



**57th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference
London, United Kingdom
21 – 28 July 2011**

Reinforcing Democracy

Summary Statement

Significant reforms must be made so the Commonwealth becomes a more active international organization, Parliament's domination by the executive is reduced and its public reputation improved and better global and domestic policies are developed on climate change, migration, technology and other issues, recommends a high-level group of Commonwealth Parliamentarians.

Parliamentarians attending the 57th annual conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and associated meetings called for the Commonwealth and its member governments to take a world leadership role in promoting the values of good democratic governance and equitable development. The conference, hosted by the Parliament of the United Kingdom from 21 to 28 July, was composed of 600 Members and officials of Parliaments and Legislatures from more than 140 Commonwealth nations, states, provinces and territories. They listed parliamentary reform and strengthening the Commonwealth as an international institution as top priorities for immediate action and said greater use of the Commonwealth's parliamentary, governmental and other networks will help to identify and implement effective measures to raise standards of governance throughout the world.

Arguing that the Commonwealth and Parliament are very valuable institutions, the MPs called for Commonwealth co-operation to: mitigate the effects of climate change, increase the accountability of governments and Commonwealth institutions, curb cyber threats, improve access to technology and especially biotechnology, implement effective migration controls to benefit all societies, enhance the status of women, expand trade opportunities, enforce the rule of law, protect small states and involve citizens, especially young people, in governance. Both institutions must be more effective in countering abuses of democracy and human rights and in promoting globally and domestically the Commonwealth's fundamental values of democracy, freedom, equality and sustainable development for all.

The meeting in London, chaired by Rt Hon. John Bercow, MP, Speaker of the U.K. House of Commons and 2011 President of the CPA, included the Small Branches Conference on 23 and 24 July for Parliamentarians from jurisdictions with populations of up to 500,000 and a meeting of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians on 26 July.

Summary Statements containing the conclusions of all three conferences follow below.

**57th Commonwealth
Parliamentary Conference
26 – 27 July 2011**

Reinforcing Democracy

Workshop A: The Commonwealth in the 21st Century

The workshop concluded the Commonwealth should reform itself to play a more active role in setting internationally trade and climate change policies and in improving standards of democratic governance and accountability both of member states and of the organization.

In trade, it was argued that the Commonwealth should embrace trade engagements within partner states because there are many similarities in legal frameworks, political institutions and even business practices. The Commonwealth should be used not only as a network of 54 states but as a vehicle to access markets in China and elsewhere.

In climate change, it was agreed that the Commonwealth should do more to tackle the real threat posed by climate change as Members expressed concern about the severe impact they warned it will have on food production and standards of living. If countries do not act now, they will have to spend more in future to tackle the severe effects than they would spend if action is taken now. Participants were apprised of the fact that 32 islands vulnerable to sea level rise and the deterioration of water quality are in the Commonwealth.

In Commonwealth reform, Members called on member governments to recognize that the organization is the second largest political network after the United Nations and individual national interests should be modified for the benefit of the larger community. They recalled that the Commonwealth used to be the focus for democracy and liberation; but countries now prioritize other partnerships at the expense of the Commonwealth.

There should be an index of democratic compliance to assess how member countries are performing. The eviction of countries which perform poorly in the area of good governance should be explored and a Commonwealth Development Fund should be established so developed countries can assist developing ones to make the Commonwealth more relevant.

There was a strong consensus that there should be greater clarity on practical help available to member states and that clear outcomes and methods of holding the organization to account should be developed.

Workshop B: Parliament and Reforms – Raising the Benchmarks

Participants at the workshop were unanimous in their agreement that parliamentary reform is necessary and timely to re-assert the supremacy of Parliament over the executive. Parliaments and their Members must have the political will to reduce executive domination of Parliament by such measures as strengthening committee scrutiny of executive actions, acting to curb corruption and extending scrutiny to areas of governance that executives strive to keep to themselves. Matters such as foreign treaties and quasi-governmental bodies were among areas sited for greater parliamentary oversight.

Steps should be taken to make Parliaments and their Members fully accountable and accessible to citizens, and to ensure they represent their people appropriately, particularly by improving the representation of women.

Members noted that the CPA Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures provide a guide to ways to improve the effectiveness of Parliament; but ultimately it was agreed that Members themselves must summon up the political will and act in a collaborative way across party lines to carry out the reforms needed to make their Parliaments more effective.

