



TheParliamentarian

Journal of the Parliaments of the Commonwealth

2024 | Volume 105 | Issue Two | Price £14

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IN THIS ISSUE ▶

Views from Speakers, Members and Youth Parliamentarians around the Commonwealth

PAGES 134-139

Cyberviolence and its effects on political engagement

PAGE 142

Parliament as a forum for scrutiny and accountability: India and the UK

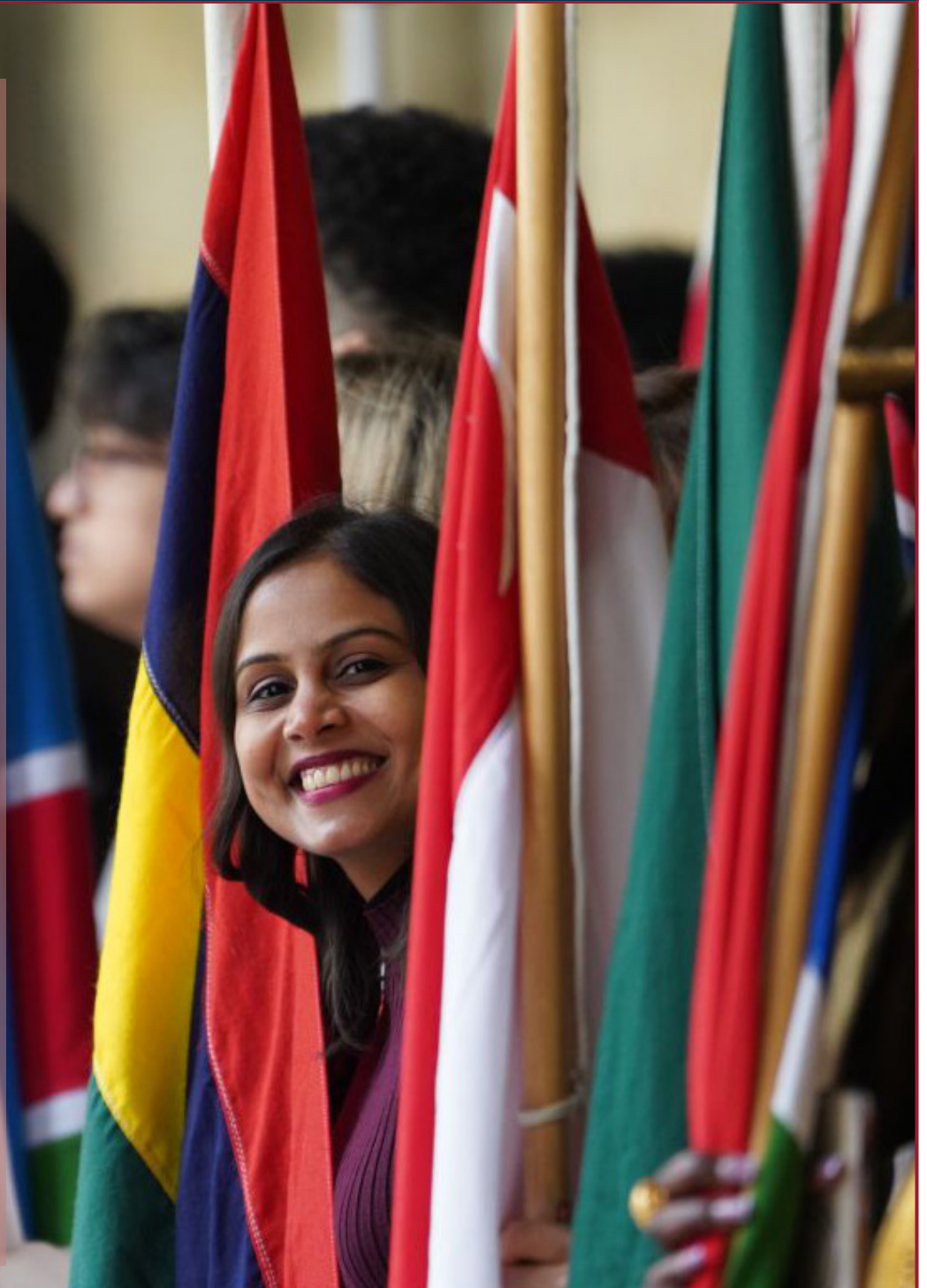
PAGE 153

Developing a bespoke web-based voting app for small Parliaments in Guernsey

PAGE 160

Does Election Observation make a difference? Evidence from Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories

PAGE 162



75th ANNIVERSARY OF THE 'MODERN' COMMONWEALTH

What is the importance of the 'modern' Commonwealth today?

PAGES 128-141

67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference

3-8 November 2024 | Sydney, Australia



67th COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE SYDNEY, NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA

3 to 8 October 2024 (inclusive of arrival dates)

**CONFERENCE THEME: 'ENGAGE, EMPOWER, SUSTAIN:
CHARTING THE COURSE FOR RESILIENT DEMOCRACY'**



- One of the largest annual gatherings of Commonwealth Parliamentarians. Hosted by the Parliament of New South Wales and the CPA New South Wales Branch.
- Over 600 Parliamentarians, parliamentary staff and decision-makers from across the Commonwealth for this unique conference and networking opportunity.
- CPA's global membership addressing the critical issues facing today's modern Parliaments and Legislatures.
- Benefit from professional development, supportive learning and the sharing of best practice with colleagues from Commonwealth Parliaments together with the participation of leading international organisations.

During the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, there will also be several additional conferences and meetings including: **40th CPA Small Branches Conference**; **8th Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Conference**; meetings of the **Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) network**; **CPA General Assembly** and debate; meetings of the **CPA Executive Committee**; presentation of the **2024 Commonwealth Parliamentarian of the Year awards**; the **2nd Lifaka Lecture**; and the **57th Society-of-Clerks-at-the-Table (SoCATT)** meeting. At the 67th CPC, eight learning and development workshops will be held during the main Conference with four workshops during the CPA Small Branches Conference and four workshops during the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Conference.

Visit the **67th CPC Hub** for more information - www.cpahq.org/67-cpc or email cpc@cpahq.org.

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) | Email: hq.sec@cpahq.org | Tel: +44 (0)20 7799 1460
www.cpahq.org | Twitter @CPA_Secretariat | Facebook.com/CPAHQ | Instagram @cpa_secretariat | LinkedIn | Flickr



Calendar of Forthcoming Events

Updated as at 24 June 2024

2024

July

- 20 to 27 July 2024 60th CPA Canadian Regional Conference, Toronto, Ontario, Canada *plus Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Canada Regional Conference*
- 23 to 25 July 2024 CPA Small Branches Workshop: Workshop on Legislative Leadership for Environmental Resilience in Small Jurisdictions, Hawaii, USA
- 24 to 25 July 2024 Commonwealth Sports Ministers Meeting, to be held in Paris, France in the margins of the Olympic Games

August

- 5 to 7 August 2024 National Conference of State Legislatures Summit, Kentucky, USA
- 12 August 2024 International Youth Day
- 20 to 22 August 2024 Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Workshop: 'A Parliamentary Response to combatting gender-based violence and ensuring gender justice', Abuja, Nigeria
- 31 August to 4 September 2024 46th CPA Caribbean, Americas and the Atlantic Regional Conference, Georgetown, Guyana *plus 14th Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) CAA Regional Conference and 17th CAA Caribbean Youth Parliament*

September

- 2 to 6 September 2024 12th Commonwealth Youth Parliament, New Zealand
- 5 September 2024 2024 Parliamentarian of the Year Awards – nomination deadline closes
- 15 September 2024 International Day of Democracy
- 22 to 27 September 2024 CPA Parliamentary Academy: Residency Programme on Parliamentary Practice and Procedure for MPs, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

October

- 13 to 17 October 2024 149th IPU Assembly, Geneva, Switzerland
- 21 to 27 October 2024 27th Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), Apia, Samoa

November

- 4 to 8 November 2024 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia including 40th CPA Small Branches Conference; 8th Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) and Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) meetings; CPA General Assembly; CPA Executive Committee meetings; and the 58th Society of Clerks at the Table (SoCATT) meetings.

The CPA calendar fosters the exchange of events and activities between CPA Regions and Branches. For further information on any events, please contact the CPA Branch concerned or the CPA Headquarters Secretariat via hq.sec@cpahq.org or visit www.cpahq.org. CPA Branch Secretaries are asked to send notices of all events to the CPA Headquarters in advance of the publication deadline to ensure the calendar is accurate.



CONTENTS

THE PARLIAMENTARIAN: 2024 ISSUE TWO

VIEWS & COMMENT

Editor's Note

75th anniversary of the 'modern' Commonwealth
Page 108

View from the CPA Secretary-General

CPA Status update and looking ahead to CPA activities this year
Page 110

View from the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Chairperson

Advancing Inclusiveness: Enhancing Women's Representation in Commonwealth Parliaments
Page 112

View from the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) Chairperson

How Parliamentarians can support youth potential in the 'Commonwealth Year of Youth'
Page 114

NEWS & PHOTOS

CPA news

News reports from CPA and Commonwealth activities
Pages 116-126

Commonwealth Day 2024 reports

Reports from CPA Branches as Parliaments and Parliamentarians celebrate Commonwealth Day 2023
Pages 173-175

Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) news

Reporting on CWP activities
Pages 182-185

PARLIAMENTARY REPORTS

Parliamentary Reports and Third Readings

Reports from Australia, Trinidad and Tobago, Canada, British Columbia, New Zealand, India, Uganda and the United Kingdom
Pages 186-202

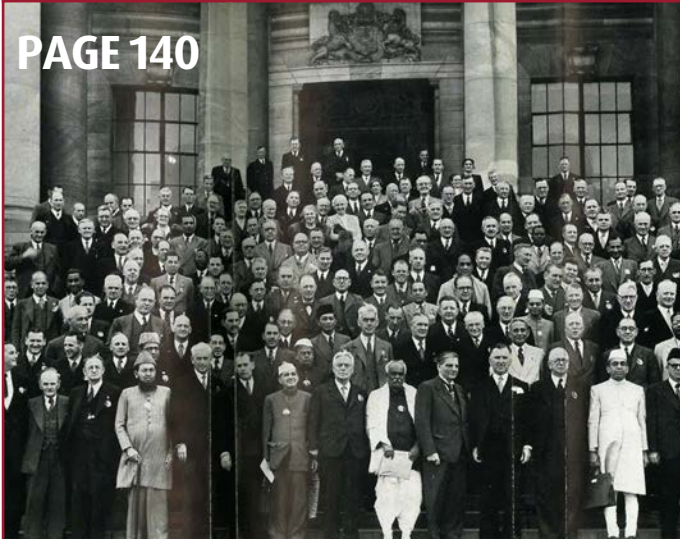
CPA DIRECTORY

CPA Organisational Structure

CPA Executive Committee, CWP and CPA Small Branches Steering Committees, CPwD Regional Champions and CPA Regional Secretaries
Page 204



PAGE 128



PAGE 140



PAGE 146



PAGE 162

75th ANNIVERSARY OF THE 'MODERN' COMMONWEALTH

Reflections on the 75th anniversary of the 'modern' Commonwealth

The Commonwealth Secretary-General writes
Page 128

A journey of unity, challenges and a future of shared growth

A view from Pakistan
Page 132

Views from Speakers, Members and Youth Parliamentarians around the Commonwealth

Reflections on 75th anniversary from Tanzania, Pakistan, Australia, Isle of Man, Canada, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, India, New Zealand and Malaysia
Page 134

How did the events of 1948-50 affect the creation of the 'modern' Commonwealth?

A historical perspective
Page 140

Cyberviolence and its effects on political engagement

The Speaker of Québec examines social media and its use by elected officials
Page 142

Engaging young people in Parliament

The experiences of a young Member of Parliament from South Australia
Page 146

FEATURE ARTICLES

Engaging young people in the work of Parliamentary Committees

A Member from Queensland
Page 148

Representing older persons in Parliament

A case study from Uganda
Page 151

Parliament as a forum for scrutiny and accountability

Comparison of Indian and UK parliamentary devices for backbench MPs
Page 153

Making South Africa's transport system accessible for all its citizens

A case study showing the clash between policy implementation and practical application
Page 157

Developing a bespoke web-based voting app for small Parliaments

A case study from Guernsey
Page 160

Does Election Observation make a difference?

Evidence from Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories Election Observation Missions
Page 162

Prioritising Economic Empowerment for Women

Aiming to achieve gender equality and poverty reduction in The Bahamas
Page 176

Empowering women to lead Australia into the future

Pathways to Politics for Women
Page 178

DEVELOPING A CODE OF CONDUCT FOR PARLIAMENT

Developing a Code of Conduct for the National Assembly of The Gambia

How the National Assembly of The Gambia approached the task of creating a new Code of Conduct for its Members
Page 166

Behind the scenes with a Parliamentary Clerk

Providing technical expertise to the National Assembly of The Gambia
Page 169

The experience of developing a Code of Conduct for a Legislature

Reflections from the Speaker of the Australian Capital Territory and CPA Small Branches Chairperson
Page 171

Updated 'Standards for Codes of Conduct for MPs and the Parliamentary Workplace'

CPA launches new Parliamentary Standards
Page 172

Main images: CPA Headquarters Secretariat. Additional images: CPA Branches and Shutterstock. Front cover image: Commonwealth Day 2024/ Commonwealth Secretariat/RCS.

The Parliamentarian:
Journal of the Parliaments of the Commonwealth
Volume 105 | 2024: Issue Two
The Parliamentarian
ISSN 0031-2282

Issued and published by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, CPA Headquarters Secretariat, Richmond House, Houses of Parliament, London, SW1A 0AA, United Kingdom.

Tel: +44 (0) 20 7799 1460
Email: hq.sec@cpahq.org
www.cpahq.org
Twitter @CPA_Secretariat
Facebook.com/CPAHQ

Stephen Twigg
CPA Secretary-General

Mr Jeffrey Hyland
Editor, *The Parliamentarian*
editor@cpahq.org

Annual subscription: Four issues including supplements: UK: £44 inc. postage. | Worldwide: £46 surface post and £52 airmail

Price per issue: UK: £14 cover price plus UK or worldwide postage.

Disclaimer: Opinions and comments expressed in articles and reviews published in *The Parliamentarian* are those of the individual contributors and should not be attributed to the Secretariat of the Association.

Contributors: Thank you to all contributors for this issue.

Printed in: United Kingdom by Warners Midlands, PLC; and Times Printers, Singapore.

Limited print run - contact editor@cpahq.org for details of print copies for CPA Branches.





Mr Jeffrey Hyland, Editor, *The Parliamentarian*, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

75th ANNIVERSARY OF THE 'MODERN' COMMONWEALTH

When the London Declaration was signed to create the 'modern' Commonwealth 75 years ago, few could have imagined that we would be reflecting on the successes of the Commonwealth many years later and looking forward to a renewed global partnership for the future. The origins of the Commonwealth stretch back much further than 75 years, but the signing of the London Declaration in 1949 marks the point at which the legacy of the British Empire was replaced with a partnership of equal member countries sharing a set of principles and values that was later enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association emerged from the Empire Parliamentary Association, which had been founded in 1911. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association was re-established at a conference in London in October 1948, several months ahead of the London Declaration on 26 April 1949 when its new name was adopted. This issue of *The Parliamentarian* includes a historical perspective of the establishment of the 'modern' Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in 1948-50, the transition from the Empire to the Commonwealth and the growth of the CPA over the last 75 years.

