secretary-General, Lucy Slack concluded: "*We look forward to working closely with the CPA to continue to promote democracy and good governance at all levels, and the value of multi-level action in both decision-making and delivery.*"

To find out more about the work of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) please visit [www.clgf.org.uk](http://www.clgf.org.uk).



# REINVIGORATING PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEES

## Strengthening Accountability across the Commonwealth

### Introduction

Public Accounts Committees (PACs) are a cornerstone of democratic oversight and a vital part of the accountability chain in public financial management (PFM). Their core role - to examine the use of public resources and ensure that government expenditures align with legislative intent - is essential for fiscal transparency and integrity.

Yet across many Commonwealth jurisdictions, PACs face significant structural, political and procedural constraints that reduce their effectiveness. This article draws from lessons learned to highlight five key challenges and offers a call to action for Parliaments and stakeholders to reinvigorate PACs as a vehicle for meaningful accountability.

### Five key constraints undermining PAC effectiveness

#### 1. Overemphasis on transactional detail in an age of polycrisis

In many countries, PACs operate as if they are still living in a world of routine fiscal missteps, focusing heavily on line-item compliance issues that are frequently repeated from one audit report to the next. While such findings must not be ignored, this transactional focus prevents PACs from addressing more strategic and systemic risks - such as fiscal sustainability, public debt and the governance of state-owned enterprises. This practice also hampers the timely review of other Supreme Audit Institution (SAI) reports, including performance audit reports, as Parliamentary Committees expend disproportionate time on repetitive details rather than systematically

addressing the complete set of audit findings.

Recent Open Budget Survey results reveal a troubling trend: fewer PACs are meeting the best practice of examining the SAI annual Audit Report within three months and publishing a report with findings and recommendations. Out of the 31 Commonwealth countries assessed in the survey, the number achieving this benchmark began at three in 2008, rose to a peak of nine in 2012, and then fell back to three in 2023.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, those taking more than six months or failing to publish a report rose from three in 2008 to nineteen in 2023. In many cases, delays stem from a transactional approach to audit scrutiny - focusing on individual audit transactions rather than systemic weaknesses - which consumes time, clogs Committee agendas and leaves broader audit backlogs unaddressed.

In an age of polycrisis - where governments face converging challenges such as climate change, pandemics and rising debt - PACs need to lift their gaze. Oversight must evolve from transactional to transformational, probing how governments manage emerging risks, adapt policies in uncertain times and safeguard long-term fiscal health.

To make the shift from transactional to transformational oversight truly effective, PACs need a disciplined method for identifying which audit findings merit priority attention. This calls for clear criteria to guide the prioritization and review of findings - including current reports and considerations of materiality - ensuring that the most significant financial and governance risks receive timely and thorough scrutiny.



Geoff Dubrow is Founder and Principal Consultant at Nexus PFM Consulting, dedicated to addressing global challenges - such as the debt crisis and social inequality - through horizontal collaboration and multi-institutional solutions.

#### 2. Limited coverage beyond central government

In most jurisdictions, PACs concentrate their oversight on central government agencies. This leaves a wide gap in scrutiny of sub-national governments and state-owned enterprises (SOEs), even though these entities often control large public investments and assume substantial fiscal risks.

The result is a dangerous blind spot. SOEs are frequently involved in infrastructure development, energy provision and large-scale borrowing - areas where inefficiencies and mismanagement can have significant fiscal consequences.

Some countries have addressed this by creating parallel Committees, such as Public Investment Committees or dedicated SOE oversight mechanisms. In South-East Asia and parts of East Africa, parliamentary rules define clear mandates for such SOE and local government oversight Committees. However, many West African and Caribbean Parliaments have yet to follow suit.

In the absence of broader coverage, PACs risk becoming overburdened, undermining their ability to meet public and institutional expectations for robust parliamentary oversight.

Expanding the scope of scrutiny and distributing oversight responsibilities more evenly across specialised Committees can ease pressure and improve results.

#### 3. Weak follow-up on PAC and SAI recommendations

A Committee's effectiveness is ultimately judged by whether its recommendations are implemented by



the Executive branch. Many PACs excel at holding hearings and producing reports but the Executive branch falters when it comes to follow-up.

Between 2006 and 2023, more countries reported publicly on Executive follow-up through their SAI or Legislature than through the Executive branch itself, and such reporting has increased significantly over time. While this demonstrates political will and capacity within oversight bodies, it also underscores a gap in Executive accountability. The responsibility for implementing and reporting on audit recommendations lies with the Executive branch, and SAIs should not be expected to fill this role on their own.

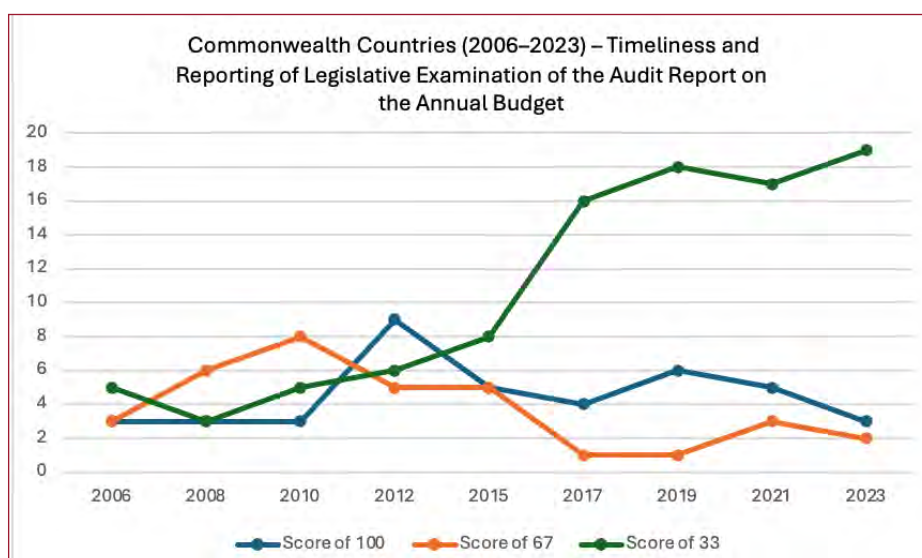
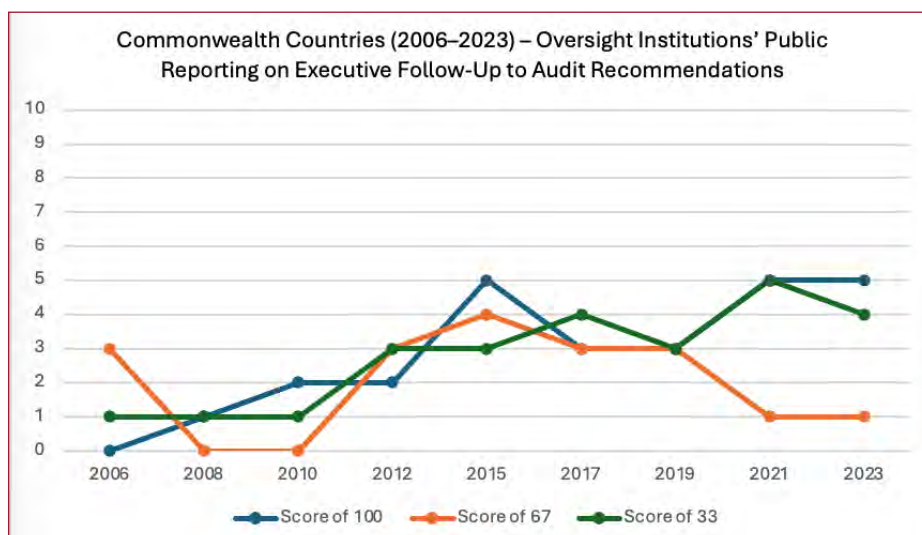
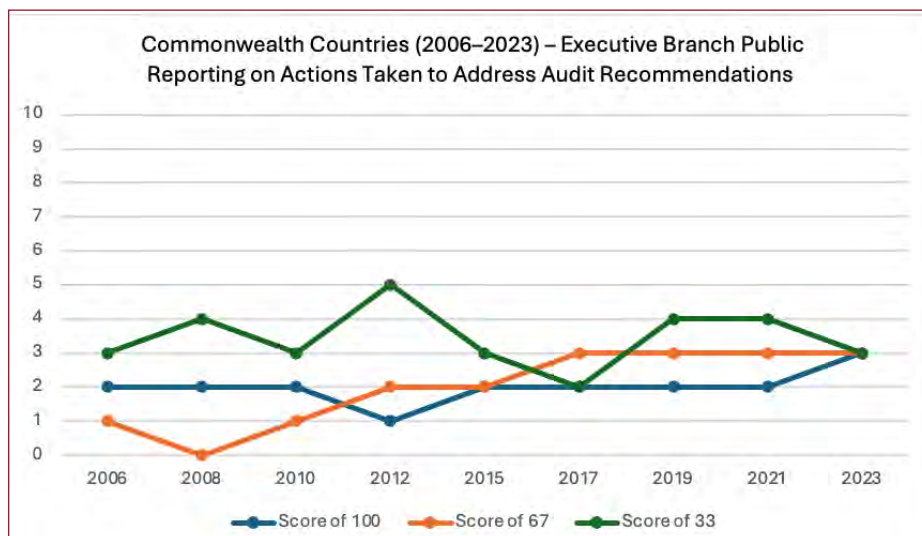
Embedding clear obligations for the Executive - such as statutory Treasury Memoranda or legally mandated annual progress reports - into law and practice can ensure timely responses to PAC recommendations, strengthen follow-up and close the accountability loop.