Workshop C: Commonwealth Initiatives in Handling Migration Issues

The challenge facing the Commonwealth is one of scale, urgency and connectedness. The Commonwealth was said to be uniquely placed to take a leadership role through international and bilateral agreements and by demonstrating best practice. There was agreement that migration can be an asset; but there is an urgent need for it to be properly managed rather than policed. It was also stressed that all Parliamentarians and governments have a responsibility to address negative public perceptions on migration using accurate evidence so that the benefits of migration for all countries and people are understood.

All participants acknowledged that migration is a complex and challenging global issue affecting all Commonwealth countries and requiring a united approach. Migration is predicted to grow in the future due to globalization, improved communication, changing demographics and a changing climate.

The beneficial contributions of migrants to economic and social development in all countries were highlighted: destination countries are provided with needed skills and labour, particularly vital in countries with ageing populations, whilst origin countries may receive valuable remittances and foreign exchange. In addition, cultural exchange can enrich the societies on both sides.

However, speakers also emphasized the challenges facing different countries within the Commonwealth: the impact of large-scale migration and emigration on small countries; the integration of temporary migrants and potential stresses on society's values and resources in large receiving countries; the impact on development of a "brain-drain" of skilled people, and the reliance of some economies on emigration and remittances.

The exploitation of vulnerable migrants was also raised, particularly where migrants are unaware of their rights or are taken advantage of by unscrupulous agents or human traffickers. The negative impacts of forced migration were especially emphasized.

Workshop D: Enhancing Good Governance and Accountability: Improving Standards of Probity and Performance

The workshop supported governance reforms to improve the accountability of the executive to Parliament, upgrade Parliament's links with its citizens and raise standards of probity.

To improve accountability, the workshop suggested that there should be a mechanism to cull out government assurances and to follow them up through a parliamentary assurance committee. The committee system should be strengthened and the public outreach programme of Parliament should be further expanded and its effectiveness improved so that there is no disconnect between the public and Parliament. Being an MP should be a fulltime

job with adequate remuneration in order to serve the public and to secure good governance. Parliaments should have adequate infrastructures and high-quality human resource skills and capacities to improve the performance of Parliamentarians.

In order to improve the accountability of Members to the public, legislation enabling voters to recall their Members was also suggested. Parliament should be modernized to take advantage of information communication technology.

On the aspect of improving standards of probity, the workshop agreed that legislation should require Members to disclose their financial assets and business interests publicly. There should be a code of conduct for all Members to follow to ensure integrity, objectivity, openness, honesty and accountability. There should be institutions available to examine alleged violations of the code. A register of interest should be made available at the earliest opportunity after an election and there should be periodic declarations obtained from Members about incomes received over and above the parliamentary remuneration.

Workshop E: The World Economy and Obstacles Facing the Commonwealth

The international economic and financial crisis has highlighted economic interdependency and the need for better economic governance and an effective regulation regime at a global level. Since 2008, the crisis has brought a fall in global demand and consequently a downturn in economic activity which has adversely affected small and developing economies that depend heavily on exports in the absence of a large internal market.

The barriers that exist in international trade, by way of tariffs, quotas and similar measures, which have been the subject of various conferences of the World Trade Organization, prevent access to the large markets of developed countries for the goods produced by developing countries. Within the Commonwealth, the developed countries ought to assist developing countries by facilitating trade because developing countries need trade and not aid which translates into dependency.

Commonwealth developing countries often suffer from a lack of access to financial resources and a sound legal system that protects investment. Development is also often undermined by corrupt practices and inadequate education and health services. Another obstacle to economic development is intercommunal discrimination on the basis of race, creed, religion, status and other such factors which put entire sections of society at a disadvantage in terms of education, job opportunities, income and social mobility. The remedy for intercommunal discrimination is that there should be concrete measures established to achieve social justice.

Workshop F: Women as Agents of Change: Where Are We Now? The Way Forward

Women need to see themselves as individuals capable of creating change. They need to develop strategies to encourage and foster interest in politics, strategies that may well transcend partisan political lines. The work undertaken by non-governmental organizations was considered a prime means by which women can develop their talents and expertise in the political arena. Also of note were the effectiveness of Youth Parliaments in introducing women to politics and its processes.

Women have established or own nearly one quarter of the new businesses in the world. Such businesses have become the sparkplugs of new economic growth. Efforts to promote the

developments of small business may well broaden women's access to economic decision-making and power. Women are a high return on investment, yielding great dividends.

Women represent one half of the world's population and are becoming less dependent on the male-dominated power structure to act on their demands.