Since the modern Commonwealth came into existence, the relevance and value of the relationship has been reaffirmed and consolidated. For the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), its membership expanded across the CPA's nine Regions and to over 180 Branches including national, state, provincial and territorial Parliaments and Legislatures.

Reflecting on the 75th anniversary of the 'modern' Commonwealth, this issue features views from Speakers, Members and Youth Parliamentarians around the Commonwealth – from **Tanzania, Pakistan, Australia, Isle of Man, Canada, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, India, New Zealand and Malaysia** - and what it means to them. In this issue of *The Parliamentarian*, the **Commonwealth Secretary-General, Rt Hon. Patricia Scotland, KC** reflects on the progress made as the Commonwealth marks 75 years since its establishment.

The annual celebration of Commonwealth Day has been celebrated around the Commonwealth on the second Monday in March every year since the 1970s and this year, the celebrations also included the 75th anniversary of the 'modern' Commonwealth. The 2024 Commonwealth Day theme, and for the forthcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Samoa in October 2024, is *'One Resilient Common Future: Transforming*

our Common Wealth'. The theme highlights how the 56 member countries must harness their strengths by building resilience, unlocking potential, leveraging the 'Commonwealth Advantage' and fostering a connected, digital Commonwealth.

As the Head of the Commonwealth, His Majesty King Charles III also reflected on the 75th anniversary of the Commonwealth in a special video message released for the day. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association welcomed the recent announcement that King Charles is the new Patron of the Association, succeeding the late Queen Elizabeth II who was Patron from 1989-2022.

CPA Branches and Regions across the network of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association marked Commonwealth Day 2024 in many ways and reports of these activities can be found in this issue of *The Parliamentarian*.

In his *View* article for this issue, the **CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg** reports on the developments regarding the CPA's Legal Status and looks ahead to Commonwealth and CPA activities in 2024, including the 27th Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Samoa, the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) in New South Wales, Australia and the 12th Commonwealth Youth Parliament (CYP) in New Zealand.

Youth engagement is a key topic for Commonwealth Parliaments and 2024 continues the *'Commonwealth Year of Youth'*. The **Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) Chairperson, Hon. Laura Kanushu, MP** (Uganda) writes about how Parliamentarians can support youth potential. **Hon. Laura Henderson, MLC** (South Australia) shares her experiences and thoughts on youth engagement as one of the youngest Members of Parliament in the Commonwealth and **Hon. Joan Pease, MP** (Queensland) writes about engaging young people in the work of Parliamentary Committees as a way of increasing youth outreach.

While Parliaments rightly focus on youth representation to ensure that young people are engaged in the political process, do Parliaments need to represent older people in their Chambers? This issue features a case study from Uganda by **Mohammed Katamba** on the Members elected to represent older people in Parliament.

The impact of social media, cyberviolence and its effects on political engagement are examined by the **President of the Assemblée nationale du Québec, Hon. Nathalie Roy, MNA** who is also a former journalist herself.



Right: The 75th anniversary of the Commonwealth was marked with a special 'Commonwealth Speakers Summit' to coincide with Commonwealth Day 2024 hosted by the Speaker of the UK House of Commons, Rt Hon. Sir Lindsay Hoyle, MP along with more than 20 Commonwealth Speakers plus special guests in attendance.

The role of Backbench MPs and their methods of scrutiny to hold the Executive to account are examined in an article by **Ravindra Garimella** (Rajya Sabha at Parliament of India) and **Professor Rochana Bajpai** (SOAS University of London) which compares the India and UK Parliaments.

The implementation of policy and its practical application need to coincide to deliver the best results for people with disabilities. This issue features a case study by **Amanda Gibberd** (South African Department of Transport) on making South Africa's transport system accessible for all its citizens.

All Parliaments are using new technologies to improve their efficiency and **Simon Ross** (Guernsey) provides an interesting case study of how they developed a bespoke new voting app for Members.

2024 will see more elections across the world than any previous year and so the role of election observation is at the forefront once again. **Matthew Bishop** (University of Sheffield, UK) and **Jack Corbett** (Monash University, Australia) report on recent Election Observation Missions in the Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories and ask if election observation makes a difference?

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association has been working closely with the National Assembly of The Gambia in developing their first Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament. **Kalipha MM Mbye** (The Gambia) writes about the process that was undertaken in drafting the Code of Conduct and **Michael Torrance** (United Kingdom) shares a behind-the-scenes view of the technical expertise that was provided.

The CPA recently published the new 'Standards for Codes of Conduct for Members of Parliament and the Parliamentary Workplace' for use by Parliaments and Legislatures as a result of extensive research and consultation with Parliaments across the world. One of those Legislatures was the Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly and their Speaker and the **CPA Small Branches Chairperson, Joy Burch, MLA**, writes about developing a Code of Conduct for the Legislative Assembly.

This issue features reports of activities for International Women's Day on 8 March this year in many Commonwealth Parliaments as well as the launch of new 2024 data on Women in Parliaments from the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) network. The



Image: UK Parliament Speaker's Office.

CWP Chairperson, Hon. Dr Zainab Gimba, MP (Nigeria Federal) writes about enhancing women's representation and advancing inclusiveness in Commonwealth Parliaments.

The President of the Senate of The Bahamas, Senator Hon. J. LaShell Adderley writes about prioritising economic empowerment for women to achieve gender equality and poverty reduction in The Bahamas.

Professor Vicky Browning (Queensland University of Technology QUT) writes about the QUT *Pathways to Politics for Women* programme that she leads and how it is empowering women to lead Australia into the future.

News reports in this issue of *The Parliamentarian* include the CPA Executive Committee virtual meetings; the Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting in Zanzibar; the 53rd CPA British Islands and Mediterranean Regional Conference held in St Helena; the 72nd Westminster Seminar on Effective Parliaments; the 15th Canadian Parliamentary Seminar in Ottawa; the 3rd Commons and Overseas Territories Speakers' Conference (COTSC) in Turks and Caicos Islands; Parliamentary Clerks from the Africa Region meeting 8th SoCATT Africa Seminar; the CPA Secretary-General's visits to the CPA Tanzania Branch and his meeting with the Speaker of Malaysia and the New South Wales Speaker.

The Parliamentary Report and *Third Reading* section includes parliamentary and legislative news from Canada Federal; British Columbia, Trinidad and Tobago; New Zealand; Uganda; United Kingdom; India; and Australia Federal.

We look forward to hearing your feedback on this issue of *The Parliamentarian* and to receiving your future contributions.

Jeffrey Hyland
 Editor, *The Parliamentarian*
 editor@cphaq.org



The Secretary-General of the Commonwealth
Parliamentary Association, Stephen Twigg

CPA STATUS UPDATE AND LOOKING AHEAD TO CPA ACTIVITIES THIS YEAR

For more than thirty years, the CPA has been seeking a change in its legal status in the United Kingdom. In the previous edition of *The Parliamentarian*, I wrote: 'Over the past year, we have made very significant progress in our discussions with the United Kingdom Government. I am delighted to report that Rt Hon. Dame Maria Miller's Bill which includes provisions relating to CPA's legal status was given its Second Reading in the UK House of Commons on 19th January 2024. I am grateful to Dame Maria for her leadership on this. The Bill provides a framework for the CPA to achieve a new legal status in the UK. It also provides a framework for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to do so as well. Like the CPA, the ICRC has been keen to secure UK legislation. The Bill enjoys wide cross-party support in both chambers of the UK Parliament. Its progress is dependent on the availability of parliamentary time including the timing of the UK's General Election. Therefore, the Bill's progress is by no means a certainty, but we are closer than we have ever been to achieving our goal. I will keep everyone informed as this matter moves forward in the crucial next few weeks and months.'

Since then, the UK General Election has been called. I am deeply disappointed that our Bill did not pass in time. I am grateful to the many CPA Branches and individuals who have been in touch since this news to share their concerns and to express appreciation for the work that has been done on the CPA Status. I am determined that this important work must continue so that this question is finally resolved.

The Bill passed smoothly through all stages in the UK House of Commons between January and April of this year. On May 17th, there was an excellent Second Reading debate in the UK House of Lords led by former Lords Speaker, Baroness Frances D'Souza. This debate demonstrated once again the strong cross-party support for the proposed legislation. When the UK General Election was called, I was optimistic that our Bill might be passed quickly as part of the process known as 'wash up'. Unfortunately, this did not happen, despite the efforts of a wide range of UK Parliamentarians in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

So, what happens now? Let me address this question in three parts reflecting the distinct strands of work that have been undertaken on Status:

1. Creation of a new, non-charitable CPA – at the 66th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) in Accra, Ghana last October, a new non-charitable organisation was established into which 2024 membership fees are being paid. This has addressed one of the main concerns that many Members have

expressed during debates on the CPA Status. Detailed proposals will be brought to the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) in Sydney, Australia in November 2024 to enable the new, non-charitable CPA to take responsibility for delivering CPA activities in future. The Interim Executive Board for this new entity has met and elected its officers.

2. Consideration of potential relocation outside the United Kingdom – following the 66th CPC, an invitation was sent to all CPA Branches to express their potential interest in hosting the CPA Headquarters. Two CPA Branches responded and I am very grateful to both for their interest. At the virtual Mid-Year CPA Executive Committee meeting in May 2024, it was agreed to pause the relocation process because of the progress of the UK legislation but to review this position in August. This review is now underway.
3. Securing UK Legislation - after the UK General Election has taken place on July 4th, we will renew our efforts to secure legislation on the CPA Status. Although we have undoubtedly experienced a setback, I am hopeful that this will prove to be a temporary setback and that the UK Parliament might take forward the Bill in the period following the UK General Election.

Throughout this process, I have been encouraged by the commitment, interest and support from the CPA membership. The unity and determination of Parliamentarians across all nine regions of the CPA gives me great hope that, together, we will finally secure this new legal status soon. I am especially grateful to the members of the Governance Working Group chaired superbly by the Hon. Bridgid Annisette-George, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Trinidad and Tobago.

The second half of 2024 will be very busy for the CPA and the wider Commonwealth. I look forward to attending CPA Regional Conferences, representing the CPA with others at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Samoa and then, of course, to participating in our 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia.

The Regions of the CPA are vital to the success of our organisation, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the nine CPA Regional Secretaries for their hard work and commitment. I am also pleased to take this opportunity to thank those CPA Branches that have kindly agreed to host CPA events this year including Sri Lanka and Malaysia (CPA Parliamentary Academy Residencies), Nigeria (CWP Workshop) and New Zealand (12th Commonwealth Youth Parliament). I look forward to hearing from the CPA membership further during the months ahead.



CPA SECRETARY-GENERAL'S PHOTO GALLERY



Above left: The CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg met with the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of The Gambia, Hon. Seedy Njie, during his visit to London for the Commonwealth Speakers Summit 2024 and Commonwealth Day celebrations. They discussed various topics, including international cooperation across the Commonwealth and professional development for Members of Parliament and parliamentary staff including the CPA technical assistance programme to assist with drafting of the National Assembly's first Code of Conduct for Members. The CPA Secretary-General visited the National Assembly of The Gambia in June 2023, the first visit by a CPA Secretary-General since the CPA Gambia Branch re-joined the Association in 2019.

Right: The CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg met with a delegation from the Legislative Assembly of Ontario who were visiting the Parliament of the United Kingdom as part of a legislative programme with the UK House of Commons Overseas Office. The Deputy Speaker, Hon. Donna Skelly, MPP led the Ontario delegation of Hon. Bhutila Karpoche, MPP; Hon. Lucille Collard, MPP; Hon. Patrice Barnes, MPP and the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly and CPA Ontario Branch Secretary, Trevor Day. The Members were able to hear about the work of the CPA across the Commonwealth and the CPA Canada Region.



Image credits: CPA Headquarters Secretariat.



Above right: The CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg met with his counterpart, Rt Hon. Patricia Scotland, KC, the Commonwealth Secretary-General to discuss ongoing collaboration with the Commonwealth Secretariat to support Commonwealth Parliamentarians and to promote the rule of law, the separation of powers and election observations. The meeting also discussed the forthcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Samoa, where the CPA have been recently supporting the Parliament with a benchmarks assessment. The CPA Secretary-General was accompanied by Clive Barker, Acting Head of Strategy and Engagement at the CPA Headquarters.



Left: The Vice-Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee, Hon. Arthur Holder, Speaker of the House of Assembly of Barbados, met with the CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg and the Deputy Secretary-General, Jarvis Matiya in London. Discussions focused on the CPA's work in the Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region and the forthcoming CPA governance meetings.

Right: Members of the National Assembly of Zambia's Parliamentary Reforms and Modernisation Committee met with the CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg during their visit to the UK Parliament in May 2024. The Committee Chairperson, Hon. Frank Moses Moyo, MP, Second Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Zambia led the delegation of ten Members and five parliamentary staff. The Parliamentary Reforms and Modernisation Committee was undertaking a research visit to the UK House of Commons on proposed reforms for the National Assembly including virtual sittings and proxy voting as well as their impact on Members of Parliament.



Below right: The CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg met with the Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan, Hon. Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, MNA, together with Hon. Aijaz Hussain, MNA and officials from the Parliament of Pakistan

during their visit to the UK Parliament in May 2024. The CPA Pakistan delegation discussed the CPA's support and professional development training for Members through the CPA Parliamentary Academy and the potential for post-election training for new and returning MPs.



Left: The CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg met with New Zealand Member of Parliament, Hon. Tangi Utikere, MP at the CPA Headquarters on 3 April 2024 to discuss CPA's work in the Pacific Region. The New Zealand MP had recently attended the 148th IPU Assembly as part of the New Zealand delegation. The CPA New Zealand Branch will be hosting the 12th Commonwealth Youth Parliament in Wellington in September 2024.





**Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP)
Chairperson, Hon. Dr Zainab Gimba, MP, Member of
the Federal Parliament of Nigeria**

ADVANCING INCLUSIVENESS: ENHANCING WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTS

The Commonwealth of Nations remains an embodiment of diversity and unity, comprising 56 member countries across different continents, cultures and histories. As an organisation, the Commonwealth promotes diversity and rejects discrimination on the basis of race, gender, state of development and culture.

Since its establishment, the Commonwealth has also been at the forefront of promoting democratic systems that advocate for gender equality, full and equal participation of both women and men. Its commitment to promoting these democratic ideals across the Commonwealth and beyond has been widely acknowledged.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) helps to identify benchmarks of good governance and to implement the enduring values of the Commonwealth. The CPA, as a community of Commonwealth Parliaments and Legislatures, promotes inclusiveness in its activities and work to deepen the Commonwealth's commitment to the highest standards of democratic governance. Through its interventions and the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) network, there is an increasing awareness about gender issues.

However, despite the enormous efforts expended by the association to ensure that women are adequately represented in Parliaments, women have remained at the margin of democratic participation in many member countries of the Commonwealth. Many international declarations aimed at advancing women's political participation have not recorded the desired outcomes. The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (coming out of the Fourth World Conference on Women in China) and five years later, the outcomes of the 23rd Special Session of the UN General Assembly on gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century both underlined the need to ensure equal rights of men and women and are prominent examples of such declarations. Also, the objective outlined in the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, which is to promote gender equality and empower all women and girls has not been fully attained. One of the targets set for this goal relates to the political participation of women as measured by the proportion of seats held by women in national Parliaments.