#### 4. Delays in plenary adoption of PAC reports

Even when PACs do their job thoroughly - holding hearings, analysing audit reports and drafting findings - political roadblocks often delay the adoption of those reports by Parliament. In systems where Treasury Memoranda or Executive responses are only triggered after plenary adoption, this delay can paralyze the entire oversight process.

In jurisdictions like Uganda, PAC reports can take months or even over a year to reach the floor for adoption - owing to backlogs and scheduling delays. In Nigeria, even after a historic success where the audit cycle was completed for the first time in 26 years, plenary proceedings went through the report clause by clause before adoption - demonstrating strong engagement but effectively repeating the Committee's work and delaying Executive action (PLSI, Press Statement, 23 July 2025).

Parliaments should streamline adoption procedures in Standing Orders, ensuring that PAC reports are tabled promptly and brought forward in a timely, non-partisan manner. Without this, the PAC's recommendations



Above: Trends from the Open Budget Survey (OBS) results for Commonwealth countries in relation to public reporting.



remain theoretical, and the cycle of accountability is broken.

### 5. Structural constraints in small Legislatures

Small Legislatures, such as those in many Caribbean and Pacific Island countries, face structural and political constraints that weaken PAC effectiveness. With fewer MPs and limited backbenchers, staffing is a challenge; Ministers or other Executive Members may sit on the Committee, undermining independence, while quorum can be difficult to achieve. Many operate without dedicated research or administrative support. In the Caribbean, the Leader of the Opposition often chairs the PAC - a role that can lend political weight but, when held by a former Prime Minister or defeated political leader seeking a return to power, can shift the focus from impartial scrutiny to political point-scoring, eroding credibility.

In some Pacific islands, constraints are also acute. In Tuvalu, Hon. Seve Paeniu, MP, described how a three-member PAC can grind to a halt if the Chair is absent, making it impossible to achieve quorum. He noted that the Committee's rules, embedded in Standing Orders, lack sufficient 'teeth' to ensure regular meetings or effective follow-up. The PAC also relies heavily on the Auditor-General's Office for both advisory and clerical support - an

Above: The Commission des finances publiques is the National Assembly of Québec's Committee responsible for overseeing public finances. The practice of such a Committee in Québec dates back to 1867, though its activity has been intermittent. In 1969, the National Assembly created a new body, the Committee on Financial Commitments, which focused on verifying authorised but unspent expenditures to exercise oversight at an earlier stage of financial decision-making.

arrangement that blurs oversight roles and further undermines functionality.

Such constraints can render PACs 'paper tigers' - Committees that exist in law but lack real bite. Meetings may be sporadic, follow-up weak and reports largely ignored.

Creative solutions are needed: Parliaments could consider leveraging support from independent experts, inviting eminent members of civil society to participate as members in the hearings, or providing technical assistance through regional networks. House Leaders and Prime Ministers must also recognise PACs as allies in improving governance - not threats to be politically managed.

### A call to action: Strengthening the full accountability chain

Reinvigorating PACs is not just about improving Committee procedures. It is about reimagining them as part of a broader accountability chain that includes SAls, internal audit bodies, anti-corruption commissions, Ministries of Finance, and - most importantly - the plenary of Parliament itself. This includes joining organisations such as the Commonwealth Association of

Public Accounts Committees (CAPAC) and participating in peer-to-peer benchmarking activities.

A strong PAC requires political will from party leaders, support from the Speaker's Office, and capacity investments in staff and research. Even more fundamentally, it requires a shift in mindset: from viewing oversight as a partisan threat to embracing it as a tool for institutional strengthening.

In an age of polycrisis, democratic resilience depends on transparent, effective oversight of public resources. Reinvigorating PACs is both an institutional imperative and a political necessity. Let us rise to the challenge.

Nexus PFM Consulting is dedicated to addressing global challenges through horizontal collaboration and multi-institutional solutions. Public Financial Management expert with extensive expertise supporting Parliamentary Oversight Committees, including PACs, fostering strong linkages with SAls, Ministries of Finance and civil society to ensure collaborative and impactful oversight. Visit <https://nexuspfm.com/>.

### References

<sup>1</sup> 31 Commonwealth countries were assessed in the 2023 OBS survey. The total number in other years may vary.



# REGULATING ASSISTANCE FOR DISABLED PEOPLE IN CANADA

**A Private Members Bill in Prince Edward Island has sought to strengthen the duty to accommodate service dogs through standardised identification and registration**

Under the *Canadian Human Rights Act* and Provincial human rights codes, individuals with disabilities have the right to equal access to public spaces, which includes the duty to accommodate disabled persons with service animals. Despite this, people who rely on service dogs (also known as assistance dogs) often face barriers due to inconsistent recognition and understanding of their rights - both by the public and by operators of public spaces.

A service dog is trained to assist a person with a disability. The work performed by a service dog must be directly related to a person's intellectual, mental or physical disability.

This case study explores the efforts undertaken in Prince Edward Island (PEI), Canada, to address these challenges through the introduction and passage of the *Service Dog Act* (Fall 2024) as a Private Members Bill.

The legislation aims to create a clear framework for identifying and registering valid service dog teams to improve public awareness, support enforcement and ensure accommodation. This study ultimately

recommends a standardised, pan-Canadian (and ideally Commonwealth-wide) service dog identification and registration system.

## The Challenge

Despite longstanding legal obligations under the *Canadian Human Rights Act* to accommodate individuals with disabilities, public access for service dog teams remains inconsistent. Two key issues contribute to this:

### 1. Lack of Awareness and Training:

Staff in restaurants, taxis, airports and other public spaces often lack understanding of their duty to accommodate individuals accompanied by service dogs.

### 2. Fraudulent Representation:

Increasingly, individuals are misrepresenting untrained or emotional support animals as service dogs, eroding public trust and making enforcement difficult.

These issues are compounded when service dog teams travel across Provincial or National borders. Each Canadian jurisdiction currently has its own approach - ranging from no formal

legislation to fully developed registries. The absence of a standardised approach may lead to inconsistent treatment, particularly in interjurisdictional or international travel.

## Legislative Response: The Prince Edward Island Service Dog Act

In response to this growing concern, the Legislative Assembly

of Prince Edward Island passed the *Service Dog Act* in the Fall 2024 sitting. Modelled after legislation in Nova Scotia, the Act establishes:

- A standard definition of a service dog and service dog team.
- A government-led certification and registration process for teams meeting specific training and behavioural standards.
- Identification cards and vests to be issued to approved teams.
- Fines and penalties for individuals who misrepresent unqualified animals as service dogs.
- A proclamation clause requiring the Act to come into force within two years of Royal Assent (by Fall 2026).

This legislation provides clarity for individuals with disabilities, enshrines their right to access public spaces, and offers tools for businesses and the public to distinguish legitimate service dog teams.

## Interjurisdictional Issues

A critical gap remains in ensuring consistent recognition of service dog teams across provincial, national and international borders. Current barriers include:

- Varied definitions and training requirements across jurisdictions.
- No standard visual identification for service dogs.
- No interoperable registry accessible across borders.

As a result, legitimate service dog teams may face denial of access when travelling - undermining their rights and safety.

## Recommendations

To better support persons with disabilities and uphold human rights



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Image: Shutterstock\_412811\_Hearing\_Dog



across the Commonwealth, the following recommendations are offered:

- 1. Develop a Pan-Canadian Standard:** Provinces and Territories in Canada should collaborate through the Federal government to harmonize service dog legislation and establish a national registry and ID standard.
- 2. Enable Cross-Border Recognition:** Work with international partners and Commonwealth nations to create agreements recognising service dog certification across borders.
- 3. Educate Public and Service Providers:** Launch coordinated campaigns to raise awareness of the duty to accommodate, the appearance of valid IDs and consequences of fraudulent representation.
- 4. Promote a Commonwealth Model Act:** Leverage CPA networks to advocate for a model Service Dog Act that can be adapted across Commonwealth jurisdictions.

### Conclusion

The duty to accommodate persons with disabilities is a fundamental right, but without clarity and consistency in service dog recognition, it is too often denied.

Provincial legislation represents a critical step toward addressing this gap. However, broader national and international cooperation is essential to create a standard that ensures dignity, independence and accessibility for all service dog users.

For further information about the Service Dog Act in Prince Edward Island please visit <https://bradtrivers.com/pei-legislature/service-dog-act/>.