Despite some advancement of women in politics, a multitude of barriers continue to exist. These include: a lack of economic security; racial, cultural and religious norms, as well as competing priorities. Moreover, once these obstacles are overcome for women to find their respective places within the political arena, they are confronted by challenges from within political parties in an environment dominated by men.

Workshop G: Technological Threats to International, National and Personal Security

Technological advances have had clear beneficial impacts both in a societal and financial sense. However, the huge progress made in recent times has led to the emergence of new threats. The most prominent threat is that posed by developments in information technology.

Cyber threats have a wide range of implications, from personal information security through to cyber espionage perpetrated against nation states and even disruptive attacks on national infrastructure. There was agreement that education on personal security is necessary, especially when individuals are not aware that many internet resources offer functionality at the expense of privacy. Legislation is also necessary on information security, an area where keeping abreast with developments in technology is problematic.

The difficulty in attributing blame over attacks and bringing perpetrators to justice represents a considerable challenge. Discussion leaders said that policing agencies require further funding and that countries should establish security agencies responsible to assess and address emerging threats. International communication and collaboration are vital to address cyber threats as they do not respect geographical or political borders. The CPA is well placed to assist in programmes on cyber threats and other areas such as biotechnology.

The use of the internet as a tool for dissent was also covered. The "Arab Spring" has shown that information and communication technologies are a social enabler. In contrast, the Wiki-leaks episode and subsequent attacks by so called "hacktivists" demonstrates how the internet also provides a means of dissent that could be deemed illegal. Government responses to Wiki-leaks have also shown how governments can attempt to keep information out of the public domain. Although participants and speakers agreed that governments have a duty to maintain secrecy over certain information, there were differing views on where the balance between security and openness should be found.

Workshop H: The Role of Parliamentarians in Advancing the Transfer of Agricultural Technology and Research

The importance of investment into agricultural research was highlighted as a means for nations to become more domestically self-sufficient and achieve a comfortable level of food safety. Although a great deal of research has already been done, much of this work has not been communicated to the global population. Research should be made available to all countries to enhance domestic crop yields and increase local sustainability.

There was concern expressed from developing countries that much research is held in the Western world and can only be accessed at a high price. The issue of the “brain drain” was also raised. The workshop noted that scientific researchers are rarely responsible for implementing new technology in the field; entrepreneurs therefore need to be encouraged to implement advances to transfer new technology from the laboratory to the field.

Final Plenary: Commonwealth Parliaments: Progress and Challenges

The Commonwealth must be strengthened to enhance its global effectiveness in promoting good democratic performance, respect for the rule of law and joint international action in such policy areas as climate change mitigation, agreed speakers at the final plenary session.

Looking ahead to the Eminent Persons Group report on the future of the organization which is to be presented to Commonwealth Heads of Government at their October meeting in Perth, Australia, Members called for the organization to become a modern network of likeminded nations promoting the values for which the Commonwealth stands, including good parliamentary democratic governance, the rule of law and equitable development for all.

As an organization representative of nearly one-third of the world’s population spread over all regions, it is well placed to become a vocal global advocate for best practices not just in governance and in opposing oppression and racism but also in dealing with issues as diverse as climate change, trade, sustainable development, the empowerment of women, the involvement of young people in governance and social development and the protection of small states.

At the parliamentary level, member nations must share their experiences to help all Parliaments and Legislatures to reform in accordance with the highest benchmarks of good governance, argued Members.

30th Small Branches Conference

23 and 24 July 2011

1st Plenary: Commonwealth Initiatives in Handling Migration Issues

Careful immigration controls to Commonwealth small countries through work permits to fill skilled and unskilled labour shortages has potential to stimulate economic growth while not degrading the quality of life and the environment, delegates agreed as they noted that controlled migration is clearly beneficial.

Delegates found cross-border migration is usually driven by the power of money and social and economic factors in both originating and recipient countries. Remittance money from migrant workers can improve living standards significantly. Targeted development aid and education programmes in originating countries were offered as positive ways of assistance.

Some concern was expressed about illegal immigration, especially in the Caribbean. Another sentiment offered on migration controls was that careful attention is needed to monitor economic conditions in small countries. Housing/rental shortages, population density and pressure on infrastructure can lead to resistance to work permit migrants.

Commonwealth Heads of Government, the Ramphal Centre and other bodies have been looking at these various issues. There was consensus that the full report of this session should be forwarded those institutions.