While there have been encouraging developments in some countries, many countries are still a far cry from the expected threshold. As at January 2024, women held 26.9% of seats in national Parliaments.¹ According to data published by the CWP in April 2024, the average percentage of women in Parliaments (including national and subnational Parliaments) is at 25.9% across

the Commonwealth.² This may appear commendable, but it suffices to say that we still have much work to do to achieve the target.

This state of affairs is borne out of the existing cultural, social, economic and political marginalization of women in the political process. Women are placed at a disadvantage when competing with their male counterparts in political and economic activities. Many women in politics are still being stigmatized and sometimes come under serious threat to life in many societies for daring to want to represent their people. There is also the challenge of women's inability to access funding to sponsor their political activities and in some jurisdictions, the structural imbalances that prevent women from attending party meetings. These imbalances have continued to perpetuate the under representation of women in Parliament in many member countries.

It is important to point out that the growing complexity of issues in society and the challenges of national development often require that countries deploy all of their available human and material resources, leaving few resources for women in politics. It is also true that shutting the door on women, who constitute half of the global population, to prevent them playing an active role in politics in general, and denying their representation in Parliament, would also deny the world the benefits of the contributions of half of its population.

In order to reverse this trend, we must first pursue a policy direction that targets the removal of structural and legal obstacles and the discriminatory practices that help to entrench the marginalization of women in every facet of life. A deliberate action is definitely required to address these obstacles, which are militating against the increased representation of women in Parliament. As the bedrock of democratic governance, Parliaments should ordinarily lead the way towards promoting greater equality and inclusivity. As they become more diverse and inclusive, Parliaments are more prepared to bring about changes by enacting inclusive and equitable legislation.

In addition, political parties could set targets or quotas for the number of women to be elected to Parliament. This may include subventions paid to women candidates to assist with the purchase of nomination forms and an affirmative action policy that ensures that a certain percentage of women are elected to Parliament.

Following the above actions is the need to encourage more women to occupy leadership positions in Parliament. A diverse parliamentary leadership structure would create avenues for a gender-sensitive Parliament and a more balanced policy environment. As more women leaders emerge in Parliament, it



allows greater opportunity to bring to bear a gender perspective on issues that would promote inclusive national development. In addition, the electoral system that a given country adopts could have a significant impact on the representation of women in Parliament. For example, electoral systems that include quotas or proportional representation are more likely to lead to inclusive representation.

Further, embarking on an aggressive public education and awareness campaign directed at societal biases and highlighting the need to elect more women to Parliament will help change the electoral preferences of citizens in favour of women candidates.

Capacity-building programmes could also play an important role in enhancing women's representation in Parliaments and their success in occupying leadership positions. Such capacity building initiatives are directed at providing support to women aspiring to political leadership positions, through leadership training, campaign support, mentoring and institutional support.

Furthermore, helping women to build support networks will open up access to resources such as funding opportunities, research and information. Support networks are also valuable in electoral campaigns and in promoting wider visibility for women candidates. Engagement with civil society organisations (CSOs)

and women's organisations are critical avenues that could also promote gender equality and help to amplify women's voices. By engaging with CSOs, women are able to improve their leadership skills, acquire new knowledge and build their confidence. They are also better positioned to lobby for the eradication of discriminatory practices and to influence policies that may advance their interests.

Finally, partnership with faith-based organisations and traditional institutions are veritable options for addressing some of the societal biases and other limitations that have combined to hinder increased women's representation. The totality of these strategies and initiatives is capable of ensuring inclusiveness and gender parity in Parliament. The corollary effect of this is an enriched democratic process and more representative governance.

References:

¹ Inter-Parliamentary Union - Women in Parliament 2023 report <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2024-03/women-in-parliament-2023>

² Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) data on the numbers of Women in Parliaments across the Commonwealth (April 2024) - https://www.cpahq.org/news/2024_05-cwp-gender-data/

COMMONWEALTH WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS CHAIRPERSON HIGHLIGHTS GENDER-SENSITIVE PARLIAMENTS AT 68th CSW

The Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP), Hon. Dr Zainab Gimba, MP (Nigeria) attended a joint UN Women-IPU parliamentary meeting on '*Gender-sensitive Parliaments: Advancing gender equality to end poverty*' in the margins of 68th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68) in New York. The President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Dr Tulia Ackson, Speaker of the National Assembly of Tanzania opened the session stating that it is only by working together that Parliamentarians can tackle inequality, violence and discrimination against women and girls. She also said that Parliamentarians have the power and duty to translate the needs and interests of women into practical policies, ensuring that '*no one is left behind*'.

Senator Hon. Julie LaShell Adderly, President of the Senate of The Bahamas also spoke at a session on '*Prioritising poverty reduction to achieve gender equality*', giving an insight into the initiatives introduced to address poverty and the economic inequality of women following the impact of Hurricane Dorian in 2019, one of the worst natural disasters in the Caribbean Region.

A further session was held on 'gender sensitive institutions breaking the poverty cycle' in which the CWP Chairperson spoke about how Commonwealth Parliaments are engaging with other stakeholders, including civil society and grassroots movements, to enhance their effectiveness in addressing gender inequalities and poverty. The discussion looked at how women's parliamentary caucuses have been advancing this agenda across party lines alongside other panellists from UN Women, the National Assembly of France, Delete Nothing and the Chamber of Deputies of Chile.

In the margins of the CSW68, the CWP Chairperson also met with Hon. Adetola Kafilat Ogbara, MP (Nigeria) and Esther Eghobamien-Mshelia, Vice-Chairperson of the UN CEDAW Committee and Nigeria's representative to discuss women's political empowerment and the elimination of discrimination in



Image credit: Rwanda Government/CLGf

Nigeria. Discussions also focused on strategies needed to help support efforts to pass a Gender Equality Bill and the need to collaborate with key stakeholders to help realise this.

The CWP Chairperson also met with Hon. Neema Lugangira, MP (Tanzania) for discussions about ensuring women's meaningful representation at all decision-making levels including political parties and combating violence against women in politics. The Member of Parliament from Tanzania is an innovative global campaigner for women in Parliament who recently wrote for The Parliamentarian on the challenges of online visibility for Women Parliamentarians. The Parliament of Tanzania recently passed a ground-breaking Bill, The Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Government Elections Bill (awaiting Presidential assent) which recognises violence against women in politics and criminalises harassment during elections. It is hoped that this new law will help to address the multiple challenges faced by both women and men when exercising their political rights.



Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD)
Chairperson, Hon. Laura Kanushu, MP, Parliament of Uganda

Background

Youth globally represent a vital demographic, constituting approximately 16% of the world's population, or 1.2 billion people (United Nations, 2022). Despite their potential, youth face numerous challenges impacting their well-being and future prospects. As of 2023, around 68 million young people were unemployed, representing 13.6% of the global youth population, compared to 4.3% of the adult population (International Labour Organization, 2020). Additionally, 263 million children and youth are out of school, with significant barriers to education exacerbated by gender disparities, economic hardships and conflicts (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020). Mental health issues are also prevalent, with one in seven adolescents aged 10-19 experiencing mental health disorders, and suicide being the fourth leading cause of death among 15-19-year-olds (World Health Organization, 2021). Moreover, over 600 million young people live in conflict-affected areas, facing violence, displacement and limited opportunities for development (United Nations, 2021).

The 'Commonwealth Year of Youth 2024' provides a unique and timely opportunity for Parliamentarians across member states to champion the cause of youth development. With over 60% of the Commonwealth's 2.7 billion population being under 30, the youth demographic represents both a significant asset and a source of potential challenges (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2022).

How Parliamentarians can support youth potential

Parliamentarians can play a pivotal role in empowering young people to realize their full potential by focusing on key areas such as education, employment, political inclusion, health, technology and environmental sustainability as detailed below.

Education and Skills Development

a) Investment in Education: Education is the cornerstone of youth empowerment. Parliamentarians must advocate for policies that ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all young people. This involves adequate budget allocations for education, improved teacher training and the development of infrastructure (UNESCO, 2021). In Sub-Saharan Africa, 97.5 million children are out of school, highlighting the critical need for investment in this sector (UNESCO, 2021).

b) Curriculum Reforms: Modernizing curricula to meet the demands of the 21st-century job market is essential. This includes integrating digital literacy, critical thinking and entrepreneurial

COMMONWEALTH YEAR OF YOUTH 2024: HOW PARLIAMENTARIANS CAN SUPPORT YOUTH POTENTIAL

skills into the education system. Globally, approximately 50% of youth have addressed digital transformation, participating in various initiatives and using digital tools to enhance their skills and employment opportunities (World Economic Forum, 2021). A study by the OECD highlights the importance of curricula that prepare students for a rapidly changing job market (OECD, 2021).

c) Access and Equity: Addressing barriers to education, such as gender discrimination, socio-economic inequalities and geographic disparities, is crucial. Inclusive education policies should focus on supporting marginalized groups to ensure 'no one is left behind' (UNICEF, 2020). In Uganda, despite improvements, the net enrollment rate for secondary education remains low at 26% (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2020).

Employment and Entrepreneurship

a) Job Creation Programmes: Youth unemployment is a significant issue in many Commonwealth countries. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the youth unemployment rate stands at 12.9%, with Uganda's youth unemployment rate at 13.3% (World Bank, 2022). Parliamentarians can support job creation through policies that stimulate economic growth and development. This includes investing in sectors that have high employment potential and supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (International Labour Organization, 2022).

b) Entrepreneurial Support: Encouraging entrepreneurship among youth can drive innovation and economic development. Parliamentarians should support the establishment of youth entrepreneurship funds, provide tax incentives for young entrepreneurs and ensure access to mentorship and training programs (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2021).

c) Labour Market Reforms: Implementing labour market reforms that protect young workers' rights and promote decent work conditions is essential. These reforms should facilitate smooth transitions from education to employment and ensure fair wages and job security (International Labour Organization, 2021).

Political Inclusion and Participation

Promoting youth representation in legislative bodies and decision-making processes is vital for sustainable democracy. In Uganda, only 6% of Parliamentarians are under 30 (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021). Parliamentarians should advocate for quotas and policies that ensure youth voices are heard and considered in governance (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021).



Health and Well-being

a) Healthcare Access: Ensuring universal access to youth-friendly healthcare services, including mental health support and sexual and reproductive health services, is crucial. In Sub-Saharan Africa, 1 in 5 adolescents experiences a mental health condition, yet services are scarce (WHO, 2022). Parliamentarians should advocate for policies that make healthcare accessible and affordable for all young people (World Health Organization, 2021).

b) Health Education: Promoting health education programs that address lifestyle diseases, substance abuse and mental health issues among youth is essential. These programs should be integrated into school curricula and community initiatives (UNICEF, 2020).

Technology and Innovation

a) Digital Infrastructure: In Uganda, 42% of the population uses the internet (Uganda Communications Commission, 2021). Investing in digital infrastructure to ensure equitable access to the internet and digital tools is critical. Parliamentarians should advocate for policies that bridge the digital divide and provide opportunities for all young people to benefit from technological advancements (International Telecommunication Union, 2021).

b) Innovation Hubs: Supporting the establishment of innovation hubs and incubators that provide young people with resources and mentorship can drive entrepreneurial success. Parliamentarians

should encourage public-private partnerships to create ecosystems that nurture innovation (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2020).

Environmental Sustainability

a) Youth-led Initiatives: Supporting youth-led environmental initiatives and movements that promote sustainability and conservation is essential. Parliamentarians should provide platforms and resources for young people to lead and participate in environmental projects (Commonwealth Youth Climate Network, 2021).

b) Climate Policies: Advocating for and implementing robust climate policies that address the impacts of climate change on young people and future generations is crucial. Parliamentarians should ensure that climate action is inclusive and considers the voices of the youth (UNFCCC, 2021).

Conclusion

The 'Commonwealth Year of Youth 2024' presents a pivotal moment for Parliamentarians to champion the cause of youth empowerment. By prioritizing education, employment, political inclusion, health, technology and environmental sustainability, Parliamentarians can create a nurturing environment where young people can thrive and contribute to the prosperity of the Commonwealth. It is through such strategic and concerted efforts that the potential of the Commonwealth's youth can be fully realised.

UPDATED DISABILITY INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATIONS GUIDELINES FOR PARLIAMENTS

The Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) network has launched an updated 'Disability Inclusive Communications Guidelines' to provide detailed and practical guidance to Commonwealth Parliaments and Legislatures on how to enhance and sensitize their communications and interactions with persons with disabilities.

Developed in collaboration with disability charity, Leonard Cheshire, the Disability Inclusive Communications Guidelines emphasise the importance of inclusive language and communications in Parliaments. The CPwD network recognises that accessible and inclusive communications are essential for ensuring equitable participation for all individuals, including those with disabilities, in democratic processes.

The need for disability-inclusive language and communications resonates with the CPA's commitment to upholding the values of equality, accessibility and non-discrimination in parliamentary institutions across the Commonwealth. This also aligns with the principles outlined in the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Commonwealth Charter and the CPwD network is dedicated to eliminating barriers and fostering an environment where people with disabilities can fully engage in parliamentary affairs.

The team behind the Guidelines conducted research amongst the CPA's membership of almost 180 Commonwealth Parliaments and Legislatures as well as non-governmental organisations. The Guidelines provide various examples of best practices that can be adopted by both Parliaments and Parliamentarians in order to continue to ensure that they sensitively address Parliamentarians, parliamentary staff and visitors to the institution with disabilities.

The Chairperson of the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) network, Hon. Laura Kanushu said: *"The inclusion of Parliamentarians with disabilities is of vital importance to advancing parliamentary democracy across the Commonwealth and is a key priority of the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities network. These updated guidelines will support Parliaments in becoming more*

'disability confident' in their communications with and about Parliamentarians with disabilities across the Commonwealth."

The CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg said: *"The updated Disability Inclusive Communications Guidelines primarily focus on promoting disability-inclusive language and communications for Parliaments. The Guidance is designed to assist parliamentary institutions in adopting practices encouraging respect, dignity and equal participation for people with disabilities. Giving a meaningful voice to people with disabilities in Parliaments and Legislatures leads to improvements in oversight, equal representation and sensitive legislation."*

The updated 'Disability Inclusive Communications Guidelines' are available to download on the CPA website or by emailing hq.sec@cpahq.org.



CPA SECRETARY-GENERAL VISITS CPA AFRICA REGIONAL SECRETARIAT AND CPA TANZANIA BRANCH

Ahead of the Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting (CLMM) In March 2024, the CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg met with the CPA Africa Regional Secretary, Ms Nenelewa Joyce Mwihambi, who is also the Clerk of the National Assembly of Tanzania, in Dodoma to discuss the CPA's activities in the CPA Africa Region. The meeting was also attended by the Assistant CPA Africa Regional Secretary, Daniel Eliufoo, Director of Communications at the Parliament of Tanzania and Sharon Moses, Head of Human Resources at the CPA Headquarters Secretariat.

The CPA Africa Region is the largest of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's nine Regions, comprising of 63 national and subnational Legislatures, ranging from Tanzania and The Seychelles to South Africa and The Gambia.