*Artificial Intelligence (AI) was used in the preparation of this article.*

# DEMOCRACY, PARLIAMENTS AND UNIVERSITIES IN THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY COMMONWEALTH

## Higher Education can play a key role in tackling global challenges

Boutros Boutros-Ghali's observation in 1996 that the word '*democracy*' does not appear in the Charter of the United Nations was a provocative plea for more democratisation by the then UN Secretary-General. Such a statement of strategic intent would be unnecessary in the case of the Commonwealth. In contrast to the goal-orientated approach of the UN, the Commonwealth of Nations is an explicitly values-based organisation whose fundamental principles were formally articulated in 2013 in the form of the Commonwealth Charter. While Sir Sonny Ramphal showed what could be achieved in the struggle against apartheid during his Commonwealth Secretary-Generalship from 1975 to 1990, nobody pretends that the practical implementation of the Commonwealth ideals is an easy or straightforward matter. There is always a balance to be struck in a world of *Realpolitik*. This makes the Commonwealth at least as vulnerable to criticism as the UN, whose overriding aim is to be a peace and co-operation forum for all the sovereign states of the world, with as few as possible excluded.

Nowhere are the Commonwealth ideals more salient than in the Parliaments through which its member states are governed. Parliaments, like universities, are the bedrock of free, democratic societies. As both are founded on the highest ideals, they are often the target of cynicism, sometimes with good cause but very often without. This makes it near-impossible for either type of institution to adopt positions that are anything other than centrist, stable and dignified. Nor should they, and not just because it is a mistake to throw stones in glass houses.

As institutions, Parliaments and universities share a dedication to free speech, the rule of law, peace, order and equal access to rights. That those ideals are difficult to live up to at all times in the messy world we actually inhabit, does not mean that we should abandon our attempts to do so. On the contrary, we should not let the best be the enemy of the good.

Both Parliaments and universities share the common feature that whilst their institutions must remain stable and neutral, the individuals and factions that populate them must be free to express strong, divergent opinions without fear or favour – and in the case of Parliaments are democratically mandated to do so. Both types of institution have evolved strategies to cope with the tensions and consequent unwelcome limelight that can arise from this contrast. Neither universities nor Parliaments are campaigning institutions, but they must uphold the principles on which they were originally founded or risk their continued existence.

Parliaments, and Parliamentarians, uphold the values and principles of the Commonwealth Charter by showing leadership not just in what is done, but how it is done. It is Parliaments that are responsible for holding governments accountable on behalf of the electorate, and Commonwealth universities align with Parliaments in this respect. Universities across the Commonwealth provide evidence that allows Parliaments to frame their law-making responsibilities in an intellectually and morally defensible way. Despite occasional public scepticism, universities provide a forum for debate, allow new ideas to be promulgated and





offer criticism of the public discourse on democracy. More easily than Parliaments, universities are able to model ways in which it is possible to follow a values compass in the face of heavy criticism, and they can develop options for balancing competing rights.

We at the Association of Commonwealth Universities support our members strongly to do exactly these things. In January 2024, we established our Higher Education Taskforce, which focuses on five areas where higher education can play a key role in helping member states to pursue their priorities: access and inclusion; digital access and AI; employability, entrepreneurship and skills; finance and funding; and fostering inclusive and healthy research ecosystems. To the disinterested observer some of these areas might sound abstruse and unconnected to national concerns. In fact, all of them underpin the priorities of the Commonwealth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, whether they be climate and the environment, democracy, or trade and prosperity. On the latter point, for example, recent ACU research arising from the Higher Education Taskforce demonstrates that a mere 1% increase in tertiary education qualifications across the Commonwealth could lead to an increase in Commonwealth GDP of US\$28 billion by 2029.

However, our work goes much further. ACU member universities drive a whole range of education and research in the stand-out challenges facing the Commonwealth such as climate change or reparative justice. They are critical to a host of areas that Parliaments and governments across the network are focused on, including health, youth development, gender equality and the empowerment of small states. A thriving higher education sector plays a key role in strengthening

democratic institutions, transitioning to greener economies and equipping young people for decent work. As the only sector with the capacity to educate the educators, train the health workforce and conduct fundamental research, higher education is critical to all our Commonwealth futures.

In addition to undertaking these activities, the ACU is custodian of the *Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan*, an international framework through which Commonwealth countries offer university scholarships and fellowships to citizens of other member nations. We host the secretariat of the *Commonwealth Scholarship Commission*, run the *Queen Elizabeth Commonwealth Scholarships*, which offer a unique opportunity to study a two-year Master's degree in a low or middle-income Commonwealth country and are developing *The King's Commonwealth Fellowship Programme*, focused on Small Island Developing States and launched in the presence of His Majesty King Charles III at the National University of Samoa in October 2024. Creating opportunities for learners to forge lasting links across the Commonwealth through cultural and academic exchange is one of the most impactful activities that we undertake, and is one where Parliaments, universities and governments can work hand in hand at relatively low cost to provide mutual, lasting impact across the Commonwealth.

On the topic of demonstrating this impact, this is another opportunity for collaboration between Parliaments, the ACU and its members. The ACU's in-house team has deep expertise in delivering monitoring, evaluation and impact studies to ensure that its policies, programmes and initiatives are



Professor Colin Riordan is Secretary-General and Chief Executive of The Association of Commonwealth Universities.



The Association  
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Universities

evidence-based and deliver tangible outcomes. This includes a strong track record in evaluating international mobility schemes and measuring their contribution to capacity building, equity and long-term development impact across Commonwealth countries. Persuasively demonstrating impact is simultaneously the biggest win and the biggest frustration that faces our organisations and our democracies. Not only must we work collaboratively for the benefit of all, but we must also show that we are doing so successfully.

Every year an all-day event is held in the UK Parliament in Westminster for visiting Commonwealth scholars. In 2025, many of them attended a Commonwealth All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) meeting and heard a talk by the University of London's Institute of Commonwealth Studies on legal reform. The scholars' commitment to well-functioning democracy was ever apparent, while their alertness, insight and curiosity in the question-and-answer session was proof positive of the value of Parliaments and universities working together to shape a brighter future. Let's make the most of the opportunity.

To find out more about the work of The Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) please visit [www.acu.ac.uk](http://www.acu.ac.uk).

***“Both Parliaments and universities share the common feature that whilst their institutions must remain stable and neutral, the individuals and factions that populate them must be free to express strong, divergent opinions without fear or favour – and in the case of Parliaments are democratically mandated to do so.”***



# CLIMATE BUDGET AS A GOVERNANCE SYSTEM

## A review of Pakistan’s integration of climate considerations into the budget process for ensuring resilience through economic diversification

The unabated pace of climate change continues to set new records as the planet observes extraordinary surface temperatures culminating in extreme events across the world in various forms and shapes.

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) *State of the Global Climate 2024* report records the highest levels of atmospheric CO2 concentrations in 2023 compared with the last 800,000 years. As of now, 2024 has been marked as the warmest year in a 175-year observational record. In fact, each of the last ten years, i.e. 2015-2024, was the warmest year on the observational record, given that the temperature was 1.5°C±0.13°C above the pre-industrial level. As per the WMO *Global Annual to Decadal Climate Update 2025-2029*, there is an 80% likelihood that in the next five years this record will again be broken at least one time. Climate emergency necessitates a corresponding response on a war footing from all stakeholders irrespective of national, regional, continental or institutional boundaries.

**Pakistan’s climate change profile**

During 2024, Pakistan recorded temperatures that were 0.71°C higher than normal as the average increased to 23.52°C. Almost 31% more rainfall than usual corresponding to 390.0mm was measured last year. Climate change manifests itself in the South Asian country in the form of extreme heat, flooding, significant changes in precipitation, melting glaciers in the Himalayan mountains, and growing intensity of vector-borne diseases such as dengue as it stands among the countries most vulnerable to climate change.

The ensuing climatic changes further exacerbate economic challenges which

hamper sustainable socio-economic development in an emerging economy. Ironically, the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions profile of Pakistan stands among the lowest as it contributes not more than 0.9% to the global emissions.

Pakistan has devised various legislative and policy measures at the national as well as international level to curb the effects of climate change. The *Pakistan Climate Change Act 2017* is the key legislative instrument meant to steer the country’s national policies and plans as well as meeting international commitments with regards to climate change.

The National Climate Change Policy formulated in 2012 and revised in 2021 serves as the prime document to lead the country’s efforts in combating climate change. Climate change retains major position among the priorities Pakistan identifies for its socio-economic policy planning, such as the 13<sup>th</sup> five-year plan (2024-2029), termed as URAAN Pakistan.