2nd Plenary: Countering Threats to the Stability of Small Democracies: Piracy, Drug Trafficking, Terrorism

Drug trafficking, terrorism and piracy present a significant and growing threat to small democracies, concurred delegates attending this plenary session. A deliberative and cohesive strategy is necessary to counter this threat and it must be collaboratively developed between small and large jurisdictions alike, with input from international organizations, if such a strategy is to be truly effective. While an ominous task, these threats must be effectively countered as they represent truly serious global issues that result in very real and significant human, economic and social costs.

The plenary heard that piracy has existed for thousands of years and in various forms. Modern piracy (particularly in the Gulf of Aden and Somalia) has become more acute as a result of long-term political instability. More effective results in countering this threat would be realized if legislation, based on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, was passed in affected jurisdictions allowing for the successful prosecution of pirates.

The plenary also heard how matters of piracy, drug trafficking and terrorism can destabilize small democracies at the political, social and economic levels. The result is that these very nations, in addition to suffering a disproportionate share of negative consequences, become the unfortunate home for such illicit activities.

Collaborative efforts such as the New York Declaration of 2009, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and the Djibouti Code of Conduct of 2009 have resulted in success in countering piracy; but more must be done and the CPA should help to ensure that it happens.

3rd Plenary: Women as Agents of Change in Small Societies

A real paradigm shift is still necessary to attract more women into politics and to empower women generally, it was emphasized by discussion leaders and delegates in this debate.

Historically, women have paved the way for women's rights and have had access to professional careers. They have been agents of many changes since time immemorial. It was recognized in the debate that globally women have been a dominant force in their communities and assumed prominent positions such as Premiers, Prime Ministers, cabinet Ministers, Permanent Secretaries, and others in respective governments. But more needs to be done to enable women to change small societies.

Priorities such as economic security, protection and safety, leadership, social inclusion and education for women are essential tools to empower women to become change agents in small societies. Equally, not only women but also men can make a difference in transforming the lives of women in society and assist them in reaching their potential, it was agreed.

4th Plenary: Strengthening Democracy in Small States: Youth Leadership Training, Citizen Involvement and Parliamentary Reform

Delegates agreed that it is important to find new ways to involve citizens in the political process in addition to their ability to vote in elections.

In many small jurisdictions there is already considerable reliance on members of the community serving in a voluntary capacity on committees and other bodies. New methods of electronic interaction such as social networking sites are an effective means for citizens to mount campaigns on a variety of issues and this is particularly useful in small states with a large geographical area or in island archipelagos where it is difficult for citizens to meet in person. It was, however, agreed that it is important to take care that the views expressed vociferously by certain sections of the community are genuinely representative of general public opinion. Systematic measures of public opinion such as referenda have sometimes shown that the views expressed by some are not necessarily supported by the majority.

Many of the jurisdictions represented organize regular Youth Parliaments or have Youth Councils or similar bodies. These are not only a way to enable younger people to understand more about the political process, but they are also a valuable way for the views of young people to be expressed and taken into account by governments. Delegates recognized that many young people do not think that Parliaments are of any relevance to their day-to-day lives, so it is important to engage young people on issues that affect them.

The need for young people from many of the small states represented to travel abroad to attend school or university was seen as a barrier to young people developing an interest in political life in their home community; but this had to be set against the considerable benefit that education in another country can bring when students return home and bring knowledge and experience back with them.

Participants discussed the need for parliamentary reform, not only to improve internal parliamentary proceedings but also so that Parliaments do not become alienated from citizens. Examples were given of small states where the lack of a strong Parliament to ensure proper oversight of the executive had contributed to civil unrest, public disobedience and sometimes a coup.

Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Meeting

26 July 2011

Gender Debate: Being an Effective Agent of Change: Prerequisites and Modus

Better economic empowerment measures and education is needed for Commonwealth women, agreed women Parliamentarians attending this debate. It was concluded that women need to see each other globally for their similarities and to work both together and with men, also important agents, to effect change.

Governments and Parliamentarians throughout the Commonwealth should share information on successful measures used in other countries, such as the United Kingdom's campaign against domestic violence which delegates heard has reduced the cost of domestic violence by billions of pounds. A global effort is needed to combat domestic violence everywhere.

Another success story for women noted by delegates has occurred in Rwanda since the end of the genocide in 1994. Changes effected without discrimination in that central African country have improved the participation of women in decision-making at every level.

Sharing experiences can also help to overcoming differing cultural values which are obstacles to change. Delegates noted that in the Pacific Region, for example, most governments preach democracy but its application varies because of differing cultural values. Setting up networks to help women Parliamentarians share their experiences would be beneficial in such cases, it was agreed.