During his visit to Tanzania, the CPA Secretary-General also met with Stella Manda and Sizarina Hamisi from UN Women Tanzania to discuss the ongoing work of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) network in promoting equal representation in Parliaments and promoting gender equality.



Images: Parliament of Tanzania.

CPA SECRETARY-GENERAL DISCUSSES THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE WITH COMMONWEALTH STUDENTS IN LONDON

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) co-hosted a colloquium on the theme of representative democracy for postgraduate students at Goodenough College in London. Scholars, students and Commonwealth representatives convened at the historic campus in Bloomsbury on 20 February 2024 to deliberate on the status of representative democracy worldwide. Alice Walpole OBE, Director of Goodenough College and a former UN Assistant Secretary-General, welcomed students to the event before CPA Secretary-General Stephen Twigg chaired two student-led panel discussions.

The first panel examined the danger of democratic backsliding with Jacob Delorme (Tony Blair Institute for Global Change) and Lisa James (Constitution Unit at University College London) offering analyses of key trends in electoral and democratic participation around the world whilst Bill Muriuki and Florence Côté, postgraduate

students from Kenya and Canada respectively, discussed their experiences of activism in their home countries.

The second panel delved into the intersection of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and democratic governance. Anne Gallagher, Director-General of the Commonwealth Foundation, Dr Kiran Hassan, Coordinator at the Institute for Commonwealth Studies and Lennard Metson, a researcher from the Department of Government at the London School of Economics, shared insights on AI's impact on elections, privacy and decision-making. The deliberations underscored the imperative for ethical AI frameworks that uphold democratic values.

The event concluded with a short talk by the CPA Secretary-General Stephen Twigg, who reflected on his career in Parliament and shared his thoughts on the future of democratic governance in the Commonwealth.

Goodenough College is a postgraduate residence and educational trust in Bloomsbury, London. It offers talented postgraduates from all over the world a supportive community in which to live, study and access outstanding opportunities.

Later in the week, the CPA Secretary-General also attended the Commonwealth Scholarships Commission in the UK's (CSC) Connect and Collaborate 2024 Conference. CSC provides the UK government's scholarship scheme led by international development objectives. It supports the co-creation of research, innovation and solutions to enact sustainable development priorities across the Commonwealth and beyond. At the conference, the CPA Secretary-General spoke to scholars during a panel event on security, democracy and governance in the Commonwealth.



Image credit: CPA Secretariat.

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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, DIGITAL REFORMS AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT FOR PARLIAMENTS IS HIGHLIGHTED AT 53rd CPA BRITISH ISLANDS AND MEDITERRANEAN REGIONAL CONFERENCE HELD IN ST HELENA

Commonwealth Speakers, Members and parliamentary staff from the CPA British Islands and Mediterranean (BIM) Region have attended the annual Regional Conference, which was held this year in St Helena from 18 to 25 May 2024. The 53rd CPA BIM Regional Conference focused on the theme of ‘Addressing Challenges to Sustainable Development in Times of Global Uncertainty’ and delegates shared their own Legislatures’ experiences as they participated in the discussions. Delegates from 10 Parliaments and Legislatures across the CPA Region heard from panellists on a range of topics including digital reforms and artificial intelligence; decentralized finance; the climate emergency and green energy solutions; tourism development and improving agriculture productivity.

Parliamentarians and officials were welcomed by the CPA St Helena Branch President, Hon. Cyril Gunnell, Speaker of the Legislative Council, and the Chief Minister of St Helena, Hon. Julie Thomas, MLC to the CPA Regional Conference, the first of its kind to be held in St Helena. The programme also included the CPA BIM Region’s Annual General Meeting and a Commonwealth Women’s Parliamentarians (CWP) network session promoting equal representation for women and men in Legislatures. Delegates heard from women MPs from Scotland, Jersey, Wales and St Helena as well as women leaders, business owners and community representatives from St Helena.

A plenary workshop was also held on the benefits of a Youth Parliament with delegates from Northern Ireland, Gibraltar, Jersey and St Helena speaking about their engagement with young people via Youth Assemblies and Youth Parliaments. Youth campaigners Selene Gough and Shanice Phillips spoke about youth engagement for young people in St Helena while Year 10 students from Prince Andrew School spoke about the benefits that a Youth Parliament could bring to St Helena.

At the CPA Regional Conference, the Deputy President of the CPA St Helena Branch, Hon. Catherine Cranfield, MLC said: *“It is a great honour for St Helena to be hosting the CPA BIM Regional Conference for the first time ever. It is a valuable opportunity to engage in meaningful discussions with other BIM delegates, sharing their valuable insights and knowledge in their respective fields. This is also a great opportunity to showcase to the BIM delegates this remarkable island and its community.”*

On behalf of the St Helena Government, the Minister of the Environment, Natural Resources and Planning, Hon. Christine Scipio, MLC said: *“Regional conferences, such as this, are an ideal opportunity for Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff alike, to join together to network, to learn and to share similar issues in what is often a challenging and fast-moving global context. It is hoped that the attendees who began as delegates, will become colleagues and by the finale, will be friends which illustrates the true spirit of a regional conference.”*

In his address to delegates, the CPA Chairperson, Hon. Ian Liddell-Grainger, MP said: *“We are extremely grateful to the CPA St Helena Branch for their historic hosting of their first CPA Regional Conference on behalf of the CPA British Islands and Mediterranean Region.*



Delegates have benefited from some excellent discussions and the Region goes from strength to strength.”

Representatives from many CPA Branches were in attendance including Scotland, Wales, Jersey, St Helena, Falkland Islands, Isle of Man, Gibraltar, Cyprus, Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom. The CPA British Islands and Mediterranean Region is one of the nine Regions of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. It consists of thirteen Legislatures, from the United Kingdom, one of the largest Parliaments in the Commonwealth, to St Helena, one of the smallest. The Regional Secretariat is based within the CPA UK Branch, and undertakes a number of programmes, including Election Observation Missions to Crown Dependencies and UK Overseas Territories.

Left: Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians were joined by women leaders from St Helena for a session promoting equal representation for women and men in Legislatures.



Image credits: Maharashtra Legislative Assembly.

SEMINAR ON BUDGET SCRUTINY AND OVERSIGHT FOR THE PARLIAMENT OF MALAWI AS PART OF ONGOING CPA TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME

The CPA Headquarters has delivered a Seminar on Budget Scrutiny and Oversight for parliamentary staff at the Parliament of Malawi in Lilongwe from 6 to 7 April 2024. The Seminar was designed to equip parliamentary staff with new skills and knowledge in order to provide effective scrutiny and oversight of a Government's budget. The Seminar was delivered by two experts - Nicola Hudson, Head of Research and Financial Scrutiny at The Scottish Parliament and Alexander Knight, Head of Financial Scrutiny at the UK House of Commons Scrutiny Unit, accompanied by CPA Programmes Manager, Clive Barker. The Seminar included sessions on Roles and Responsibilities in Oversight, The Budget Process in Malawi, Engaging Stakeholders in the Budget Process, Financial Reporting and Accountability, and Public Reporting in the Budget Process.

Participants at the CPA Seminar were welcomed by the First Deputy Speaker of the Malawi Parliament, Hon. Madalitso Kazombo, who said that effective scrutiny and implementation of the national budget needs skilled and knowledgeable Members and that the workshop will allow Members of the Budget and Finance Committee to strengthen their knowledge of the budget process and learn best practice from around the Commonwealth. *"Budget determines how public resources are allocated, setting the priorities that shape the trajectory of our societies and as representatives of the people, we must ensure that this process is transparent, accountable and reflective of the needs and aspirations of those we serve. Parliamentary oversight of the budget is not merely a formality; it is a crucial mechanism for upholding the principles of good governance and safeguarding the interests of citizens. Through rigorous scrutiny, analysis and debate, Parliamentarians play a pivotal role in ensuring that public funds are used effectively and efficiently to address the pressing challenges facing our communities."*

This CPA Seminar has allowed our Parliament to strengthen its understanding of the importance of the budget process, learn best practices from around the Commonwealth and develop our Members and parliamentary staff through learning and development."

The seminar was delivered as part of a CPA Technical Assistance Programme (TAP) implemented following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the CPA Headquarters and the Parliament of Malawi in October 2023. The CPA TAP will provide learning and development for upskilling the Legislature, its Members and parliamentary staff in several areas, including public engagement (Communications and Outreach) and post-legislative scrutiny.



Images: CPA Secretariat.

COMMONWEALTH SPEAKERS FROM UK AND OVERSEAS TERRITORIES MEET IN TURKS AND CAICOS FOR DISCUSSIONS ON PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY, SECURITY AND OUTREACH

The 3rd Commons and Overseas Territories Speakers' Conference (COTSC) was held in the Turks and Caicos Islands from 3 to 5 April 2024, hosted by the Speaker of the Turks and Caicos House of Assembly, Hon. Gordon Burton, MHA in Providenciales and Grand Turk. Speakers and Clerks attended from Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Falkland Islands, Montserrat, St Helena and the Turks and Caicos as well as the United Kingdom.

At this year's Conference, the Speakers, alongside Parliamentary Clerks and technical experts, examined different aspects of building strong Legislatures and effective parliamentary democracy, focusing on AI, Cyber and Physical Security of Parliaments and on Parliamentary Education and Outreach. The CPA Headquarters' Head of Programmes, Matthew Salik also provided expertise on protocol and precedent as it relates to Commonwealth Speakers as well as presenting the CPA's recent publication 'Parliamentary Handbook on Disinformation, AI and Synthetic Media'. The Secretariat for the COTSC Conference is provided by the UK House of Commons Speaker's Office and the CPA Headquarters and CPA UK Branch are official partners.



Image credit: Turks and Caicos House of Assembly.

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PARLIAMENT OF ST KITTS AND NEVIS UNDERTAKE CPA BENCHMARKS SELF-ASSESSMENTS TO FOCUS ON PARLIAMENTARY STRENGTHENING AND REFORM

The National Assembly of St Kitts and Nevis is the latest CPA Branch that has undertaken a CPA Benchmarks Self-Assessment. The CPA's Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures provide a framework for excellence in Commonwealth parliamentary and legislative practice. In recent years, 28 Commonwealth Parliaments have undertaken assessments against the updated CPA Benchmarks.

In Basseterre, the Speaker of the National Assembly of St Kitts and Nevis, Hon. Lanein Blanchette said: *“Working with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Secretariat on the CPA Benchmarks self-assessment has given us the opportunity to examine our parliamentary procedures and practices as well as to hear from experts in the Commonwealth. The recommendations that come from this self-assessment will help us to see where we are performing well and to outline the reforms required to further our parliamentary governance and development.”*

The CPA delegation of Matthew Salik, Head of Programmes and Avni Kondhia, Programmes Manager, met with the Prime Minister, Hon. Dr Terrance Drew, MP; the Speaker; the Deputy Speaker, Hon. Latoya Jones; the Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Dr Mark Brantley; as well as the Clerk and Members of the National Assembly, parliamentary staff, the media, civil society groups and other relevant stakeholders. At the conclusion of the process, a report from each of the CPA Benchmarks self-assessments will be formulated with recommendations for reform to strengthen parliamentary institutions in each jurisdiction. The outcome reports will play an important role in developing the effectiveness of their Legislature and contribute to their implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



Image credits: National Assembly of St Kitts and Nevis.

CPA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE HOLD VIRTUAL MEETINGS TO ADDRESS KEY GOVERNANCE ISSUES

The CPA Executive Committee held its Mid-Year meetings via video link on 7 and 8 May 2024 chaired by the Chairperson of the Executive Committee, Hon. Ian Liddell-Grainger, MP. Committee Members discussed key governance issues and planning for the year ahead including updates to the CPA's legal status, financial reporting and future activities, such as the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference due to be held in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia in November 2024. Meetings of the Finance Subcommittee and the Planning & Review Subcommittee were also held.

The Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee said: *“The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association provides a unique platform for inter-parliamentary dialogue to take place amongst its membership of 180 Member Parliaments and Legislatures. We look forward to furthering the CPA's work in strengthening parliamentary democracy across the Commonwealth supported by the CPA Headquarters Secretariat.”* The CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg also met virtually with the CPA Regional Secretaries ahead of the virtual CPA Executive Committee meeting.



CPA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
8 May 2024



www.cpahq.org

Images: CPA Secretariat.

CPA AFRICA REGION EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE IN UGANDA

The 86th CPA Africa Regional Executive Committee Meeting was held in Entebbe in Uganda from 7 to 12 March 2024. The Senior Regional Representative of the CPA Africa Region, Hon. Osei Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu, MP (Ghana) led the Regional Representatives Sub Committee meeting and the CPA Africa Regional Treasurer, Hon. Ntombi Mekgwé, MPL (Gauteng) chaired the Programme, Planning and Finance Sub Committee. The plenary session heard from the Speaker of the Parliament of Uganda, Rt Hon. Anita Among, MP and the Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Africa Region, Hon. Madina Ndangiza, MP (Rwanda) led the CWP Steering Subcommittee.



Image credit: Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories.

COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARIANS AT 72ND WESTMINSTER SEMINAR ON EFFECTIVE PARLIAMENTS

Over 60 Commonwealth Parliamentarians, Clerks and officials from 29 CPA Branches attended the 72nd Westminster Seminar from 11 to 15 March 2024 hosted at the UK Parliament by the CPA UK Branch.

Participating CPA Branches included: Alberta, Antigua & Barbuda, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cameroon, Canada Federal, Cayman Islands, Falkland Islands, The Gambia, Grenada, Guernsey, Jamaica, Jersey, Kenya, Malawi, New South Wales, Pakistan, Québec, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, St Helena, St Kitts & Nevis, St Lucia, Trinidad & Tobago, Tonga, Victoria, Wales, Western Australia, Zambia.

The theme of the Westminster Seminar was 'Effective Parliaments', which informed sessions throughout the seminar and provided a forum for delegates to exchange ideas on parliamentary practice and procedure, as well as share wider experiences of how Legislatures across the Commonwealth function.

Delegates heard from Rt Hon. Dame Maria Miller, MP, Chair of CPA UK's Executive Committee, who emphasised the powerful benefits of global peer-to-peer learning. The opening session looked at the similarities and differences across the Commonwealth of the role of the Speaker with contributions from Rt Hon. Sir Lindsay Hoyle, MP, Speaker of the UK House of Commons, Senator Hon. Dessima Williams, President of the Grenada Senate and Hon. Leo Cato, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Grenada.

Delegates heard from a wide range of Parliamentarians, parliamentary staff and officials during the week exploring solutions to shared challenges across different Legislatures.

Delegates also experienced the work of the UK Parliament; observed Prime Minister's Questions, visited the local constituencies of UK MPs and spent time at the Welsh Parliament (Senedd) to experience a devolved Legislature.



Image: CPA UK

COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARIANS EXAMINE OPPORTUNITIES TO STRENGTHEN PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY AT 15TH CANADIAN PARLIAMENTARY SEMINAR

The CPA Canada Federal Branch welcomed Commonwealth Parliamentarians, Clerks and parliamentary staff from 11 CPA Branches to Ottawa for the 15th Canadian Parliamentary Seminar from 17 to 22 March 2024 on the theme of 'Strengthening Parliamentary Democracy: Opportunities and Challenges'. The seminar is a professional development programme hosted by the Parliament of Canada on the principles of democracy provides an opportunity to share issues of mutual importance.