Pakistan submitted its first NDC (Nationally Determined Contributions) in 2016, and the updated version was

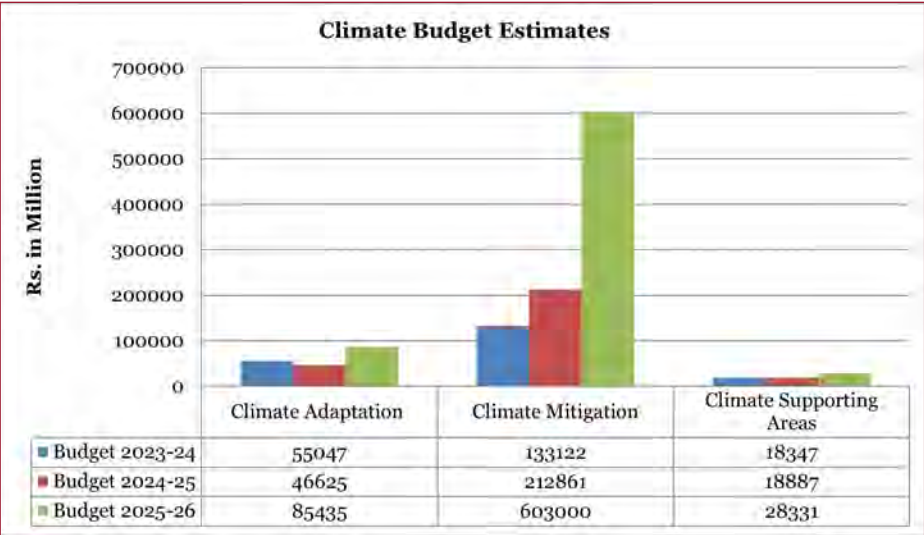
submitted to the UNFCCC Secretariat in 2021 in which a target of a 50% reduction overall in projected emissions was set, conditional upon the provision of 35% international grant finance and 15% from indigenous resources. Pakistan identified its adaptation ambitions in the National Adaptation Plan unveiled in 2023. More recently, the *Biennial Transparency Report* (BTR) was submitted in 2024 under the *Enhanced Transparency Framework* (ETF) of the Paris Agreement.

**Parliament and the budget in Pakistan**

The budget process, which is one of the major pillars of parliamentary functions, in Pakistan begins with the publication of the Budget Call Circular around October to December. A fiscal year in Pakistan begins on 1 July and concludes on 30 June. The role of Parliament in the budget process begins in the months of January and February when each Parliamentary Standing Committee receives proposals for Public Sector



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Development Programs (PSDP) for detailed discussion and deliberation. A Budget Strategy Paper prepared by the Finance Division, containing the broader contours of the upcoming budget, is shared with the National Assembly and Senate during the last quarter of the fiscal year. The budget is presented in the House during the budget session held late May or early June. The session concludes after hectic discussions over 14 to 17 days with the passing of the Money Bill. After the successful passage of the budget, the Parliamentary Committees continue to oversee the PSDPs of their respective Ministries throughout the year as per their mandate.<sup>1</sup>

### Climate budget

Climate change has been an essential component of the federal budget in Pakistan even prior to the signing of the landmark Paris Agreement. For instance, the Pakistan Climate Public Expenditure and Institutional Review (CPEIR) published by UNDP in April 2015 highlighted that the Federal Government allocated no less than 6% of the total (development as well as current) expenditure of the federal budget in 2013-2014 for climate change. More than half of these allocations were related to mitigation. However, the procedural complexities created difficulties for its definitive assessment.

In the past two years, the government has introduced significant reforms to embed climate change in the budget process in order to make it more apparent and visible for greater efficiency in the policy making process. The Federal Government of Pakistan unveiled a Rs. 17.573 trillion budget for 2026 on 10 June 2025. The country recorded Rs. 114,692 billion GDP at the current market price for the year 2025. The Federal Government allocated 6.9% of the current budget and 8.2% of the development budget for climate change and 1% of the budget for disaster. This year, the Federal Government of Pakistan has “*adopted climate budget as a governance system to mainstream climate considerations into policy decision making.*”<sup>2</sup>



Flooding is a major consequence of climate change and the impact on flood affected areas in Kamber- Shahdadkot, Pakistan can be clearly seen.

Pakistan introduced climate budget tagging from the fiscal year 2023-2024. Initially, the public expenditure with regards to the Running of Civil Government (RoCG) as well as Public Sector Development Program (PSDP) were tagged. In this regard, more than 5,000 cost centers under three main categories (adaptation, mitigation and supporting areas) and forty sub-categories were tagged for climate sensitive data.

With the unveiling of the 2025-2026 Budget, the tagging exercise has been expanded to include expenditures on grants and subsidies as well. No less than 0.2% of grants and 50% of subsidies are climate responsive.

Beyond subsidies, the green component has also been identified for revenues in this year's budget for greater transparency and accountability in climate related spending. For the fiscal year 2025-2026, the budget includes 35% non-tax revenue and 9.4% gross revenue as green components. Moreover, mainstreaming climate considerations into the budget planning and process is one of the major focuses of the Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF) of the IMF which has committed US\$1.4 billion to augment Pakistan's efforts in addressing climate challenge.

### Way Forward

Over the past few years, Pakistan has significantly reformed its budget

process for greater efficiency in tracking climate change-related allocations. The adoption of a climate budget as a governance system for the fiscal year 2025-2026 demonstrates the political will to integrate climate considerations into the policy process for enhancing climate resilience in an increasing uncertain scenario.

However, the journey to climate resilience is not that simple and several challenges continue to hamper the path to progress. For instance, the overall budgetary allocations for climate change still seem meager, which may be justified in terms of various national compulsions. Similarly, transparency concerning the off-budget funds often remains challenging. In addition, the budgetary reforms may be carried out in a manner that off-budget funds are adequately discernible in budget documents. This is an area where Parliament can play a crucial role, especially through accelerating its oversight function.

Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services (PIPS) was established in December 2008 by the Parliament of Pakistan and is located in Islamabad. For more information please visit [www.pips.gov.pk](http://www.pips.gov.pk).

### References:

- <sup>1</sup> Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services (PIPS), 'Understanding Pakistan's Public Finance: A Handbook on Budget, Resource Sharing & the Economy', June 2024.
- <sup>2</sup> Government of Pakistan, Finance Division, 'Federal Budget 2025-2026: Annual Budget Statement', p.44.



# PARLIAMENTS AT THE FRONTLINE

Syed Wiqar Shah is a Special Secretary at the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Assembly in Pakistan.

## Strengthening Parliamentary Resilience in the Age of Climate Change

The 21<sup>st</sup> century presents Parliaments with unprecedented global challenges. Among these, none is more pressing - or more universal - than climate change. Rising sea levels, extreme weather events, droughts and biodiversity loss are no longer distant concerns. They are realities affecting communities across the Commonwealth, from small island nations to vast inland provinces. Yet amid these crises lies an opportunity to re-imagine the role of Parliaments as guardians of environmental stewardship, enablers of sustainable policy and models of institutional resilience.

### Parliamentary Mandate on Climate

As the core institutions of democratic governance, Parliaments hold the constitutional power to legislate, scrutinize and allocate resources. These powers place legislators in a pivotal position to combat climate change. Whether through passing environmental protection laws, overseeing national climate strategies, or ensuring transparency in adaptation financing, Parliaments must lead by example.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) has repeatedly highlighted the need for Members to support green governance, integrate climate budgeting and adopt

sustainable development frameworks within legislative agendas.

### Role of Parliamentary Committees

Across the CPA network, many Parliaments have activated climate change Committees or embedded environmental oversight in broader portfolios. These Committees serve as platforms for cross-party collaboration and expert engagement on complex climate issues.

In Pakistan's National Assembly, the Standing Committee on Climate Change has taken up critical reviews of air pollution and urban environmental degradation. In the Caribbean, island Parliaments are exploring disaster risk legislation and early warning systems. Meanwhile, in the UK and Australia, parliamentary inquiries have examined corporate carbon disclosures and renewable energy transitions. Such Committees must be strengthened with technical expertise, public consultation mechanisms and data-driven research services - ensuring that climate policy is both accountable and adaptive.

### Parliamentary Green Practices: Leading by Example

In addition to lawmaking, Parliaments themselves must embrace sustainability in operations. Some

CPA Members have already begun greening their own buildings and practices. The Parliament of Fiji for example has adopted solar energy and water-saving systems. Canada's Parliament is phasing out single-use plastics. The UK Parliament reports annually on its carbon footprint. These steps show how Legislatures can model responsible governance not just through policy, but also through example - an important message for the public and the international community.

### Youth, Climate, and Political Legitimacy

Parliaments cannot address the climate crisis without engaging the generation that will inherit its consequences. Young people across the Commonwealth are demanding climate action and Parliaments must become responsive platforms for their voices. Innovative outreach such as Youth Climate Parliaments, environmental education sessions and internship programmes for young climate leaders can bridge the gap between citizens and lawmakers. Building this trust is essential not only for environmental progress but for the long-term legitimacy of democratic institutions.

***“As the core institutions of democratic governance, Parliaments hold the constitutional power to legislate, scrutinize and allocate resources. These powers place legislators in a pivotal position to combat climate change. Whether through passing environmental protection laws, overseeing national climate strategies, or ensuring transparency in adaptation financing, Parliaments must lead by example.”***



### The Way Forward: Climate-Ready Parliaments

CPA Branches must invest in building 'climate-ready' Parliaments. This means:

- Integrating climate risk assessment into legislative planning.
- Strengthening South-South cooperation on environmental law through CPA networks.
- Ensuring climate finance oversight is part of public accounts scrutiny.
- Training MPs and staff in green policy, climate diplomacy and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In times of environmental turbulence, Parliaments must be pillars of stability - institutions capable of navigating uncertainty with foresight, equity and resilience.



Image: Shutterstock

Above: A navy rescue team help to move people affected by severe flooding in Karachi, Pakistan.

