



**66<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference  
Accra International Conference Centre  
Accra, Ghana  
30 September 2023 – 6 October 2023**

**Chairperson of Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) network  
Report to the 66<sup>th</sup> CPA General Assembly**

**Thursday 5 October 2023**

Thank you, Hon. President, Hon. Chairperson, Hon. Vice-Chairperson, CPA Secretary-General and Hon. delegates for this opportunity to address Members of Parliament from across our Commonwealth family at the General Assembly.

Let me begin by taking this opportunity on behalf of the CWP network to again thank the Parliament of Ghana for organising the 66<sup>th</sup> CPC. Their commitment and hard work have surely not gone unnoticed.

I would like to inform the General Assembly that at the CWP Steering Committee meeting held on Sunday 1 October 2023, Members elected Hon. Kate Doust, MLC (Western Australia) as the Vice-Chairperson of the CWP. Hon. Doust has a term of one year which will conclude at the end of the next CPC in Sydney, Australia in 2024. I would like to thank the outgoing CWP Vice-Chairperson, Hon. Valerie Woods, Speaker of the House of Representative of Belize and CWP Regional Representative for the Caribbean, Americas and the Atlantic Region for her support and work in her two years as Vice-Chairperson.

In my position as Chairperson of the CWP network, it gives me great pleasure to congratulate Regions on the phenomenal work they have done this year towards realising the CWP network's mission which is *"to promote the representation of women in CPA Branches and women's full and equal participation in all political and parliamentary leadership at all levels"* in 2024.

I would like to take this opportunity to briefly highlight some of the extraordinary work Regions have been doing:

In October 2022, the CPA Africa Region held a Regional Gender Sensitization Workshop on the theme of *'Women Parliamentarians in Leadership and Politics'* in Tanzania where women Parliamentarians from 15 African Parliaments, political and gender experts from across the Region had robust discussions on election campaigning, representation and post-election conflict. Members of the CWP Africa paid a gender sensitisation parliamentary visit to Botswana in July ahead of the

forthcoming elections where women Members of Parliament met with both the Speaker of the National Assembly of Botswana, Hon. Phandu Chaka Skelemani, MP and His Excellency Dr Mokgweetsi Eric Keabetswe Masisi, President of Botswana to discuss women's political participation and representation as key objectives of the network. The CPA KwaZulu-Natal and CPA Western Cape Branches undertook Gender Sensitive Parliament Self-Assessments in May 2023 that were guided by the 2020 *CWP Gender Sensitive Parliament Guidelines* making them the second and third Branches in the CPA, after the CPA Australian Capital Territory being the first in December 2022, to benefit from this important work.

The CPA Australia Region will use its 2023 Regional Strengthening Funds to support the CPA Tasmania Branch's 'Stepping-Up Programme' which seeks to encourage young women (school age) to consider a career in politics by equipping them with the right skills needed to 'step up' into leadership roles. The Region will also use its funds to support the delivery of the two workshops that will be held for newly and re-elected women Parliamentarians from the CPA New South Wales and CPA Western Australia Branches on dealing with online bullying and hate that will be held by a cyberbullying expert.

Delegates should note that in October 2022, the CPA British Islands and Mediterranean (BIM) Region held its 9<sup>th</sup> CWP Regional Conference in Gibraltar themed '*Attracting and Retaining Effective Women Parliamentarians*'. At the regional conference, delegates discussed legislating against online harms and the online safety of women Parliamentarians. The regional conference included an outreach event for local women who were interested in politics and had the opportunity to engage and learn from the experiences of elected women from across the Region. In June 2023, 3 Members from the BIM Region's CWP Steering Committee represented the CWP at the *Women Political Leaders Summit* in Brussels. The Region also hosted a 3-day workshop in the same month on women in trade that was attended by women Parliamentarians from across the CPA membership that looked at the impact of trade agreements on gender equality, poverty and economic empowerment. Other highlights from the Region include work on Gender-Sensitive Parliaments that has been undertaken by the Parliaments of Scotland, Wales and Jersey.