The CPA Canada Federal Branch Chair, Hon. Alexandra Mendès, MP, Assistant Speaker of the House of Commons, said: "It is a privilege to gather with our friends from across the Commonwealth in order to promote democratic governance and to support greater understanding of parliamentary systems. Since 2001, the annual Canadian Parliamentary Seminar has proven to be a forum that encourages collaboration. In



Image: Parliament of Canada

working together to build an informed parliamentary community, we are, at the same time, building goodwill among our countries. In the spirit of cooperation, our comprehensive programme emphasises knowledge sharing as a means of strengthening the foundations of our democratic institutions."

Discussions at the seminar included hybrid proceedings in Parliaments, the role of Parliament in a national emergency, women's representation in Parliament and the impact of technological trends and Artificial Intelligence. Delegates also visited both the Senate and the House of Commons at the Parliament of Canada and met with Canadian Parliamentarians.

Delegates attended the seminar from New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia, Ghana, Sri Lanka, Fiji, Newfoundland and Labrador, Alberta and Northwest Territories. James Pinnell, Deputy Head of Programmes (Multilateral Engagements) at the CPA Secretariat also attended to provide a briefing on the activities of the CPA and its role in the Commonwealth.



Image: Parliament of Canada

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ANGUILLA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY UTILISE CPA RESOURCES IN SCHOOLS

Two Members of the Anguilla House of Assembly – Hon. Shellya Rogers-Webster and Hon. Cardigan Connor visited the Alwyn Allison Richardson Primary School recently to educate students about the House of Assembly and utilised the education resources and video developed with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. The resources were developed as a tool to educate students about the work of the Assembly and to learn about democracy.

The Speaker of the Anguilla House of Assembly, Hon. Barbara Webster-Bourne, said: *"If we are to strengthen our democratic systems, our young people as the inheritors of these systems must be educated about those systems and the values that hold them together."*

The CPA Headquarters has been working with the Anguilla House of Assembly on a CPA Technical Assistance Programme which has resulted in a review of the Assembly's Standing Orders; a Governance, Organisational and Administrative review; the launch of a new Code of Conduct and Register of Interests for Members; as well as the development of outreach and educational resources for the House of Assembly. The CPA Headquarters also engaged a Creative Digital Intern who worked on the video resource project.



Image credit: Anguilla House of Assembly.

CPA DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL MEETS WITH COMMONWEALTH HUMAN RIGHTS REPRESENTATIVES

The CPA Deputy Secretary-General, Jarvis Matiya met with representatives of the Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (CFNHRI) at the CPA Headquarters in London. Discussions focused on the CPA's work on human rights with Commonwealth Parliamentarians and the outcomes of the CPA Working Group on Human Rights. The CFNHRI Chair, Providence Umurungi (Chairperson of the Rwanda Commission on Human Rights) led the delegation which also included representatives from Samoa, Northern Ireland and Rwanda – including Lorraine Hamill, Director, Michael Boyd, Senior Projects Manager (both from Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission), Ellenlina Moala-Tumua, Human Rights Advisor, Samoa Office of the Ombudsman/National Human Rights Institution and Aissa Umutoni, Commonwealth Specialist at the Rwanda Commission on Human Rights.



Image: CPA Secretariat.

SPEAKER OF MALAYSIA MEETS CPA SECRETARY-GENERAL AT WESTMINSTER

The Speaker of the House of Representatives (Dewan Rakyat) at the Parliament of Malaysia, H.E. Tan Sri Dato' Johari bin Abdul met with the CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg to discuss a wide range of activities including professional development support for Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff through the CPA Parliamentary Academy, increasing representation for women in Parliament through the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) network, the Commonwealth Youth Parliament and the CPA's work on human rights. The Speaker-led delegation of four MPs and three parliamentary staff from the Parliament of Malaysia attended a three-day programme at the UK Parliament in April 2024 hosted by the CPA UK Branch to examine parliamentary practice and procedure as well as the Committee system in Westminster and to meet UK MPs and Peers. During his visit to the United Kingdom, the Speaker of Malaysia also met with the Speaker of the UK House of Commons, Rt Hon. Sir Lindsay Hoyle, MP where they discussed security for the Parliamentary community and championing women in the workplace.



Image: UK Parliament Speaker's Office/CPA Secretariat.

CPA HEADQUARTERS RECOGNISED WITH INVESTORS IN PEOPLE SILVER AWARD

The CPA Headquarters Secretariat has received the Investors in People Silver award in recognition of its principles and practices as well as its human resources support for its 22 staff. The accredited award follows a rigorous review process and places the CPA Headquarters Secretariat alongside a wide range of organisations that seek to provide and nurture the best possible working environment for their staff. The CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg said: *"Receiving the Investors in People Silver award for the CPA Headquarters Secretariat in recognition of our principles and practices is testament to the hard work of the CPA staff and our belief that the success of any organisation begins and ends with its people. The Silver Award is recognition of the professionalism and dedication of the CPA Secretariat team. The comprehensive report from the IIP assessor provides a road map for us to consider and I look forward to working collaboratively with the staff team to agree and deliver further improvements."* The Investors in People accreditation is a community of 15,000 organisations across 75 countries.



CPA TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO BRANCH VISIT THEIR PARLIAMENTARY TWINNING PARTNERS AT CPA ONTARIO BRANCH IN CANADA

A delegation from the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago has visited the Legislative Assembly of Ontario in Canada from 6 to 9 May 2024. The two CPA Branches are twinned through a partnership agreement that was signed in May 2019 just before the COVID-19 pandemic. The twinning agreement promotes collaboration, cooperation and understanding for the mutual benefit of both Parliaments.

There are a number of historic and current links between the Caribbean islands and Canadian Province, such as the many Trinidadians going to Canada to serve as teachers in the educational system, the twinning of the cities of St Catherine's and Port-of-Spain, and educational links between Brock University and the University of the West Indies.

The Trinidad and Tobago delegation was led by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Hon. Bridgid Annisette-George and included Hon. Adrian Xavier Leonce, MP; Dr Rishad Seecheran, MP; Senator Deeroop Teemal and Chantal La Roche, Director of Legal Services. The delegation were welcomed by the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, Hon. Ted Arnott, MPP and Trevor Day, the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly.



Image: Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago/Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

NEW ZEALAND SPEAKER VISIT COOK ISLANDS AND NIUE IN FIRST DELEGATION VISIT

The Speaker of the New Zealand House of Representatives, Rt Hon. Gerry Brownlee, MP led parliamentary delegation to both of New Zealand's free association realm countries, the Cook Islands and Niue from 17 to 26 April 2024. Both Parliaments enjoy a close relationship with the New Zealand Parliament and are Branches in the CPA Pacific Region. A cross-party delegation of MPs accompanied the Speaker to Cook Islands including Hon. Tangi Utikere, MP; Dr Vanessa Weenink, MP; Hon. Greg O'Connor, MP; and Hon. Scott Willis, MP.

The delegation met with the Speaker of the Te Marae Akarau Vānanga o te Kuki Airani (Parliament of the Cook Islands), Hon. Tai Tura and engaged with MPs on topics such as oral questions, interrogation of Bills and constituency work. Other engagements including meetings with the Cook Islands Ombudsman and Auditor, and a session with Youth Leaders.

In Niue, the cross-party delegation comprised Hon. Dr Ayesha Verral, MP; Hon. Tangi Utikere, MP; Hon. Katie Nimon, MP; and Hon. Hūhana Lyndon, MP with the New Zealand Speaker. During the visit, the delegation met with Niue's Premier, Cabinet Ministers and the Speaker, Hon. Hima Douglas at Fale Fono II (Niue's Parliament building). The New Zealand delegation also attended Niue's 77th ANZAC Day Commemoration at the National War Memorial in the capital, Alofi on 25 April 2024.



Image: Parliament of Cook Islands.

FIJI DELEGATION VISIT AUSTRALIAN AND NEW SOUTH WALES PARLIAMENTS

The Speaker of the Parliament of Fiji, Hon. Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu led a delegation visit to the Parliaments of Australia and New South Wales in February 2024. The delegation were welcomed by the President of the Australian Senate, Senator Hon. Sue Lines and the Speaker of the Australian House of Representatives, Hon. Milton Dick, MP during a busy Parliament Sitting Week. The Fijian delegation viewed exhibitions and historical artifacts at Parliament House in Canberra before meeting with Committee Chairs and observing a Joint Standing Committee Public Hearing. The Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Inia Seruiratu, MP said: *"It was very encouraging to learn about how the Parliament of Australia conduct their Committee work and hope that this can be implemented at home so that our work becomes more effective and efficient, particularly in the areas of scrutiny and oversight."* The delegation also met media personnel working at the Parliament and visited the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS).

In Sydney, the CPA President, Hon. Ben Franklin, MLC, President of the New South Wales Legislative Council welcomed the Speaker of the Fiji Parliament, Hon. Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu and Fijian MPs to the Parliament of New South Wales. The Speaker of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly, Hon. Greg Piper MP, along with other Members of the New South Wales Parliament also welcomed the visitors and joined discussions on shared values of parliamentary democracy.



Image: Parliament of Australia.

Image: Parliament of New South Wales.



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CPA INDIA ZONE III REGIONAL MEETING TAKES PLACE IN ASSAM

The Speaker of the Assam Legislative Assembly Hon. Biswajit Daimary, MLA hosted Speakers and Members from North Eastern States of India for the CPA India Zone III Regional meeting in Guwahati, Assam. The Speaker of the Nagaland Legislative Assembly, Hon. Sharingain Longkumer was elected as the new Chair of CPA India Region Zone III succeeding the Arunachal Pradesh Assembly Speaker, Hon. Passang Dorjee Sona.



Image credit: Assam Legislative Assembly.

CANADIAN PARLIAMENTARIANS UNDERTAKE BILATERAL ENGAGEMENTS TO BARBADOS, SAINT LUCIA, TANZANIA AND ZANZIBAR

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



Image: CPA Canada/Parliaments of Saint Lucia and Barbados.

The CPA Canada Branch delegation then visited the Parliament of St Lucia for talks with the President of the Senate, Senator Hon. Alvina Reynolds, the Speaker of the House of Assembly, Hon. Claudius Francis and Deputy Speaker, Hon. Jeremiah Norbert. The focus of discussions was on women in politics, parliamentary procedure, and the idea of building parliamentary capacity through twinning programs between Caribbean Parliaments and Provincial or Territorial Legislatures in Canada.



Image: CPA Canada/Parliament of Tanzania.

Senator Hon. Amina Gerba and Hon. Brenda Shanahan, MP, Co-Presidents of the Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association (CAAF), led a delegation from the Parliament of Canada to Tanzania and Zanzibar. In Dodoma, the Canadian delegation met with Hon. Tulia Ackson, Speaker of the Tanzania National Assembly, who is also the President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) to hear about Tanzania's parliamentary structure, social and economic challenges, and priorities regionally. The delegation also met with Members of the Tanzania Women's Parliamentary Caucus to hear about the challenges facing Tanzanian women in politics and society. In Zanzibar, the Canadian delegation met with the Speaker of the Zanzibar House of Representatives, Hon. Zubeir Maulid, along with nine other MPs and discussions focused on the functioning of the House, its link with the National Assembly of Tanzania and the role of women in politics.

CPA SCOTLAND VISIT BRITISH COLUMBIA LEGISLATURE

The Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, Hon. Raj Chouhan and the Clerk of the Legislature, Kate Ryan-Lloyd welcomed the Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament, Rt Hon. Alison Johnstone, MSP and three MSPs on a bilateral visit to Canada. This visit was held for interparliamentary learning and exchange of ideas and the Scotland delegation included Evelyn Tweed, MSP; Maurice Golden MSP; and Shadow Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Michael Marra, MSP.



Image: Legislative Assembly of British Columbia.

SAMOA DELEGATION VISITS NEW ZEALAND PARLIAMENT

The Speaker of the Parliament of Samoa, Hon Papali'i Li'o Oloipola Taeu Masipau, MP has led a delegation visit to the New Zealand Parliament from 8 to 12 April 2024. The delegation of five Members and two parliamentary officials were welcomed with a mihi whakatau and were greeted by the Speaker of the New Zealand House of Representatives, Rt Hon. Gerry Brownlee, MP, followed by meetings and community events in Auckland, Wellington and the Wairarapa. The delegation also met with Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) workers from Samoa who are working in the agricultural sector in New Zealand.



Image: Parliament of New Zealand.

PARLIAMENTARY CLERKS FROM AFRICA REGION MEET FOR 8th SoCATT AFRICA SEMINAR ON MODERNISATION OF PARLIAMENTS

Over 60 delegates, including Clerks and parliamentary officials, attended the 8th Society of Clerks-At-The Table (SoCATT) Africa Professional Development Seminar in Arusha, Tanzania from 21 to 22 May 2024. Delegates were welcomed by Hon. Deodatus Mwanyika, MP (Tanzania), on behalf of the Speaker of the National Assembly of Tanzania, Hon. Dr Tulia Ackson, who said that Parliamentary Clerks are at the forefront in making changes in Parliaments and so they need to be equipped with the technological skills to enhance parliamentary operations in the era of modernization. The seminar took place under the theme of ‘Re-positioning Parliamentary Administration in the era of Evidence and Modernisation’ and Clerks were encouraged to embrace new technology in order to respond to prevailing technological advancements. Topics discussed at the seminar included research and evidence-use in Parliaments; the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Legislatures; and the separation of powers between the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary.



Image: Parliament of Tanzania

The SoCATT Africa Region works to promote the parliamentary practice of the legislative chambers of Commonwealth Parliaments in the Region more accessible to Clerks-at-the-Table or parliamentary staff with similar duties and to foster a mutual interest in their duties, rights and privileges.

CPA NEW SOUTH WALES SPEAKER VISITS CPA HEADQUARTERS

The Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales, Hon. Greg Piper, MP and the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, Ms Helen Minnican met with the CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg at the CPA Headquarters to discuss a wide range of activities including professional development support for Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff through the CPA Parliamentary Academy and the ongoing planning for the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference due to be held in Sydney, Australia in November 2024.



Images: CPA Secretariat/UK Parliament Speaker's Office

During their visit to the United Kingdom, the Speaker and the Clerk also met with the Speaker of the UK House of Commons, Rt Hon. Sir Lindsay Hoyle, MP to discuss parliamentary security and question time sessions in the Chamber and met with parliamentary staff at the Scottish Parliament to examine the work of the Financial Scrutiny Unit and Communities Team.

CARIBBEAN PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEES EXAMINE EFFECTIVE SCRUTINY AT CPA WORKSHOP IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago hosted Commonwealth Parliamentarians, Committee Chairs and Clerks for the CPA Caribbean Regional Workshop for Public Accounts Committees and Trade Scrutiny from 27 to 29 February 2024. The workshop, organised in partnership with the CPA UK Branch, facilitated peer-to-peer discussions on how to enhance effective scrutiny of government spending and trade policy. Many Commonwealth Parliaments have a Public Accounts Committee or equivalent that provides parliamentary oversight of government finances.