### A Commonwealth Call to Action

Climate change does not respect borders, and neither should our response to it. The Commonwealth offers a unique platform for collaboration, uniting nations large and small, rich and vulnerable, with shared democratic values and institutional frameworks. The CPA can play a transformative role in this effort

by continuing to provide resources, training and platforms for peer exchange on environmental legislation and climate governance.

All Parliaments can focus on sustainable policy, governance reform and inter-parliamentary cooperation, ensuring that they are an active member of the Commonwealth Parliamentary

Association and advocate for climate resilience in democratic institutions.

Together, we can ensure that our Parliaments are not only reactive but proactive agents of change - charting a path toward a greener, fairer and more sustainable future for all.

**COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY RESEARCH SERVICE**

**COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY INFORMATION AND REFERENCE SERVICES**

**CASEWORK SERVICES**

The CPA Headquarters Secretariat was approached by the CPA Scotland Branch about an enquiry on the level of support that legislatures offer to Members, and their staff in the production and delivery of 'casework' / casework services to the public.

Research Report | February 2025 | By Faith Oyemekan

**CPA COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION**

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**CPRS Report: Casework Services for Parliaments**

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# COULD NORWAY HAVE JOINED THE COMMONWEALTH?

**You may not think of the Scandinavian country as a 'typical' candidate to join the Commonwealth, but this historical perspective shows that a proposal for Norway to join the Commonwealth was considered in 1955**



David Redvaldsen is a Lecturer at the University of Agder. He is the author of the article 'The Role of Britain in Late Modern Norwegian History: A Longitudinal Study', *Britain and the World* 9:1 (2016), pp. 10-31.

In volume 5 of *Norsk utenrikspolitikkshistorie* [*The History of Norwegian Foreign Policy*], Knut Einar Eriksen and Helge Pharo narrate the conversations taking place 1953-1955 with a view to enhancing relations between Norway and Britain.

In 1953, the Labour government of Oscar Torp had envisaged joining the Sterling Area, an economic cooperation zone whereby members' currencies would shadow the British pound. Although Norway did not join in the end, it was a sign of the amicable ties between the two countries which were crystallized during the Second World War.

On 13 December 1954, Sir Michael Wright, the departing British Ambassador to Norway, upped the game by broaching Norwegian membership of the Commonwealth in his farewell dispatch to the UK Foreign Office in London. He was aware of the obstacles which stood in the way, but believed that if security considerations required it, he would 'not regard it as inconceivable that the Norwegian people might conclude that their greatest safety lay within the Commonwealth' (FO 371/116470. Wright to Eden 13 Dec 1954, p. 5).

This proposal to join the Commonwealth is little known in both the UK and Norway today. Indeed, the revision of the Norwegian National Curriculum in 2020 removed the Second World War from the history teaching syllabus, an indication of the conflict no longer being at the forefront of attention.

Olav Riste, the military historian famous for his claim that Norway had in

fact been an ally of the Entente during the First World War, noted in 2010 that Germany had replaced Britain as Norway's most important trading partner. Conversely, Britain's decision to enter the European Economic Community in 1973, a course of action which Norway rejected in a referendum, gradually dissolved what had sometimes been described as a 'special relationship' between the two countries. Unlike in 1955, Norwegian Cabinet Ministers no longer discuss the possibility of joining the Commonwealth. Ironically, the prospects of doing so would have been better today.

The UK Foreign Office did not think that Norway as a monarchy would want to be part of an association led by another crown. However, just two years later, Malaya (later Malaysia) joined the Commonwealth under its ruler Tuanku Abdul Rahman, regarded as a king in a unique 'rotating' monarchy that alternates between the rulers of nine Malaysian states. In 1966, Lesotho followed suit, in 1968, the Kingdom of Eswatini and in 1984, Brunei Darussalam. Apart from these monarchies in Asia and Africa, Samoa and Tonga in the Pacific, also with royal heads of state, joined the Commonwealth in 1970.

Every country within the Commonwealth is completely independent and of equal status. That

the current Head of the Commonwealth is King Charles III does not imply any form of suzerainty over the Presidents and monarchs of other nations. The Head of the Commonwealth is not a hereditary position and is jointly chosen by all member states. Being part of the association involves no surrender of sovereignty.

More recently, it has been established that a former imperial connection to Britain is not required to join the Commonwealth. Mozambique (joined 1995), Rwanda (2009) and Gabon and Togo (2022) do not have a past history of being governed by Britain.

Half a century ago, Norway could have cooperated extensively with the Commonwealth. In 1967, it was resolved that Norwegian aid to developing countries should be focused on a few of these: India, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Zambia and Pakistan. They were chosen precisely because it was easier to engage with nations where English was widely spoken.

In 1977, Mozambique and Sri Lanka were added to the list of the main partners for Norwegian efforts. All eight countries are in the Commonwealth today, though Norwegian aid now spans wider than before and is set at a higher proportion of national income. (In 1982, it reached 1% of national income, attaining an aspiration set by the United Nations.) It also became more political, rather

***"This proposal to join the Commonwealth is little known in both the UK and Norway today."***





Image: Shutterstock\_218862331\_Norway\_Fjords.

than being purely humanitarian. Norway gave financial support to South African liberation movement the ANC from 1977 and by 2013, the Palestinian Authority was high on the list of beneficiaries.

The main Norwegian interest, however, beginning with independence from Sweden in 1905, has always been the protection of its territory. J. G. Ward in the UK Foreign Office (FO 371/116470. *Ward to Hohler 26 Jan 1955*) believed 'that NATO is probably the framework within which the Norwegians will want to develop their relations with the countries upon which they depend most closely.'

As a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, Britain is permitted to possess nuclear weapons and is Europe's greatest military power. *Would it be willing to extend its responsibilities to a state which borders Russia?*

In 2022, prior to Finland's and Sweden's accession to NATO, those

countries signed a defence agreement with Britain involving mutual help in the event of a crisis. That was during former UK Prime Minister Rt Hon. Boris Johnson's premiership, whose role model is Winston Churchill.

Nevertheless, there have been no significant changes to British defence policy under the current UK Prime Minister, Rt Hon. Sir Keir Starmer. The military assistance to Ukraine has continued and the UK Labour Government recently cut foreign aid in order to boost defence spending. In the *Øygarden Declaration* of 16 December 2024, the UK Prime Minister and Norwegian Premier, Jonas Gahr Støre, pledged to strengthen the bilateral military ties.

Military technology is an important application of science. Fortunately, research and development has peaceful uses too.

In 2022, the Norwegian Research Council signed an agreement with five UK Research Councils within broad subject areas. It enables Norwegian and British researchers to participate in projects funded in the other country. This agreement, renewed in 2024, is very useful to Norwegian academics since 91% of articles published by them in 2021 were written in English. Britain has long been the destination of choice for Norwegian students, ahead of Denmark and the United States in second and third place respectively. Six out of the top 25 institutions in the newest edition of the *Times Higher Education World University Rankings* are located within the Commonwealth.

It all suggests that Norway at least would have benefited from Commonwealth membership, had the issue been taken further in 1955.



# 'GREEN EGGS AND HANSARD'

## Exploring the Parliamentary Cookbooks published by the Legislatures of the Commonwealth

The kitchen shelf might seem like an odd place to find parliamentary books. Yet, Legislatures from all corners of the Commonwealth have published cookbooks alongside their Journals and Hansard! One thing makes these endeavors even more appetizing: they all supported charities.

### United Kingdom

*'The House of Commons Cookery Book: 150 Favourite Recipes Contributed by Members of Parliament'* was compiled by UK MP Charles Irving and published in 1987 with a forward from then House of Commons Speaker, Rt Hon. Bernard Weatherill. UK Prime Minister, Rt Hon. Margaret Thatcher offered a recipe for Sauté of Chicken with Tarragon Sauce and MP Irving, Chair of the Commons Select Committee on Catering, contributed a recipe for Cheltenham Cheese Pudding from his own constituency. Proceeds supported ChildLine and other charities.

In 1999, *'Parliamentary Portions: Gourmet Recipes from New MPs'* featured contributions primarily from the MP class of 1997 alongside contributions from UK Prime Minister, Rt Hon. Tony Blair and House of Commons Speaker, Rt Hon. Betty Boothroyd. Some of the recipes might not be what you'd expect - one MP wrote of the "bizarre" recipe contributed for a "condensed milk and sugar toasted sandwich." The book's

proceeds supported Cancer Research and the Cats Protection League.

### Northern Ireland and Scotland

Westminster's Parliamentarians are not alone in the UK parliamentary cookbook field. In 2008, Northern Ireland saw the publication of *'An Assembly of Recipes'*. The minutes of the Assembly Commission meeting for 18 November 2008 show "it was agreed as an interim measure, to allow the sale of the recipe book entitled *'An Assembly of Recipes'* in aid of Cancer Research" at the Assembly's shop.

The next year, Scotland saw *'MSP's Gut Feelings - A collection of recipes from Members of the Scottish Parliament'*. Among its pages? Then Scottish First Minister, Rt Hon. Alex Salmond's recipe for *Cullen Skink*, a traditional thick soup made of smoked haddock, potatoes and onions.

