



10TH COMMONWEALTH YOUTH PARLIAMENT
Delhi Legislative Assembly, India



CPA CHAIRPERSON'S OPENING ADDRESS

25 November 2019

Hon. Emilia Monjowa Lifaka, MP (Cameroon)
Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee
Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

- Honourable Shri Ram Niwas Goel, Speaker of the Delhi Legislative Assembly
- Honourable Shri Arvind Kejriwal, Chief Minister of Delhi
- Honourable Shri Om Birla, Speaker of the Lok Sabha
- Honourable Members of the Legislative Assembly
- Honourable Members of the Parliament of India
- Commonwealth Youth Parliamentarians
- Distinguished Guests
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Good afternoon,

On behalf of the CPA family it is my pleasure to welcome you all to the 10th Commonwealth Youth Parliament. I am delighted and honoured to be here at the Legislative Assembly of Delhi to be part of this opening ceremony.

I am sure we share the tremendous warmth and hospitality that is offered to us by the hosts here this week. I would like to express my sincere thanks to CPA Delhi and CPA India Branch for their generosity in hosting us this year.

Being here in India for this landmark Commonwealth Youth Parliament is poignant. Especially as India is the largest democracy in the world. At the 2019 election a breath-taking 600 million people voted. Furthermore, as we celebrate the 70th Anniversary of the London Declaration and the foundation of the 'modern' Commonwealth, it is important to consider the significant role that the newly founded state of India played. Drafted by the Indian statesman V. K. Krishna Menon, the declaration had two main provisions: It allowed the Commonwealth to admit and retain members that were not Dominions, so including both republics and indigenous monarchies, and it changed the name of the organisation from the British Commonwealth to the Commonwealth of Nations. It is therefore appropriate that this year's Commonwealth Youth Parliament should be here in India.

India, which has one of the fastest growing economies in the world today, is home to a fifth of the world's youth. Half of its population is under the age of 25, and a quarter is below the age of 14. India's young population is its most valuable asset. As such India has long recognised the importance of young people to the future of society. The decision to take on the 10th Commonwealth Youth Parliament shows not only a commitment to empower its own young people, but also a wider commitment to the development of Commonwealth Youth beyond its own shores. To quote the words of Jawaharlal Nehru, India is a country that believes "*[Youth] are like buds in a garden and should be carefully and lovingly nurtured, as they are the future of the nation and the citizens of tomorrow.*"

This year's Commonwealth Youth Parliament is particularly important in that it is the milestone 10th Youth Parliament. It is the longest lasting CPA youth programme and serves to build the capacity and skills of young people throughout the Commonwealth. Following its decision in Ottawa in 2019, the Executive Committee of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association determined that the 10th Commonwealth Youth Parliament would be the last one it would organise. However, I do feel that on greater reflection further consideration is needed. With 60% of the Commonwealth's population aged under 30, the Commonwealth Youth Parliament is of crucial importance to help shape future leaders. As an Association primarily for Parliamentarians, we recognise that young people have a proven capability to lead change and are a vital and valuable investment for now and the future. I don't wish to put pressure on any stakeholder, but my team at the Secretariat and I will be watching the proceedings closely this week to reassess whether the programme should continue, in its current form, or another. As Chairperson of CPA International, I am extremely proud that over the last ten CYPs we have helped to shape the future leaders of the Commonwealth.

Both this week, and the fact that elections are imminent in my country, I have begun to think carefully on what it means to be a Parliamentarian. What are the traits you should have as a Parliamentarian, what virtues, principles and skills are characteristics you should emulate this week?

Firstly, communication is key. We are fortunate that we are in India, where it is a known fact that over 1,000 languages are spoken across its subcontinent. If anything, this can teach us the importance of speech and communication. Coming from Cameroon where today's language so potently shapes a nation's politics, what you say and how you say it can win followers and advocates. During the parliamentary debates occurring this week you must give considerable thought to the manner in which you communicate, especially given the cultural and political sensitivities you will encounter throughout the programme, given that you find yourself working with people of many different backgrounds. As such, maintaining an environment of respect and decency is so very important.