Images: Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago/CPA UK

The workshop delegates were welcomed by Joint CPA Trinidad and Tobago Branch Presidents, Hon. Bridgid Anisette-George, Speaker of the House of Representatives and Senator Hon. Nigel De Freitas, President of the Senate. The CPA UK delegation, led by Rt Hon. Baroness Dianne Hayter and Lord Purvis of Tweed, also provided examples of best practice in public financial scrutiny and trade from the UK perspective.

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COMMONWEALTH LAW MINISTERS CALL FOR STRONGER ACTION ON 'PEOPLE-CENTRED' ACCESS TO JUSTICE AT MEETING IN ZANZIBAR

Commonwealth Law Ministers and Attorney-Generals from 23 jurisdictions met in Zanzibar and called for stronger action to ensure that access to justice becomes a reality for the 2.5 billion citizens of the Commonwealth.

The biennial meeting was inaugurated by the President of the United Republic of Tanzania, H.E. Dr Samia Suluhu Hassan, who underscored the crucial role of law in addressing unprecedented global challenges and described the meeting as a timely opportunity to cooperate on strengthening legal systems, saying: *"This forum will open doors for further collaboration, innovation, and collective action as we strive to meet the evolving needs of our societies. Together, we can build a better future where justice prevails, and the rights of every individual are protected to sustain sustainable development across Commonwealth nations."*

The Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting (CLMM) was held on the theme of 'How digitalisation paves the way for the development of people-centred access to justice', with a focus on the use of technology to enhance legal services and improve access to justice. According to the latest statistic, more than 5.1 billion people – two-thirds of the world's population – lack meaningful access to justice. Lost income and stress-related illness due to seeking legal redress can cost countries up to 3 per cent of their gross domestic product every year.

The Commonwealth Secretary-General, Rt Hon. Patricia Scotland, KC, told more than 400 Ministers and senior government officials that: *"It is our responsibility to drive forward the paradigm shift agreed at our last meeting in Mauritius to deliver on the Commonwealth Access to Justice Declaration and ensure that people of the Commonwealth know they have access to justice because they can taste it, see it and feel it."* She also commended the work of Commonwealth Law Ministers and called for even greater emphasis to be placed on justice as an 'essential strength' in overcoming the current challenges.

The CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg also joined other Commonwealth Accredited Organisations in addressing Commonwealth Law Ministers to update them on initiatives taking place across the network, such as the CPA's work on promoting the Commonwealth Latimer House Principles on the Separation of Powers between the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary and the CPA's Working Group on Human Rights.



COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARIANS HIGHLIGHT STRONG PARLIAMENTARY INSTITUTIONS AT 148th IPU ASSEMBLY

Commonwealth Speakers and Members of Parliament attended the 148th Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Assembly in Geneva, Switzerland from 23 to 27 March 2024 which focused on the theme of *'Parliamentary diplomacy: Building bridges for peace and understanding'* and discussed the role of Legislatures in promoting a resilient and peaceful world. The IPU President, Hon. Dr Tullia Ackson, MP, Speaker of the National Assembly of Tanzania and the IPU Secretary-General, Martin Chungong welcomed delegates to the Assembly. Resolutions adopted at the IPU Assembly focused on addressing the social and humanitarian impact of autonomous weapon systems, artificial intelligence and promoting access to affordable green energy.

The CPA Chairperson, Hon. Ian Liddell-Grainger, MP and the CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg met with Commonwealth Parliamentarians at the IPU Assembly to update them on the CPA's activities – including the delegation from the Parliament of Guyana who were welcomed in their new role as the Regional Secretariat for the CPA Caribbean, Americas and the Atlantic Region.

The IPU is the global organisation of national Parliaments that began in 1889 to promote peace through parliamentary diplomacy and dialogue. This year, it celebrates its 135th anniversary. The next 149th IPU Assembly is due to be held in Geneva, Switzerland from 13 to 17 October 2024.



HIS MAJESTY KING CHARLES III ANNOUNCED AS PATRON OF THE COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) welcomes the announcement that His Majesty King Charles III, Head of the Commonwealth, will be the new Patron of the Association. As Head of the Commonwealth, King Charles reinforces the links by which the Commonwealth joins people together from around the world. The King succeeds the late Queen Elizabeth II as Patron of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Queen Elizabeth supported the organisation from her accession to the throne in 1952 and became Patron in 1989. The King has also followed in the late Queen's footsteps by visiting many Commonwealth Parliaments and has met with many Commonwealth Speakers and Members of Parliament.

As the Head of the Commonwealth, King Charles spoke about the work of Commonwealth organisations like the CPA in his recent Commonwealth Day message: *"I cannot say often enough that it is by coming together that we create the best chances to improve our world and the lives of people everywhere. Indeed, over the years countless people across the Commonwealth have been inspired to form their own Commonwealth Associations, from lawyers and accountants to business and trade networks, and many more besides. The work they do is absolutely vital, sharing professional knowledge, experience, and expertise across the Continents for the betterment of each one of us."*

The CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg said: *"We are delighted that His Majesty King Charles will be the new Patron of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. His patronage should help to raise the global profile of the CPA's work with Commonwealth Parliaments to promote parliamentary democracy and supporting Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff to face the major challenges in their roles as well as our work in youth engagement, human rights, climate change and supporting small states."*



Images: Various Commonwealth Parliaments.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA GIFTS SYMBOLIC TABLES TO COOK ISLANDS PARLIAMENT

Two 'Table of the House' tables have been gifted to the Cook Islands Parliament by the Parliament of Western Australia. The centrepiece tables, constructed from the unique and symbolic Jarrah tree of Western Australia, were handed over at a special ceremony in February 2024 ahead of the first parliamentary sitting of the year. The Cook Islands and Western Australian Parliaments are 'twinned' through the CPA's twinning programme between the CPA Australia and CPA Pacific Regions, established in 2007, which fosters cooperation and support between Australian and Pacific Parliaments.

The Western Australian delegation – led by Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, Hon. Michelle Hopkins Roberts, MLA and the President of the Legislative Council, Hon. Alanna Therese Clohesy, MLC – met with the Speaker of the Cook Islands Parliament, Hon. Tai Tura, Members of Parliament and parliamentary staff in Rarotonga.

The Western Australia Speaker said: *"We are so pleased to finally be able to present the tables and we are very honoured to have a piece of Western Australia here in the Cook Islands Parliament taking centre stage. This is part of a long-term relationship - many former Speakers, former Presidents and parliamentary delegations from Western Australia have been to the Cook Islands since 2007."* The Clerk of the Cook Islands Parliament, Tangata Vainerere welcomed the gift of the two tables for the Parliamentary Chamber and highlighted the Parliament of Western Australia's ongoing support including programmes, training opportunities and additional assistance to the Cook Islands.



Image: Western Australia Parliament/Cook Islands Parliament.

Source: Cook Islands news.

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REFLECTIONS ON THE 75th ANNIVERSARY OF THE 'MODERN' COMMONWEALTH

The Commonwealth Secretary-General reflects on the progress made as the Commonwealth marks 75 years since its establishment.

In his powerful address to the UN General Assembly on 25 March 2024, Professor Sir Hilary Beckles, Vice-Chancellor of The University of the West Indies (The UWI), lauded the 'super-humanity' of Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela.¹

They have always been two of my heroes – I'm sure that is true for all of us – and today, I call to mind Madiba's words: "*remember to celebrate milestones as you prepare for the road ahead.*"

On 26 April 2024, we celebrated the 75th anniversary of the 'modern' Commonwealth. Today, we reflect on the importance and impact of that moment 75 years ago when eight leaders convened in the aftermath of the Second World War, at the outset of the Cold War and still standing in the long shadow of Empire, to bring a touch of healing to relationships which were changing but remained so important.

In the Commonwealth, they created an association of nations that has not simply survived but grown and thrived. They formalised a set of connections which have evolved into an established framework for global leadership. They gave us the foundations to face the challenges of the world with strength and purpose. In doing so, they confounded history, and they changed the world.

Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II observed a Commonwealth which "*bears no resemblance to the empires of the past - an entirely new conception, built on the highest qualities of the spirit of man: friendship, loyalty and the desire for freedom and peace – and an equal partnership of nations and races.*"

Queen Elizabeth II was right. From that initial group of eight, the Commonwealth today stands as a voluntary association of 56 independent sovereign states, spread across five continents and six oceans. At 2.5 billion people, 60% of whom are under the age of 30, we encompass around a third of the world's population.

The Commonwealth comprises developed and developing economies; island states and land-locked states; some of the largest populations of any country in the world, and some of the smallest;

five of the 10 fastest growing cities on the planet, and some of the most remote indigenous communities.

33 of our members are small states, of which 25 are Small Island Developing States. 15 of our 56 member states retain constitutional links with the Monarchy of the United Kingdom; 36 are Republics; five have Monarchies of their own; and four were never part of the British Empire.

Each of our member states is different, with a different history, and different experiences. However, each is *united* in active, engaged membership of the 'modern' Commonwealth, bound by the blend of practical advantages, common interests and shared values which makes the Commonwealth unique.

Arising from all this is an essential truth; the Commonwealth is the world's largest association of democratic nations – and the most significant grouping of countries in the history of the world – which is bound, above all, by values to which we all aspire: the values enshrined in our ground-breaking Commonwealth Charter.

The strength of our combination of advantages, interests and values shines in the fact that, with a multilateral system under strain, the Commonwealth as a multilateral organisation is growing precisely because of what we stand for and what we can deliver. This is special.

Sometimes, our experience is uncomfortable – I understand that. There is no escape from the truth that the Commonwealth's story is one of a family at times scarred by old hurts and resentments. Why would countries which were former colonies willingly decide to create such a union based on equality and friendship? I asked my father the same question. The answer is a combination of principle and practicality which means that the reality of the modern Commonwealth is remarkable and hopeful precisely because of our difficult history.

Today, we meet as equals. We have difficult conversations in a constructive spirit; and we face the world's challenges together. This has been the Commonwealth's hallmark. You can see it in our collective refusal to turn a blind eye to apartheid; you can see it in



Rt Hon. Patricia Scotland, KC has been the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth since April 2016, and she serves the 56 governments and 2.7 billion people of the Commonwealth. Born in Dominica, she moved to the UK at an early age. She has pursued a dynamic career in law, public service and politics. A lawyer by profession, she became the youngest woman ever to be appointed Queen's Counsel and is the only woman since the post was created in 1315 to be Attorney-General for England and Wales. Appointed to the UK House of Lords as Baroness Scotland of Asthal in 1997, she has been Alderman for Bishopsgate Ward in the City of London since 2015.



COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY-GENERAL SPEAKS ABOUT IMPORTANCE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AT INAUGURAL COMMONWEALTH LECTURE IN BARBADOS

The Commonwealth Secretary-General, Rt Hon. Patricia Scotland, KC, gave the inaugural Commonwealth Lecture in Barbados on 3 May 2024. Her speech marked the 75th anniversary of the modern Commonwealth and she also noted that her hosts, The University of the West Indies, were also celebrating their 75th anniversary. The speech described the achievements of the 56-member organization which established the Commonwealth Charter, while noting that there was still important and significant work left to be done.

After her address, the Commonwealth Secretary-General answered questions from Jan Yves Remy, Director of the Shridath Ramphal Centre for International Trade Law, Policy and Services on the growing importance of digital technology, including Artificial Intelligence, in the Commonwealth Secretariat's work.



Image credit: Commonwealth Secretariat.

the ground-breaking Lusaka Declaration on Racism in 1979; you can see it in the Langkawi Declaration on the Environment in 1989, which paved the way for the first Earth Summit.

You can see it in the Commonwealth Leaders Statement on Climate Change ahead of the Paris Agreement in 2015, which paved the way for the Paris Agreement; you can see it in the landmark reference to 'loss and damage' in the 2022 CHOGM Communique, which set the tone for global agreement at COP27; you can see it in the Commonwealth Charter, which created the framework for the UN Sustainable Development Goals; and you can see it in our continuous, tireless fight for the small, the vulnerable and the marginalised.

Nelson Mandela said: *"The Commonwealth makes the world safe for diversity."* Indeed, the modern Commonwealth is an enigma of diversity and equality. If it wasn't like this – if it didn't so confound its own history, and if it were not brave enough to look evil straight in the face and call it what it is – then it would not survive, and I certainly would not be the Commonwealth Secretary-General.

The Commonwealth's interventions have been ground-breaking and have often shifted the dial. Today, in the face of the enormous challenges which are thrust upon us, we must have the courage to break new ground and shift the dial again. We are living in a world which is under enormous pressure; tightly bound by a tangled knot of crises spanning global systems. A world still living with the social, political and economic consequences of COVID-19. A world of crippling debt, inflation and high interest rates and of spiralling

costs for food and energy. A world which is rocked by the tremors of instability and conflict. In which the process, culture and institutions of democracy are under threat. As we attempt to navigate these straits, all the time, our nations are buffeted by the increasingly harsh impacts of climate change. Each of these challenges can be characterised as a grave and serious crisis and they interconnect, entwine and worsen one another. What we feel in our lives is the relationship between these crises and the unique political, economic, social and geographical circumstances – and inequalities – of the societies in which we live.

However, the world has faced grave challenges before. What defines our present predicament as unique is the lack of single causes and single fixes. The way in which human activities have pushed the planet's ecological systems so far out of balance that all other global systems are in danger; from the production of food and energy to finance, trade and international security.

What makes it so intractable are the dilemmas it creates, where attempts to resolve one crisis worsens another, such as when poverty reduction measures increase fossil fuel emissions. How do we respond to these challenges? What role is there for the Commonwealth in the eye of such a storm?

After eight years as Commonwealth Secretary-General, it is clearer to me than ever that we require a level of international political and economic cooperation which is unprecedented in this century. Yet these crises are manifest at a time when the multilateral system is under immense pressure. Indeed, they contribute to that

"The Commonwealth's interventions have been ground-breaking and have often shifted the dial. Today, in the face of the enormous challenges which are thrust upon us, we must have the courage to break new ground and shift the dial again. We are living in a world which is under enormous pressure; tightly bound by a tangled knot of crises spanning global systems."



Image credit: Commonwealth Secretariat.

pressure. The world feels as though it is fracturing. In an increasingly polarised environment, people are anxious about the capacity of governments and international institutions to provide the leadership and action required. It is precisely in a context such as this that the Commonwealth can mobilise its greatest qualities. The world today insists that we are dependent on each other.

75 years of friendship, connection and common action mean something. We are blessed with the ingenuity and imagination of a third of the world's population, including one and a half billion people under the age of thirty. Our shared humanity contains an immensely precious diversity of thought, culture, tradition and experience. Our Commonwealth Charter, which gives expression to our defining values – peace and justice; tolerance, respect and solidarity; care for our environment, and for the most vulnerable among us – is not simply a list of ideals. It is an imperative to act, and to make a practical difference in the lives of the 2.7 billion people who call the Commonwealth home.

Whether on climate change and biodiversity loss, youth opportunity and education, global health or economic co-operation, the Commonwealth can play – and does play – an indispensable role in the most pressing issues of our time offering us unparalleled strength not merely to face the future, but to build it.

The credibility of the Commonwealth, and our leadership, lies in our programme of practical action, support and assistance for our member states – which is more comprehensive today than at any other time in our 75-year history. This support is hard-headed, responsive and ambitious. The Commonwealth's work to protect the process, institutions and culture of democracy – as well as our quiet-but-essential work for peace – serves not just the Commonwealth, but the wider world.