### Canada

*'Recipes from the Hill: Favorite Meals from Members of the House of Commons'* was published in 1989 and very much reflects what one might expect from the Canadian palette. That is, recipes include moose chow mein and maple syrup pie. Proceeds went to the United Way charitable campaign and press reports later that year indicate that the book raised over CA\$8,000.



Charlie Feldman is the former President of the Canadian Study of Parliament Group and a terrible cook.

It came a few years after a private publication *'The House is in the Kitchen: Canadian Parliamentary Cookbook'* which saw some perhaps unexpected entries contributed by Parliamentarians including a very specific way to make a cup of tea.

Not long after the 1989 book, there was a lesser-known cookbook entitled *'Meech Lake Soup'*. It contained recipes from Parliamentarians and their spouses including the then Canadian Prime Minister's wife's recipe for *'Newfoundland Screech Cake'*. Perhaps it's for the best that this book is a bit harder to find these days - the *Toronto Star* cautioned "Beware: We tested the following recipes from the book and found they needed some work in order to turn out well". It also critiqued the book for switching between metric and imperial units, something to which every Canadian chef can certainly relate.

Not to let the MPs have all the fun, there have also been Senatorial cookbooks. In 2005, the Senate Pages (students who assist in the operations

**"Some of the recipes might not be what you'd expect - one MP wrote of the 'bizarre' recipe contributed for a 'condensed milk and sugar toasted sandwich'."**

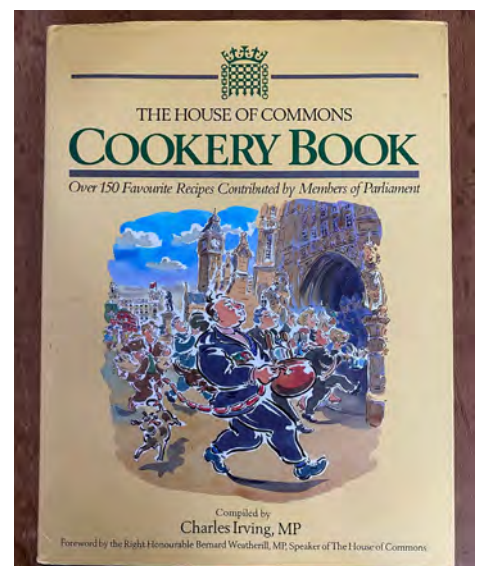






Image: National Assembly of Québec.

**Above: The National Assembly of Québec's in-house restaurant, *Le Parlementaire* was recently listed by the 2025 *Michelin Guide* as one of its recommended restaurants.**

of the Chamber and Committees) organised a recipe book to support relief efforts in the wake of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. In 2011, the Senate of Canada published *'La Crème de la Crème: A Senate Family Cookbook'* to support the Government of Canada Workplace Charitable Campaign.



Federal politicians are not the only ones to lead cookbook efforts, which sometimes find their inspiration in unexpected places. *'Taking The Heat: Canadian Politicians In The Kitchen'* contained recipes from politicians throughout Canada and was published in 2001 by a politician's wife to showcase the human side of politics after an altercation her husband had with a Provincial Premier. Similarly, after a sexist comment on the campaign trail suggesting that she should be somewhere *"baking cookies"*, Ontario Provincial Parliament Member Lisa MacLeod turned the moment into a cookbook aptly entitled *'I'd Rather Be Baking Cookies: A Collection of Recipes from Lisa MacLeod and Friends'*. It included recipes from various politicians at the Federal, Provincial and municipal levels.

A similar provincial parliamentary cookbook was also published for the benefit of a charity in Québec in 2020. It was entitled *'Les recettes des parlementaires de l'Assemblée nationale du Québec'* and spearheaded by MNA Mathieu Lévesque. It is perhaps no coincidence that the National Assembly of Québec's in-house restaurant, *Le Parlementaire* was recently listed by the 2025 *Michelin Guide* as one of its recommended restaurants.

## Australia

Parliamentary charity cookbooks are also found in Australia - consider the 2006 publication *'Cooking for your mates: The Parliament House Cookbook'*. Its forward by the President of the Senate explains that the book was *"produced by officers of the*





## PARLIAMENTARY COOKBOOKS

*Parliamentary Security Service.*” The Senate President noted that “*Many of the dishes in this cookbook look delicious, and I look forward to trying out some of the recipes*”.

One who tried his recipes was Western Australian Parliamentarian and Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Interests, Hon. Tony Buti. He hosted a *YouTube* series wherein he cooked with parliamentary and other colleagues to showcase multiculturalism. It led to the 2024 publication ‘*Cooking with the Minister*’. While perhaps tasty to do, it was not always a fun endeavor. As Buti recalled in an interview, “*I remember the time I cooked a Uruguayan dish – it was outside on the barbecue and a bit of ash flew up into my eye. I had to be rushed to hospital to have my eye flushed.*”

A different culinary offering from Australia warrants particular mention: In 2022, the New South Wales Parliament published ‘*Dining at New South Wales Parliament*’, which traces the history of Parliament’s dining rooms and offers recipes and stories alongside mouth-watering photography. One such story involves the visit of crime novelist Agatha Christie who, in 1922, feasted at Parliament House on a seven-course luncheon “*including oysters, lamb chops and peas, and grilled chicken with butter sauce.*”

### Conclusion

Of course, the Commonwealth isn’t alone in having legislative cookbooks. You can tour the regions of France



Image credit: Charlie Feldman/Canada.

Above: While visiting the US Congress in Washington DC, article contributor Charlie Feldman discovered the innovative culinary creations of the in-house catering team.

with MPs’ culinary contributions in ‘*La Cuisine de la République: Cuisinez avec vos députés!*’ (*Cuisine of the Republic: Cook with your MPs*) or follow the social media sensation ‘*Cookin’ with Congress!*’ wherein recipes from American elected officials from today and yesteryear are recreated and tasted - to mixed results.

While culinary publications may not form part of the official parliamentary record, there is occasional overlap. For example, a Hansard moment that chefs might want to clip is from the UK House of Commons (29 April 1941) wherein Major Lloyd George details the dish

known as ‘*Lord Woolton pie*’, a pastry dish of vegetables, widely served in Britain in the Second World War when rationing and shortages made other dishes hard to prepare. The recipe was created by François Latry, Maître Chef des Cuisines at the Savoy Hotel in London, and appeared on the Savoy menu as ‘*Le Lord Woolton Pie*’.

Whether legislators’ recipes give “*food for thought*” or give rise to concern for the diets and wellbeing of certain Parliamentarians, one thing is for sure: You’ll never run out of recipes that pair well with Hansard. Bon appétit!



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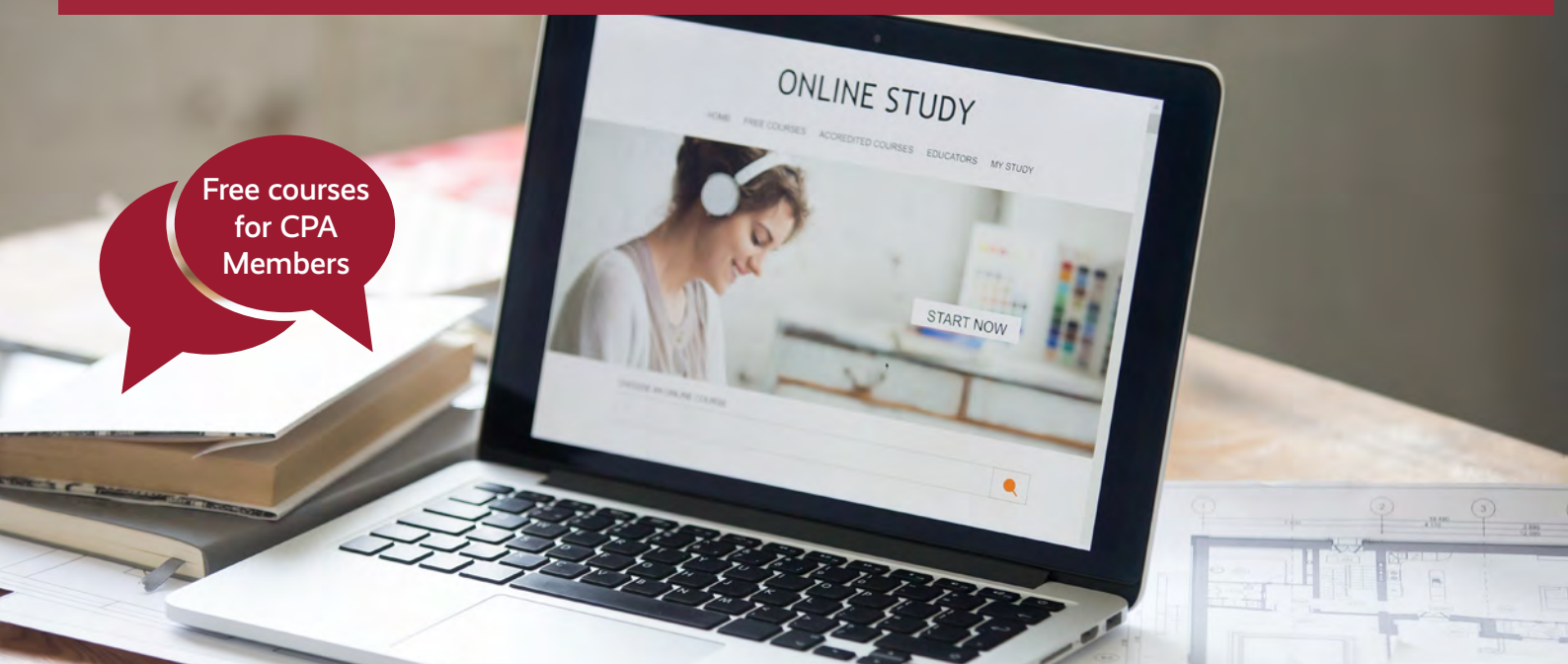


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# COMMONWEALTH

## LEGISLATIVE NEWS

### UK MP BECOMES FIRST TO CREATE HIMSELF AS AN AI BOT

A UK MP has become the first to create a virtual representation of himself, using his voice and allowing people to ask for help with local issues or policy queries. **Hon. Mark Sowards, MP** worked with a startup Artificial Intelligence (AI) firm to create the online feature.