Compromise and working together is also essential. India has a population of 1.3 billion people. Delhi alone is now the fourth-largest urban agglomeration in the world. The people and Parliamentarians in such a place will undoubtedly show you why it is important to work together, build alliances, compromise and share goals. In party and caucus meetings you should keep these principles in mind to ensure that, together, you can achieve your agenda.

Embrace change. As a Parliamentarian it is essential to be flexible and embrace new advances. As I learnt recently following the CPA's annual conference in Uganda, adaption and evolution for Parliamentarians, Parliaments and the wider-Commonwealth is so very important. Here in India we can see evidence of this approach. India has been called the fastest growing tech-hub in the world. India has embraced such change like no other country. Whether through smart cities, or as a home to some of the youngest tech-start-up entrepreneurs in the world, with the average age of founders at a mere 28 years, India clearly has much to teach us.

This last point in particular highlights that you, as Commonwealth youth are blessed more so than any generation that has gone before. The technological revolutions which are growing in frequency and advancement offer all of you the ability to reshape the world in whichever way you chose. Today a single Tweet, YouTube video or Facebook post has the potential to reach millions. And such messages can at the press of a button or swipe of a thumb challenge assumptions, fight complacency or praise the worthy. You don't have to wait until you're

older to campaign or lead, you can be a Malala Yousafzai, a Greta Thunberg or a Joshua Wong now. As a great man once said *“Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will.”* Mahatma Gandhi was saying that youth isn’t a barrier to change. It’s the fire in your heart, it is the energy and drive that your older counterparts lack. Use it. Don’t waste it. As someone once said, *“Youth is wasted on the Young”*. Fight the inclination to be a cliché! If you feel that changing the world is too difficult, you should remember that alone you may not be able to change the world, but you can cast a stone across waters to create many ripples. These words are by another great Indian legend, Mother Teresa.

Hon. Juan Watterson SHK, Teslyn Barkman MLA, Senator Sam Mezec, what do all these people have in common? They are all Parliamentarians, and more importantly, they are all Commonwealth Youth Parliamentarians. They have all sat where you sit now, and all have gone on to become leaders in their communities. I hope that those who have walked this path can be an inspiration to you. But this path does not have to lead to parliamentary office alone. Many of your predecessors are also now Public Prosecutors, Procedural Clerks, Youth Ambassadors, and government officials. What you choose to make of this week is up to you. The door is open, but whether you choose to walk, run or jump through it, is down to you.

Nevertheless, by being here now, you have taken important steps to be change-makers. You can take this unique and important opportunity to maximise every day, every session, every debate, every meeting and resolution to learn and grow your skills and experiences. Learn from your mentors, your clerks and colleagues, and from my team at the CPA Headquarters Secretariat. Not just the nuances of parliamentary practice and procedure, but also negotiation skills, listening techniques and problem solving. If you want to be the leaders for today and tomorrow, these will be invaluable weapons in your arsenal. You have a responsibility to the communities from which you come to be focused, engaged and active.

This week can also be of lasting value for the friendships and partnerships you will build. Those of you gathered this week are a microcosm of the Commonwealth family. Whether you are from small or large jurisdictions, or from the north or south, you will all share commonalities

beyond language. These are the building-blocks of a global network you can shape. CPA Headquarters have started that ball rolling in the creation of a Facebook group and I have very much enjoyed watching a few of the videos posted. Your fellow Youth Parliamentarians can themselves be a source of knowledge and experience to utilise. The very foundations of the CPA are based on the premise of shared-learning and networking. The only people who know what it is like to be a Parliamentarian, are other Parliamentarians. This same principle can be extended to youth Parliamentarians.

I wish you all a most successful 10th Commonwealth Youth Parliament. Finally, I wish to thank the Honourable Speakers, the Clerks, CPA India Regional Secretariat, the Mentors, and all parliamentary staff for their organisation and support of this Commonwealth Youth Parliament.

Thank you.

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