It is important that we use the opportunity of this 75th anniversary to reflect. The point of looking back is to enable us to look forward with more knowledge, with a deeper understanding, and with a sharper insight into what comes next. If our history teaches us anything, it is that we do not always know what challenges we are going to face.

My reflection after eight years as Commonwealth Secretary-General is that the very fact of the polycrisis we are living through

shows us that, for governments, multilateral institutions, businesses and civil society, 'business as usual' is not enough. It is not enough to simply manage the impact of our problems. It is not enough to simply react to the next challenges. If that is our approach, we will be locked in an ever-descending spiral. We must innovate. We must transcend. We must build a better future by rediscovering our confidence in humanity's ingenuity, and combining it with the hard-headed strategies which can unleash it.

By the time we reach our next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Samoa in October 2024, we will have developed the world's most dynamic and comprehensive political and economic framework for harnessing the best of technological change to deliver real results for all of our 56 countries and its 2.7 billion people.

Due to our natural advantages and unique blend of strengths, the Commonwealth is uniquely placed to achieve this, because of our shared interests, our

practical similarities in language, common law, regulatory coherence, business procedures, and our large and dynamic diaspora communities. Above all, because we have a unique capacity to load the technological transformation with our values.

This 75th anniversary of the 'modern' Commonwealth is a special opportunity to renew our commitment to ensure that they do not simply represent words on a page, but the lived experience of all – now and for generations to come. Our extraordinary potential is more than equal to the challenges we face. Each of the 27,393 days since the birth of the 'modern' Commonwealth – good days and bad days – has brought us to this point of incredible opportunity.

The Commonwealth can bring people together, drawing strength and inspiration from what we share, to create a genuinely durable future; in which no one is left behind; in which the goal of a more secure, peaceful, fair, advanced and sustainable world for everyone, everywhere is advanced; and in which we can all enjoy the kind of prosperity which is in harmony with nature and that will also secure our unique and only planet for generations to come.

The incredible connections between our nations have sustained and enriched us for more than seven decades. The Commonwealth's commitment to peace, progress and opportunity will sustain us for many more. This is our history, our promise, our experience and our aspiration. So let us continue to stand together, and strive together, in restless and practical pursuit of the global common good.

This article is an extract of the Commonwealth Secretary-General's remarks for the inaugural Commonwealth Lecture to mark *'The Commonwealth at 75'* at The University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, Barbados on 3 May 2024.

References:

- ¹ Professor Sir Hilary Beckles to address UN General Assembly (21 March 2024) <https://global.uwi.edu/media/news/professor-beckles-address-un-general-assembly>
- ² "[T]he Commonwealth bears no resemblance to the empires of the past" Queen Elizabeth II said in her inaugural 1953 Christmas broadcast.



INSTITUTE OF COMMONWEALTH STUDIES MARKS ITS REINAUGURATION AND THE 75th ANNIVERSARY OF THE 'MODERN' COMMONWEALTH

As Chancellor of the University of London, HRH The Princess Royal spoke of the importance of education and cooperation at a reception to mark the reinauguration of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies and the 75th anniversary of the 'modern' Commonwealth in April 2024.

The Princess spoke of her lifelong connection with the Commonwealth beginning at the age of two and a half when she went to Malta with her brother and then later celebrating her 16th birthday in Jamaica at the Commonwealth Games.

Part of the School of Advanced Study at the University of London, the Institute of Commonwealth Studies provides research on Commonwealth policy, human rights practice and international relations. The Director of the Institute, Kingsley Abbott outlined the future agenda focusing on three key areas: strengthening the rule of law, combating climate change and promoting freedom of expression and digital rights.

The CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg attended the event along with many Commonwealth Parliamentarians and key stakeholders. The Institute of Commonwealth Studies recently worked with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) network to highlight online harassment towards women in Parliament.



Image credits: ICWS/CPA Secretariat.

COMMONWEALTH EDUCATION MINISTERS ENCOURAGE EQUAL ACCESS TO DIGITAL TOOLS FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Education Ministers met in London for the 22nd Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (22CCEM) from 16 to 17 May 2024 to discuss ways of empowering the 2.6 billion Commonwealth citizens, with inclusive and equitable learning opportunities. Ministers exchanged ideas about tackling uncertainties in education financing, exploring new partnerships and creating a road map for accelerated progress towards UN Sustainable Development Goal 4.

Education Ministers also examined strategic actions to address education inequity, especially for young people, women, people with disabilities and those living in poverty.



Image credit: Commonwealth Secretariat.



The Commonwealth Secretary-General, Rt Hon. Patricia Scotland, KC, encouraged Education Ministers to eliminate the barriers that impede access to education and encourage lifelong learning. *"The sheer scale of what can be accomplished if we harness technology has changed the game for policymakers, educators and learners. For us to meaningfully empower Commonwealth citizens, in an increasingly digital world, it requires us to be bold in our actions and ambitions."*

The 22CCEM meeting was chaired by Dr Ezekiel Machogu EGH, Kenya's Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kenya and will report to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) 2024 in Samoa later this year.

CELEBRATING 75 YEARS OF THE 'MODERN' COMMONWEALTH: A JOURNEY OF UNITY, CHALLENGES AND A FUTURE OF SHARED GROWTH

A view from Pakistan.

Seventy-five years ago, on 26 April 1949, the world witnessed the birth of the 'modern' Commonwealth, an intergovernmental organisation that has played a significant role in shaping global diplomacy, fostering collaboration and addressing shared challenges. As we celebrate this remarkable milestone, it is essential to reflect on the journey of the Commonwealth, its enduring relevance, the challenges it has faced over the years and its potential to navigate future global issues while fostering growth and development.

The 'modern' Commonwealth emerged from the decolonization process in the mid-20th century, bringing together nations that were once part of the British Empire. Today, it comprises 56 independent and equal countries spanning Africa, Asia, the Americas, Europe and the Pacific, representing a diverse array of cultures, traditions and socio-economic backgrounds. The organisation's foundation is built on shared values, including democracy, human rights and the rule of law, providing a platform for member nations to collaborate on common goals.

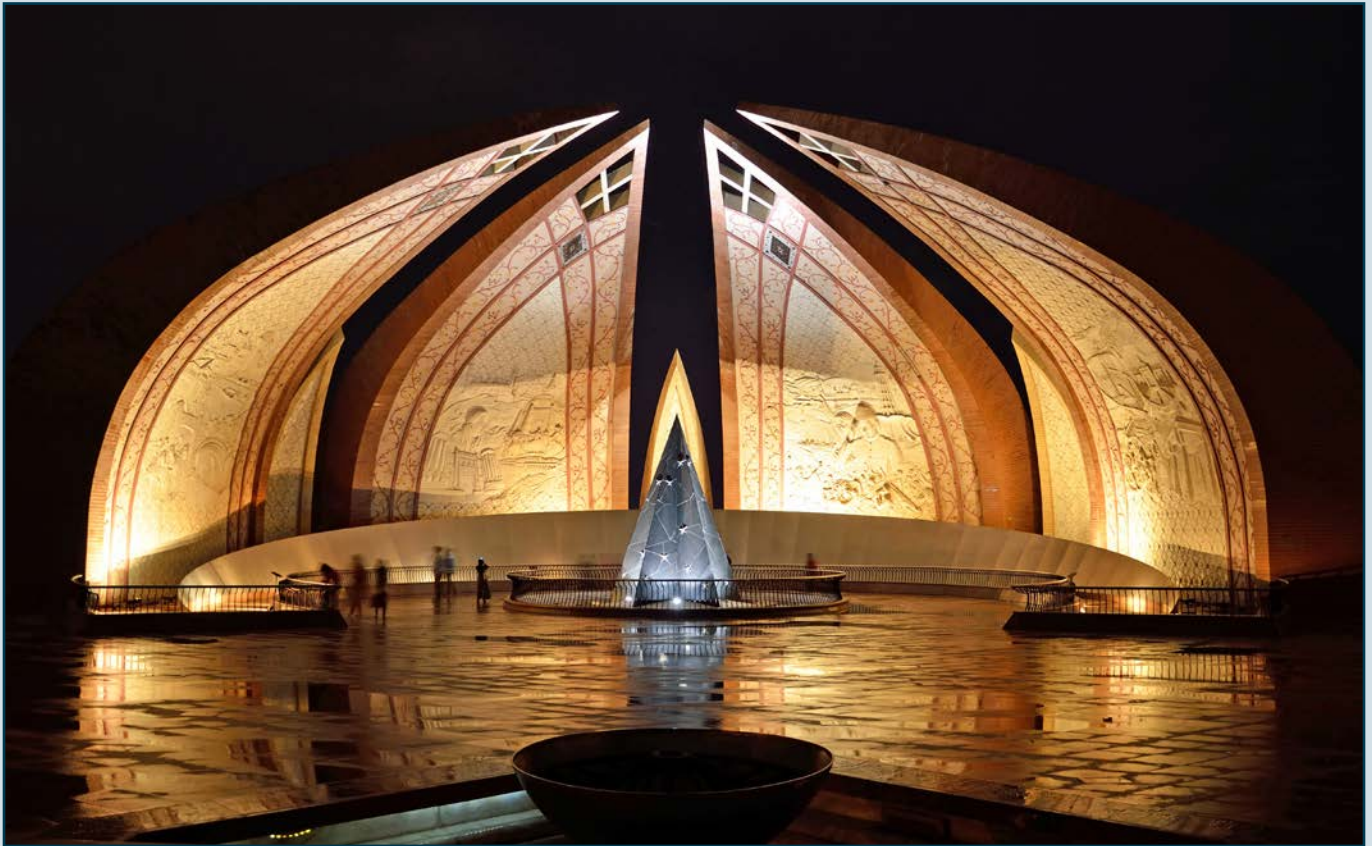
In a rapidly evolving global landscape, the 'modern' Commonwealth has demonstrated its enduring relevance by adapting to changing circumstances and addressing contemporary challenges. One of its key strengths lies in its commitment to promoting inclusivity and empowering smaller nations, offering them a voice on the international stage. The organisation's emphasis on shared values fosters a sense of community among its members, promoting mutual understanding and cooperation.

Home to over 2.4 billion people, the Commonwealth nations benefit from a network that facilitates trade, investment and cultural exchange. The Commonwealth's emphasis on education, healthcare and sustainable development has contributed to improvements in the quality of life for millions of citizens across member countries. Moreover, the organisation has played a pivotal role in conflict resolution, peacekeeping and humanitarian efforts, showcasing its commitment to global stability. While the Commonwealth has celebrated numerous successes, it has not been immune to challenges. Historically, issues such as economic disparities, political tensions and the legacy of colonialism have strained the organisation's unity. The question of relevance has also been raised, particularly as the geopolitical landscape has shifted over the decades.

Despite these challenges, the Commonwealth has proven resilient. It has evolved to address contemporary concerns, embracing a more inclusive approach that emphasizes the importance of collaboration and dialogue in overcoming differences. The organisation's ability to weather challenges and adapt to new realities speaks to its enduring strength. As the world grapples with complex and interconnected challenges, the Commonwealth is well-positioned to play a crucial role in finding solutions. Climate change, economic inequality and public health crises are among the pressing issues that require global cooperation. The Commonwealth's emphasis on shared values provides a foundation for addressing these challenges collectively.



Image credit: Pakistan National Assembly.



In the face of climate change, Commonwealth nations, with their diverse ecosystems and vulnerabilities, can collaborate to implement sustainable practices, share technological advancements, and advocate for global climate action. The organisation's commitment to empowering smaller nations can facilitate access to resources and expertise, ensuring that all member countries contribute to and benefit from climate initiatives. Economic challenges, exacerbated by global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, underscore the importance of international collaboration. The Commonwealth's network can serve as a platform for member nations to share economic strategies, promote trade and address common issues such as debt relief and financial stability. By leveraging the strengths of its diverse membership, the Commonwealth can also foster economic resilience and inclusive growth.

Looking ahead, the Commonwealth holds immense potential for fostering growth and development among its member nations. The organisation's focus on education, healthcare and sustainable development aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), providing a framework for collaborative action.

Education is a cornerstone of the Commonwealth's agenda, with initiatives aimed at improving access to quality education for all. By sharing best practices, investing in educational infrastructure and promoting innovation in learning, member nations can collectively work towards building a skilled and knowledgeable workforce, driving economic growth.

Healthcare collaboration within the Commonwealth is crucial, as is evident from the response to global health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The organisation can strengthen health systems, facilitate the sharing of medical expertise and coordinate efforts to ensure equitable access to vaccines and healthcare resources. By pooling resources and expertise, member nations can collectively address health challenges, enhancing the overall well-being of their populations.

As we celebrate 75 years of the 'modern' Commonwealth, it is evident that the organisation has evolved, adapted and persevered in the face of challenges. It is a unique and valuable association of nations that has the relevance and potential to address the global challenges of the 21st century. Its enduring relevance, commitment to shared values and potential for addressing future global challenges underscore its importance on the world stage. The Commonwealth's ability to navigate diverse cultural, economic and political landscapes positions it as a valuable platform for collaboration and growth. By leveraging its strengths, the organisation can continue to play a pivotal role in fostering unity, addressing shared challenges and promoting the well-being of its diverse member nations in the decades to come. As we reflect on the past and present, the Commonwealth's future remains promising, guided by the principles of collaboration, inclusivity and shared progress.

This article on the 75th anniversary of the 'modern' Commonwealth was provided for The Parliamentarian by the Research Directorate at the National Assembly of Pakistan Secretariat.

VIEWS FROM SPEAKERS, MEMBERS AND YOUTH PARLIAMENTARIANS AROUND THE COMMONWEALTH

Reflecting on the 75th anniversary of the 'modern' Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) has a membership of 17,000 Parliamentarians and almost 180 Parliaments and Legislatures, big and small, across all regions of the Commonwealth. The CPA's unique position in representing national, state, provincial and territorial Legislatures means that our membership includes more than 125 sub-national states, provinces and territories in federal-style countries, fourteen Overseas Territories and three Crown Dependencies, all with their own Parliaments or Legislatures. Founded in 1911, the CPA traces its origin to a world vastly different from today and pre-dates the 'modern' Commonwealth by 38 years, which was founded officially at a government level in 1949 by the London Declaration. In 2024, we mark the 75th anniversary of the founding of the 'modern' Commonwealth. Here, we ask Speakers, Members of Parliament and Youth Parliamentarians 'What the Commonwealth means to you as it marks its 75th anniversary?' and 'What do you think the importance is of the Commonwealth to parliamentary democracy today?'

CPA AFRICA REGION



Hon. Dr Tulia Ackson, MP is the Speaker of the National Assembly of Tanzania. She is also the current President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

As we commemorate the 75th anniversary of the 'modern' Commonwealth, I am filled with a deep sense of pride and exhilaration for the journey that the United Republic of Tanzania, the CPA Africa Region and Commonwealth nations at large, have

travelled since 1949 when the 'modern' Commonwealth was founded. The Commonwealth represents not just a coalition of nations united by shared values of democracy, human rights, good governance and the rule of law. It is a family that transcends continents including almost 180 Parliaments and Legislatures worldwide through the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

My own journey, from a humble background to serving as the Speaker of the Parliament of the United Republic of Tanzania is illustrative of the transformative power and opportunities offered by the Commonwealth. It is a narrative of overcoming adversity and is testament to what can be achieved when institutions support every girl child and woman towards the realization of their full potential.