The West Yorkshire MPs said that the AI chatbot will “*help strengthen the connection between an MP’s office and the constituents we serve.*” He also suggested that the technology will allow people to access support ‘24/7 365 days a year’.

Chatbots - computer programmes simulating a two-way conversation with a human user - have seen a recent rise in popularity as businesses look for new methods of communication. While the software can bring a range of benefits, there are concerns around privacy and data security, a lack of human interaction and the bot’s ability to resolve issues.

“*We have to embrace the opportunities that are represented by AI and what better way to learn about it then to become it,*” Mark Sowards said. “*I want something that will genuinely be helpful to my constituents and the people I represent and if we can create a model that functions properly without saying ridiculous things then that’s the way to go.*”

Source: BBC News website.

Below: UK MP, **Hon. Mark Sowards** with his AI counterpart.



Image credit: Mark Sowards/Neural Voice AI/UK Parliament.

### NEW ZEALAND MPs PAY TRIBUTE TO TAKUTAI TARSH KEMP

Flags were flown at half-mast on the New Zealand Parliament forecourt to remember sitting Te Pāti Māori MP Takutai Tarsh Kemp, who died on 26 June 2025 at aged 50. The previous year, Kemp had announced she was suffering from kidney disease and had taken a six-week break before returning to Parliament. The House sat that day to pay tribute to her before adjourning early. **Hon. Tama Potaka, MP (National)**, **Hon. Peeni Henare, MP (Labour)**, and **Teanau Tuiono, MP (Greens)** led the tributes, giving speeches in te reo Māori.

**Chlöe Swarbrick, MP (Greens)** said: “*She was a thoughtful, kind person who lived her values through her service. Before arriving in the trenches here - as our bench mates in Te Pāti Māori always say - she spent two decades in health, primarily Māori health and youth development, and led notably as the tumuaki (leader) of Manurewa Marae... In her own words, ‘Ko ngā rangatahi, ngā rangatira o nāianei’ - ‘Our youth are the leaders of today.’ She knew where she came from, and she knew where she was going. But, more than that, she knew who would come after, and she actively nourished their creativity and their compassion.*”

**Hon. Willie Jackson, MP (Labour)** added that “*She was directing and organising some of the best dancers this country has ever seen. Just magnificent - just magnificent - and in the area of mental health, and particularly in the area of youth suicide, she just did some fantastic work.*”

**Hon. David Seymour, MP (ACT)** agreed that “*She left no doubt about what she was here to do and who she was here to serve, and she did that even while facing and battling a chronic illness.*”

**Hon. Shane Jones, MP (New Zealand First)** referenced the



Image credit: Maori Party/New Zealand.

New Zealand MP Takutai Tarsh Kemp.

passing of sitting Greens MP Fa’anānā Efeso Collins the previous year, saying, “*Sadly, she is not the only member of our ranks to have disappeared during the life of this Parliament. As other speakers have said, she has gone far too young.*”

After speeches, MPs stood to sing the waiata (song) ‘Whakaaria Mai’ and the House adjourned early.

- Report by Lizzie Hendy, Parliament of New Zealand.

### CANADA’S OPPOSITION LEADER WINS BACK PARLIAMENTARY SEAT

The Leader of the official Opposition in Canada, **Hon. Pierre Poilievre, MP** has won a crucial by-election in the Province of Alberta on 18 August 2025 to secure a new Parliament seat after losing his constituency in the recent Federal election in April 2025.

In a surprise result, Canada’s Conservative Leader, Pierre Poilievre lost the Ottawa-area seat he had held for two decades to Liberal Bruce Fanjoy in a Federal election that saw Rt Hon. Mark Carney re-elected as Prime Minister.

In an unusual move, former Conservative Member of Parliament, Damian Kurek stepped aside to allow Poilievre run in the rural riding of Battle River-Crowfoot in Alberta. The ‘safe’ Conservative seat has seen previous candidates win with over 70% of the vote. In this by-election, Poilievre faced a record 214 candidates, many of whom are associated with a protest group seeking electoral reform.

Poilievre’s victory means that he can return to his place in Canada’s House of Commons which is scheduled





Image credit: UK Parliament/House of Lords/Roger Harris



Left: The President of France, Emmanuel Macron addresses Members of both Houses of the UK Parliament in the grand surroundings of the Royal Gallery of the House of Lords.

to return from summer break on 15 September 2025.

### FRENCH PRESIDENT ADDRESSES UK PARLIAMENT

The President of the French Republic, His Excellency Emmanuel Macron, visited the UK Parliament on 8 July 2025 accompanied by Mrs Brigitte Macron, where he addressed Members of both Houses assembled in the Royal Gallery of the House of Lords. The Speaker of the UK House of Commons, Rt Hon. Sir Lindsay Hoyle, MP gave a welcome speech and the Lord Speaker, Rt Hon. Lord McFall of Alcluith, responded to the President's address. The French President was undertaking an official state visit to the United Kingdom.

### JAMAICA RECONSIDERS PROPOSALS FOR FIXED-TERM PARLIAMENTS

The Jamaican Government has suggested that the UK Parliament's decision to repeal the *Fixed-term Parliament Act* in 2022 prompted Jamaica to reconsider implementing a similar law. The ruling Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) has suggested that the UK's decision has prompted Legislators to think again on the proposed legislation.

Jamaica does not have fixed-term Parliaments, and the constitution allows a Parliament to last up to five years from its first sitting, after which it is automatically dissolved,

with elections then held within three months. The idea of a fixed term Parliament was proposed by some MPs including the then Opposition Leader Hon. Andrew Holness during his 2016 election campaign, promising to commence legislative processes to establish a fixed-term election.

The legislation was never implemented, and Jamaica retains its traditional system where the Prime Minister can call an election earlier than the maximum five-year period.

Recently, the Chair of the Jamaican Labour Party's Manifesto and Achievements Committee, Hon. Kamina Johnson Smith, pointed out that the UK repealed its law, due to a conflict with its constitutional traditions and suggested that those traditions are similar to those upheld in Jamaica.

### PARLIAMENT OF THE BAHAMAS PROPOSES MANDATORY VOTER REGISTRATION

The Prime Minister of The Bahamas, Hon. Philip Davis, MP has stated that he would like The Bahamas to move towards a system where voter registration is mandatory for all citizens, even though choosing to vote would remain a personal decision.

Speaking in the Bahamas House of Assembly as he opened debate on the Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Bill 2025, he acknowledged that some Bahamians, including members of

certain religious communities, choose not to register, adding: *"That is their right."* However, he stressed that registration is essential to participate in elections and urged greater civic engagement.

*"Hopefully, as we move on in improving our electoral system, we may reach the point where every Bahamian citizen is required... to register, and always automatically registered. And whether they exercise that right will then be their choice."*

The legislation provides the option for electoral reforms, including optional biometric voter ID cards featuring digital fingerprints, facial recognition and electronic signatures.

The Prime Minister said that international election observer missions – including those from the Organisation of American States (OAS) and the Commonwealth Secretariat – have consistently praised the credibility of Bahamian elections but also highlighted systemic weaknesses. There are worries that the current voter registration system is outdated and vulnerable to errors with additional concerns about laminated paper voter cards, which are easy to duplicate, forge, or lose. However, the Bill does not introduce online or electronic voting.

Opposition MPs raised concerns about the proposals, questioning the need for biometric cards and the potential cybersecurity risks.

Source: *The Bahamas Tribune*.





### AUSTRALIA'S 48<sup>th</sup> PARLIAMENT OPENS

On 22 July 2025, the formal opening of the 48<sup>th</sup> Federal Parliament of Australia took place following the federal election held on 3 May 2025. The Governor-General, Her Excellency Hon. Sam Mostyn AC, issued a proclamation calling the Parliament together and the opening day began with a Welcome to Country ceremony led by Ngannawal elder Auntie Violet Sheridan.

Members of the Australian House of Representatives gathered in the Senate Chamber to hear the Deputy appointed by the Governor-General, Hon. Stephen Gageler, AC, Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia formally declare the Parliament open. Members of both Houses then returned to their respective Chambers to elect their Presiding Officers and to swear in all Members.