The CPA Caribbean, Atlantic-Americas (CAA) Region used its 2023 Regional Strengthening Funds to deliver a one-day regional conference on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2023 for the CWP CAA Region. The workshop covered the topics of Multi-Party Women Caucuses, Gender Responsive Legislative Process and Legislation Protecting Women and Other Vulnerable Groups. The final report recorded that the regional conference catered to 160 attendees (both in person and online) with registrations from 11 of the 19 regional Branches. The CWP CAA Region also hosted its 13<sup>th</sup> CWP Regional Conference, which was held in the Turks and Caicos Islands. The two-day regional conference, that was also held in July 2023, focused on the critical role of women Parliamentarians in democratic governance, the shared experiences across the Region of women in leadership, and the crippling issue of youth crime and the interventions women Parliamentarians can make to contribute to solutions. The regional conference concluded with a business meeting of the network that agreed to review the Region's CWP constitution that is anticipated to be ratified at the 2024 Regional Conference. Delegates should also note that as of 2023, Belize, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago have formally established women's parliamentary caucuses.

The CPA General Assembly should be informed that various Provinces and Territories within the CPA Canada Region have been actively engaging in various projects to encourage more women to stand for election and to improve life for women Parliamentarians. Projects include twinning young women with women Parliamentarians for exposure to the work and to Legislatures in the CPA British Columbia and CPA Nova Scotia Branches; and creating spaces for children and families, including childcare, at the Legislature in Québec. A special mention should be given to the CPA Northwest Territories Branch for leading the Region in having the highest number of women elected in Parliament at 53%.

31 Pacific Women Parliamentarians from 11 Pacific countries attended a workshop that was hosted by the New Zealand Speaker, Rt Hon. Adrian Rurawhe, that provided a platform for Pacific Women Parliamentarians to come together, share experiences and discuss crucial issues facing their nations and the CPA Pacific Region. Discussions related to issues of gender equality, political participation, social issues, climate change and more.

As time will not allow me to share more of the extraordinary work the CWP network is doing across the CPA, delegates should note that the CPA Headquarters Secretariat has made available online and via email to all CPA Branch and Regional Secretaries, all regional reports that it has received from the membership. I strongly encourage Members, both male and female, to read the reports to gain insight into the transformative work that women Parliamentarians are doing to champion gender equality.

I would also like to praise Members for contributing to the development of the online CPA Parliamentary Academy course on '*Effective Women's Parliamentary Caucuses*' and for participating in events delivered by the CPA Headquarters Secretariat, specifically the CWP Workshop on 'Champions for Gender Equality' that was hosted by the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory in December 2022. The Workshop was designed to equip male and female Members of Parliament with skills and resources to take action on gender equality and to strengthen their roles as gender champions in their respective Parliaments. The CPA General Assembly should note that it was attended by 14 women Parliamentarians and 6 male Parliamentarians from the following 12 jurisdictions: Australian Capital Territory, Bangladesh, Gauteng (South Africa), Jamaica, Kerala (India), New South Wales (Australia), Niue, Pakistan, Samoa, KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa), Queensland (Australia) and Western Australia.

Following the approval of constitutional amendments at the 65<sup>th</sup> CPA General Assembly Meeting held at the 65<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) in August 2022, specifically the requirement that CPA Branches should ensure that at least one-third of its delegation to the CPA General Assembly are women, except only where it is impossible to do so, either by virtue of the composition of the Legislature itself or limitations arising due to a single CPC delegate entitlement or otherwise, I am pleased to note that at this 66<sup>th</sup> CPC, there has been an increase in the number of women delegates which currently stands at 40.3%.

The membership should be extremely proud of the work it has achieved over the past year however, it would be remiss of me to not share what could be done to ensure that

all women Parliamentarians from across all 9 Regions of the CPA benefit from the capacity building, exchange of best practice and networking opportunities that CWP affords us. Delegates should note that there remains a Region that has yet to nominate a women Parliamentarian to represent their Region on the CWP International Steering Committee. Members should be informed that Regional Representatives play a crucial role in acting as a conduit of information on CPA/CWP matters from the CWP Chairperson/CPA Secretariat to women in their Region as well as ensuring that the needs, interests and views of women within the Region are fed into the work of the network. Delegates should also note that seven Regions, specifically the Africa, Asia, Australia, British Islands and Mediterranean (BIM), Caribbean, Americas and the Atlantic, Canada and Pacific Regions, are the only Regions that have successfully submitted their annual report of CWP developments to the CPA Headquarters Secretariat.