In House of Representatives Chamber, Hon. Michelle Gordon AC, a Justice of the High Court of Australia authorised by the Governor-General, took the Speaker's Chair to administer

the oath or affirmation of allegiance. After Members were sworn in, the Clerk presided over the election of the Speaker and called for nominations. Hon. Milton Dick, MP, who served as Speaker during the previous Parliament, was re-elected unopposed as Speaker for the 48<sup>th</sup> Parliament.

Senator Hon. Sue Lines was re-elected as the President of the Senate, a position that she held in the previous Parliament.

Later in the day, the Speaker, preceded by the Serjeant-at-Arms and accompanied by the Clerks and Members, again walked in procession from the House to the Senate, where the Governor-General made her opening speech which is a formal declaration of the calling together of the Parliament and a forecast of the government's proposed programme of legislation.

Before the Governor-General's speech was reported to the House by the Speaker, the House undertook some 'formal business'. This tradition is a symbolic declaration by the House that it is master of its own

program of business. Traditionally, the formal business takes the form of the presentation and First Reading of a Bill. This bill is termed the 'formal' or 'privilege' Bill. It is non-contentious and may not be proceeded with further.

On this occasion, the Australian Prime Minister, Hon. Anthony Albanese, MP, presented the Therapeutic Goods Amendment Bill 2025 and moved that the Second Reading be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

The Speaker then formally reported the Governor-General's speech to the House and a Committee, consisting of the Prime Minister and two MPs was appointed to prepare and deliver an 'Address in Reply' later in the day. The Address in Reply is a resolution expressing loyalty to the King and thanking the Governor-General for the speech.

The House was then free to proceed to other business before adjourning for the day. Business conducted included elections of the Deputy Speaker and Second Deputy Speaker, nominations of Members for the Speakers' Panel and a motion to agree to the 2025 programme of sittings.

**Below: Some of the new intake of MPs in the 48<sup>th</sup> Parliament of Australia pictured with re-elected Speaker of the House, Hon. Milton Dick, MP.**



Image credit: Parliament of Australia/AUSPIC.





Image credit: Parliament of South Africa/P20 South Africa.

### SOUTH AFRICAN PARLIAMENT HOSTS P20 WOMEN'S PARLIAMENT

The Speaker of the National Assembly of South Africa, Hon. Thoko Didiza, MP and the Deputy President, Paul Mashatile have called for the enhancement of efforts to achieve gender equality and inclusivity in South Africa. They were addressing the first day of the 2025 Women's Parliament held from 13 to 14 August 2025, which was organised as part of the activities for the forthcoming P20 Speakers' Summit to be held later this year as part of South Africa's G20 Presidency.

The event, hosted by the Parliament of South Africa, aligns with the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 10-year milestone of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Women's Parliament is one of several sectoral Parliaments held annually and this year, it was held under the theme of 'Accelerating Equality, Sustainability and Shared Growth: Correcting the gender re-distributional bias of growth and development through the Women's Charter, the MTDP and the 2025 G20 Development Priorities'. Other participants included MPs, government leaders, the United Nations Development Programme and civil society organisations.

### INDIA'S PARLIAMENT BANS ONLINE GAMBLING INDUSTRY

The Parliament of India has passed a Bill banning online gambling, after government figures showed that companies had stripped US\$2.3bn annually from 450 million people. The Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Bill was passed by both Houses of Parliament on 21 August 2025 and criminalises the offering, promotion and financing of online gambling, with the outcome that could see offenders face up to five years in prison.

A Government of India statement said: *"This legislation is designed to curb addiction, financial ruin and social distress caused by predatory gaming platforms that thrive on misleading promises of quick wealth."* The Government said that almost a third of Indian population had lost money gambling online with officials outlining that the rapid spread of gambling platforms had caused widespread financial distress, addiction and even suicide. The platforms have also been linked to fraud, money laundering and terrorism financing.

India's wider gaming industry is one of the largest markets in the world, but the new law carves out exceptions for e-sports and educational games, which the government says will be promoted as part of the digital economy.

The Indian Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi said the new law will *"encourage e-sports and online social*

Above: The Speaker of the National Assembly of South Africa, Hon. Thoko Didiza, MP addresses the first day of the P20 Women's Parliament.

*games" while "at the same time, it will save our society from the harmful effects of online money games".*

The ban affects platforms for card games, poker and fantasy sports, including India's hugely popular fantasy cricket apps. It also leaves the fate of the key sponsor for India's national cricket team in question. Dream11, India's biggest fantasy sports gaming platform, was named in July 2023 as the cricket team's lead sponsor for three years, with its logo on Team India jerseys.

Industry groups had urged regulation and taxation rather than a blanket ban, warning the move could drive players to illegal offshore platforms.

Source: Al Jazeera and news agencies.

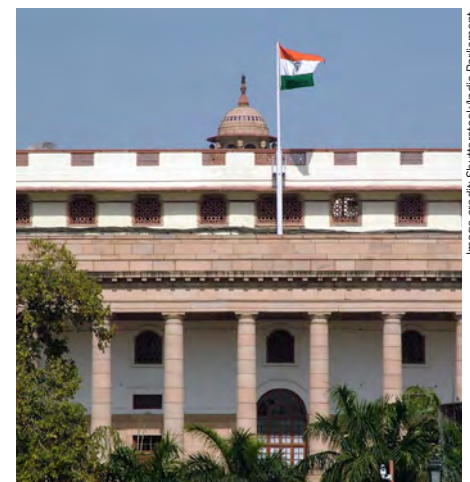


Image credit: Shutterstock/India Parliament.



### Greg Cornwell: Former Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Australian Capital Territory

Greg Cornwell, who died at the age of 87 in June 2025, was considered to be a classic Canberra conservative politician who campaigned for self-government for the Australian Capital Territory. He was born in Sydney and began his career in shipping and public relations before moving to Canberra in 1966, where he joined the Liberal Party. He was first elected to the

ACT Legislative Assembly as the Member for Molonglo in 1992 and held his seat until 2004, when he retired. He was the Assembly's Speaker between 1995 and 2001 and had

previously represented the seat of Fraser in the ACT House of Assembly, the advisory body which was a precursor to self-government when the Legislative Assembly was established in 1989.

In retirement, Greg Cornwell continued to write and advocate widely on topics from travel to politics. He also wrote a series of crime novels, *'Order in the House'*, featuring a Legislative Assembly backbencher who often found himself at the scene of a murder and would help to 'solve the crime'. One of these murders was even set at a conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

In 2008 he was made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in recognition of his service to the Assembly and the Canberra community.

News sources: ACT news region.com.au

### Constance Simelane: Former first female Deputy Prime Minister of Eswatini and CPA International Chairperson

Pioneering political figure and former Deputy Prime Minister of Eswatini, Hon. Constance Simelane passed away in July 2025 at the age of 65. Born in 1960 in the Hhohho region, Constance Simelane's journey in public service began when she was appointed to the Senate of Swaziland (later Eswatini) in 2001. Her commitment to education and social justice became evident and she took on the role of Minister of Education and Training in 2003 and she was appointed to the House of Assembly as one of the ten Ministers constitutionally allowed by the monarch.

From 2004 to 2005, Constance Simelane held the position of Acting Chairperson of the International Executive Committee of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, when the incumbent Hon. Bob Speller, MP from Canada lost his seat in the Federal elections by a small margin.

She was the first woman to hold the position of Deputy Prime Minister when she was appointed in 2006 following the untimely death of Albert Shabangu. During her tenure, she championed initiatives to increase access to

education for vulnerable and orphaned children, ensuring that financial barriers would not prevent them from receiving a basic education. She also called upon pregnant girls to be re-admitted to education, as since independence in 1968, standard practice was to expel girls from school if they became pregnant. Her efforts were instrumental in changing the landscape of education in Eswatini, allowing countless children to pursue their academic dreams. She served as Deputy Prime Minister until 2008, after which she continued her advocacy for education and women's rights becoming a prominent voice for gender equality in Eswatini.



News sources: Eswatini Daily News

### Job Ndugai: Former Speaker of Tanzania

Hon. Job Yustino Ndugai (1963-2025) was a Tanzanian politician who served as the Speaker of the National Assembly of Tanzania from November 2015 until his resignation in January 2022. He rose through the ranks of the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) party to become one of the most prominent figures in Tanzania's leadership.

First elected to Parliament as the Member for Kongwa in 2000, he was also Deputy Speaker from 2010 to 2015. He was named as the most active MP in the 9<sup>th</sup> Tanzanian Parliament.

His resignation as Speaker in 2022 followed 'controversial' remarks that Ndugai made about Tanzania's borrowing and national debt, which drew criticism from President Samia

Suluhu Hassan. He had warned against mounting debt levels saying it risked the country being 'auctioned', however he later apologised for the comments.

The current Speaker of the National Assembly of Tanzania, Hon. Dr Tulia Ackson expressed deep sorrow over the passing of her predecessor.



News sources: Tanzania The Citizen, The Tanzania Times





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## **WOMEN MPs MEET MEXICO'S FIRST FEMALE PRESIDENT**

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