With this being said, I strongly encourage all Regions to ensure that they have a women Parliamentarian actively engage in the CWP International Steering Committee and should liaise with their Regional Secretariat should they wish to know more about who their representative is. Additionally, I urge Regions to submit their annual report of CWP activities and development within their Regions to the CPA before the end of the year. These reports are not only a great opportunity to highlight the great work that the Parliaments or Regions are doing but can also serve as an inspirational source of knowledge and insight into the promotion of gender equality in Parliaments across the Commonwealth.

Delegates should note that the CWP Business Meeting was held on Monday 2 October 2023, where women Parliamentarians from all the CPA's nine Regions shared their views and ideas on what they believe would further strengthen and advance both the work and influence of CWP. I would like to assure all women Parliamentarians of the CWP network that I have listened to and acknowledged the suggestions and ideas shared at the meeting. The CWP International Steering Committee will proactively work to find a way forward in 2024 to ensure that CWP will have greater influence across CPA Regions and a greater presence at the next and in all future CPCs including sufficient time in the programme to hold its Business Meeting and to allow for capacity building, networking and the exchange of best practices.

This will begin with finalising the CWP's Annual Work Plan for 2024 which will serve as the guiding strategic roadmap for 2024. In adopting this annual Work Plan, the CWP network aims to be flexible in addressing issues as they arise and ensuring that approaches are relevant. While this plan introduces a fresh approach, it builds upon the work of the past. Initiatives like the 'Gender Sensitive Parliament Self-Assessments' and CWP Workshops will continue to be a core part of the network's work. Delegates are to be informed that the Work Plan has four key objectives:

- 1) To support Commonwealth Parliaments on their gender-sensitive journeys.
- 2) To build the capacity of women Parliamentarians and enhance knowledge sharing amongst women and male Parliamentarians.
- 3) To strengthen the governance of the CWP network and enhance its engagement with the broader CPA.

- 4) To be recognised as a leading international women's parliamentary network that promotes the success and experiences of women in Commonwealth Parliaments to a wide audience.

The CPA General Assembly should note that the CWP Steering Committee has created a Subcommittee that is reviewing the proposed Work Plan to include another Work Stream that will look to encourage women to stand for election. The CWP Steering Committee agreed that the Subcommittee would provide a report of its work to the CWP Steering Committee at a meeting that will be scheduled in late October/early November 2023. The CWP Steering Committee will then proceed to share the draft Work Plan with the wider CWP membership and strongly encourages comments and feedback on the document to ensure that it captures the priorities and interest of the CWP's membership.

Looking ahead to 2024, I would like to invite women Parliamentarians to help identify a priority theme for CWP in 2024.

On Wednesday 4 October 2023, a gender-themed session was held at the plenary conference that focused on '*Gender Quotas in Parliament - A Means to an End?*' The session evaluated the effectiveness of gender quotas in Parliaments. It is important to highlight that despite progress made in many areas, women's representation in Parliaments remains inadequate. The international community advocates for gender parity meaning 50/50 representation of women in Parliament. However, data gathered by the CPA on 15 September 2023, shows that only 55 of the 180 CPA Branches have achieved the Commonwealth Heads of Government target of at least 30% women in elected office that was set over 20 years ago. Members are to also note the data gathered by the CPA reveals that eight Parliaments in the CPA's membership have no women in Parliament.

I would like to stress that under the current rate of progress, Julie Ballington, Policy Advisor in Political Participation from UN Women shared that the realisation of gender parity in Commonwealth Parliaments would not be reached in national Legislatures before 2063 globally. Delegates at the session unanimously endorsed the recommendation that '*Parliaments of the Commonwealth, with less than 30 per cent women, should implement a percentage of gender quotas through legislative means or via political party candidate selections*'.

The CWP network endorses this recommendation and strongly urges Parliaments to be proactive in implementing gender quotas and to actively report to the CPA on their efforts, successes and challenges in increasing women's representation in Parliament.

I would like to also put on record my sincere thanks to all of the country representatives who have taken the time out of their busy schedules to be here, the Regional Representatives, all of the staff who support the work of the CWP network at the CPA Headquarters Secretariat and across the CPA's nine Regions. Without you, this work would not happen. I would like to end my report by encouraging each and every single person in this room today to get involved. Play your part in promoting the representation of women at every level of leadership, in every country, in every region. Thank you.