Since 1949, the Commonwealth has fostered unity, solidarity and peace among its member states and beyond, thus bridging historical divides and nurturing an environment of inclusivity. The recent application for membership of the Commonwealth from several countries is testimony of the ever-growing relevance and influence of the Commonwealth in the global arena.

Parliaments are at the heart of a functioning democracy. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association has played and continues to play a pivotal role in making

our Parliaments and Legislatures effective in carrying out their Constitutional roles of legislation oversight and representation. Over the years, CPA Conferences and Seminars have offered a useful platform for Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff to share their experiences and best practices in the administration of Legislatures across the Commonwealth.

We are celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Commonwealth when humanity is confronted with a myriad of challenges, ranging from insecurity, intolerance and youth unemployment to poverty and climate change. As we celebrate this landmark milestone, we should strive to make the Commonwealth fit-for-purpose so that it can address the aforementioned challenges while reaffirming our commitment to the principles of the Commonwealth.

Let us move forward with renewed determination and collective action to create a world that is more prosperous, peaceful, equitable and inclusive.





CPA ASIA REGION



Danish Ali Bhutto is a Deputy Director at the Parliament of Pakistan and a former Commonwealth Youth Parliamentarian (CYP8).

As I reflect on the 75th anniversary of the Commonwealth, my decade-long association with the CPA transcends mere membership of my country for me. It's a vibrant tapestry woven from the threads of shared history, diverse cultures, a collective commitment to

progress, a steadfast belief in the universal principles of human rights and a vital dedication to strengthening parliamentary democracy.

My personal journey within the Commonwealth began as a participant in the 8th Commonwealth Youth Parliament (CYP) in 2016 in British Columbia, Canada. Representing Pakistan at the CYP ignited a passion for bridging understanding, advocating for inclusivity and upholding the fundamental rights of all within this unique global family.

The CYP paved the way for my participation in the 63rd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Dhaka, Bangladesh two years later. Witnessing youth participants alongside seasoned leaders discuss shared challenges, forge collaborative solutions and champion the principles of parliamentary democracy instilled in me a profound sense of the Commonwealth's transformative power. Since then, my continued engagement has deepened my connection to this invaluable platform as this forum continues to empower youth, women and other less-represented groups through various initiatives.

The Commonwealth, with its emphasis on democracy, rule of law and respect for individual freedoms, is a bastion of parliamentary principles. By providing a forum for dialogue, capacity-building and knowledge exchange, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association plays a pivotal role in empowering member states to advance both human rights and democratic governance. The CPA's emphasis on the importance of parliamentary democracy lies in its ability to foster a shared understanding of best practices, promote transparency and accountability and nurture a new generation of democratic leaders.

Furthermore, initiatives like the CPA Parliamentary Academy make the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association an unmatched space for a thriving parliamentary democracy. Through its innovative training programmes and emphasis on parliamentary best practices, the CPA Parliamentary Academy empowers legislators and aspiring young leaders, providing the tools to build effective, transparent, and accountable institutions that safeguard human rights and are cornerstones of robust democracies. As we celebrate this milestone, let's reaffirm the CPA's commitment to human rights and youth empowerment within the Commonwealth, and its role in strengthening parliamentary democracies across the globe. I remain optimistic about the Commonwealth's potential to weave a stronger, more inclusive future for all its member states, drawing upon the rich tapestry of shared experiences, aspirations, an unwavering commitment to upholding human dignity, and the enduring ideals of democracy.

CPA AUSTRALIA REGION



Senator Hon. Sue Lines is President of the Senate at the Parliament of Australia.

As the Commonwealth marks its 75th anniversary, it's a moment to reflect on the tapestry of cultures, languages and aspirations that weave together its rich mosaic. For me, the Commonwealth embodies the essence of diversity, unity and collaboration on a global scale. We share common values and

objectives such as democracy, human rights, good governance and the rule of law. At its core, the Commonwealth is a voluntary association of 56 independent and equal countries, each contributing their unique perspectives and experiences to the collective tapestry. Spanning continents and encompassing both advanced economies and developing nations, the Commonwealth is home to 2.5 billion people, a staggering figure that includes 33 small states, many of which are island nations facing unique challenges.

While the roots of the Commonwealth trace back to the British Empire, its modern incarnation is far more inclusive as exemplified by the recent additions of Gabon and Togo in 2022. This evolution reflects a commitment to equality, diversity and shared values that transcend historical boundaries. The Commonwealth's vision of a mutually respectful, resilient, peaceful and prosperous community resonates deeply with me. It's a vision that acknowledges the complexities of our world while affirming the fundamental humanity

and interconnectedness of all its citizens. This year's Commonwealth theme, 'One Resilient Common Future', encapsulates the spirit of solidarity and cooperation needed to address the challenges of our time. Central to the Commonwealth's mission is the well-being of its citizens. Through collaborative efforts, member governments and the broader Commonwealth family work together to advance shared interests globally. As we celebrate the 75th anniversary, it's a reminder of the enduring commitment to supporting each other, especially in times of adversity. One of the most compelling aspects of the Commonwealth is its focus on the youth. With 1.5 billion young people living within the Commonwealth, it represents a vast reservoir of talent, creativity and potential. This year, as we honour the youth, we recognise their role as catalysts for change and drivers of progress. Their energy, ideas, and aspirations are vital in shaping a brighter future for us all.

As I reflect on the significance of the Commonwealth, I'm struck by its ability to transcend geopolitical divides and foster meaningful connections. It serves as a reminder that, despite our differences, we are bound together by our shared humanity and a collective desire for a better world. In celebrating 75 years of the Commonwealth, we acknowledge our histories, while renewing our commitment to building a future defined by resilience, unity and prosperity. It's a journey marked by challenges and triumphs, but above all, it's a testament to the power of collaboration in pursuit of a common destiny.

CPA BRITISH ISLANDS AND MEDITERRANEAN REGION



Hon. Juan Watterson, SHK is Speaker of House of Keys at Tynwald (Parliament of Isle of Man).

The Commonwealth has a great significance to us as the CPA Isle of Man Branch, as well as me personally. The Isle of Man is certainly one of the smaller Branches in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, with a population of around 85,000. However, we are delighted to have the World's Oldest Parliament, Tynwald, as well as being the first Parliament to give women (over the age of 21, who owned property) the vote in 1881. The Commonwealth enables our small Island nation to be part of something bigger. We are one of very few CPA Small Branches to have hosted the annual Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, something which we did in 1984, and are an example of how, with many other CPA Small Branches, we punch above our weight in an organisation that contains some of the largest nations on Earth. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association provides a network within which we learn and lead. Hosting delegations has also been a fantastic way to showcase our unique Parliament, whether that be Tynwald Day, Regional Conferences or bilateral visits from Speakers of Parliament or Public Accounts Committees. We have welcomed visitors from the Falkland Islands and St Helena to Alberta and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, both politicians and parliamentary officials, and such visits are invariably beneficial.

My first experience of the CPA was attending the Commonwealth Youth Parliament as an undergraduate in 2000. Along with our national Youth Parliament, they inspired me in the work of Parliaments and public service more generally. When I was elected at the age of 26 in 2006, the Commonwealth became an essential part of my parliamentary education – attending a Commonwealth Parliamentary Seminar within a year of my election, and attending regional and plenary conferences. The CPA Conferences provide a 'safe space' for learning and testing ideas outside of your domestic politics, but also provide a great opportunity to learn about almost 180 other ways of tackling the same problems as you compare notes with other CPA Branches. The contacts built up provide excellent opportunities for benchmarking, either against the CPA's *Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures*, election observations or in looking at public services in government or scrutiny roles.

I have no doubt that my immersion in the CPA has helped me to become a better constituency Member, Parliamentarian, Committee Chair and ultimately twice being elected as Speaker. This is just one Member's experience, but I am sure it is shared thousands of times around our Commonwealth network. The innumerable interactions created by the CPA help foster the common bonds of friendship, learning and democracy that are at the heart of our organisation.

CPA CANADA REGION



Hon. Alexandra Mendès, MP is the Assistant Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons at the Parliament of Canada and CPA Canada Federal Branch Chairperson.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the modern Commonwealth, an international and voluntary association that remains important to parliamentary democracies, such as Canada, to this day. Amongst its many goals, the modern Commonwealth endeavours to reinforce shared democratic values, facilitate cooperation and collaboration, and promote human rights and good governance. After 75 years of existence, it retains the capacity to regenerate and evolve with the needs and values of its member states' citizens. The organisation adapts to accommodate new perspectives, values and challenges. The commitment to shared principles, such as democracy and human rights, provides a foundation for the modern Commonwealth to continually renew its relevance and foster collaboration among its members in the pursuit of common goals, and contributes to the modernisation of democracies. Encompassing a diverse array of member nations spanning various continents, the modern Commonwealth is characterised by a rich tapestry of racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The organisation's commitment to inclusivity and equality is evident in its composition, reflecting the shared and diverse history of its many member states. With a growing membership that includes countries from Africa, Asia, the Americas, Europe and Oceania, it serves as a platform where nations of different racial backgrounds collaborate on common goals, fostering mutual understanding and respect. This multiracial nature not only enriches

the organisation but also underscores its dedication to promoting unity, diversity and equal representation on the global stage. While most member states share English as a common language, the modern Commonwealth acknowledges the significance of linguistic diversity by incorporating bilingual or French-speaking members, such as Canada and some nations in Africa. This diversity creates a platform where English and French-speaking members can engage in meaningful and constructive dialogue, share experiences and work collectively towards common objectives. Human rights are an important goal for both Canada and the modern Commonwealth, as the inclusion of all citizens of society makes it possible to build innovative, dynamic and thriving communities in which people flourish. Though imperfect, it has been a key player in denouncing racial prejudice and discrimination, promoting democratic rights and advancing women's economic empowerment and leadership. A recent focus has been the rights for 2SLGBTQIA+ people. Despite the varying progress amongst member states, the modern Commonwealth's commitment to the universality of human rights underscores its evolving role in promoting various rights. Beyond political and economic considerations, the modern Commonwealth embodies a commitment to shared principles that transcend borders, making it an essential force for fostering unity, inclusivity and progress on the international stage in the 21st century. In an era marked by interconnectedness, its importance is not just historical. Rather, the modern Commonwealth continues to provide for collective action and cooperation in addressing the complex issues of our rapidly changing century.



CPA CARIBBEAN, AMERICAS AND THE ATLANTIC REGION



Hon. Bridgid Annisette-George, MP is the Speaker of the House of Representatives at the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Commonwealth stands as an enduring force in the promotion of parliamentary democracy. Rooted in shared historical ties and a commitment to democratic values, it provides a platform for collaboration, recognition of human rights, knowledge exchange, capacity building and the advancement of democratic ideals. One of the Commonwealth's core strengths lies in its diversity. The association's 56-nation strong membership spans vast geographical regions and encompasses large and small nations with varying cultural identities and levels of economic development. The Commonwealth fosters an environment where democratic principles are adapted and strengthened within diverse contexts. In respecting the strengths of diversity within the Commonwealth family, it also promotes inclusion as an objective at the societal level-inclusion of all citizens within its Member countries spanning youth, women, indigenous peoples and persons with disabilities recognising the value of all constituents and their respective roles in achieving strong, vibrant and just societies.

The Commonwealth Charter, the organisation's guiding document, enshrines a commitment to democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and the separation of powers. This shared framework supports member states in building resilient democratic institutions, ensuring peaceful transitions of power and upholding the rights of all citizens. The *Commonwealth Latimer House Principles* seek to provide a working framework for the doctrine of the separation of powers between the three arms of Government, fostering a complementary and constructive relationship between the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary.

As Chair of one of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago's ever-improving financial oversight Committees, I can attest to the relevance of the Commonwealth Latimer House Principles on Oversight of Government, according to which "*the establishment of scrutiny bodies and mechanisms to oversee Government enhances public confidence in the integrity and acceptability of government's activities*". Particularly, *Principle 6(2) – Accountability of the Executive to Parliament* which emphasises the importance of having appropriately structured and adequately resourced Public Accounts Committees working closely with the Auditor General. Much progress has been made in Trinidad and Tobago in this regard since the establishment of our Public Accounts Committee and Auditor General's Department since 1976.

In respecting the strengths of diversity within the Commonwealth family, the Commonwealth also promotes inclusion as an objective at the societal level; inclusion of all citizens spanning youth, women, indigenous peoples and persons with disabilities. As a female Parliamentarian, I can also confidently affirm the value of *Commonwealth Latimer House Principle 4 on Women in Parliament*. Reflecting the contents of this Principle, women are indeed "*elected to Parliament through regular electoral processes*" in Trinidad and Tobago. Currently, in addition to myself as Speaker, both the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of Government Business in the House of Representatives are women MPs. With one-third (23 out of 73) of our current Parliamentarians being women, there is room for improvement. However, we must acknowledge the progress made thus far towards securing what the Commonwealth Latimer House Principles call "*the necessary inclusion of both genders in all aspects of public life*". In a world facing increasing threats to democracy, the Commonwealth serves as a beacon of hope and a champion of democratic values.



Rashana Jones is a youth campaigner and Barbados Youth Parliament representative.

The Commonwealth at 75: Inspired, Exulting, Free: The Commonwealth has been and continues to be the bedrock of parliamentary democracy and good governance for almost three billion people globally for seventy-five years. Therefore, I join the international community in extending the highest commendations to the Commonwealth on reaching this great milestone.

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

young people is commendable and will be critical to the sustainability and vibrancy of this community.

Unequivocally, the Commonwealth is a pillar of peace and multilateralism, which are paramount, especially for small island developing states. The Commonwealth's Election Observer missions have contributed to the peace, stability, security and legitimacy of countless elections. This work is pivotal in ensuring that the fundamental rights of citizens are not compromised and that elections are free and fair, amidst corruption and other threats to democracy. As a young citizen of Barbados, the Commonwealth is a beacon of hope for my generation, it is the symbol of peace, equity and inclusion. The Commonwealth is a champion in the fight for gender equality and the rights of the most vulnerable, such as the disabled community. At its core, parliamentary democracy must equally include the voices of women and other marginalised sections of our societies. Moreover, as members of the Commonwealth, we must now look 75 years ahead and envision what parliamentary democracies may look like for future generations in the face of rapid technological advancements and other global threats. As the Commonwealth community, which is now 75 years strong, we must, in the words of Barbados' national anthem, 'upward and onward we shall go, inspired, exulting, free. And greater will our nations grow in strength and unity'. Happy 75th anniversary to the Commonwealth!

CPA INDIA REGION



Ravindra Garimella is the Secretary to the Leader of the Opposition in Rajya Sabha at the Parliament of India.

The Enduring Value of the Commonwealth: As the Commonwealth celebrates its 75th anniversary, it is a time for reflection on its profound significance, particularly for the vibrant democracies of the CPA India Region. The Commonwealth transcends its historical origins; it serves as a catalyst for cooperation, institution-building and the promotion of values essential to parliamentary democracy. For India, a proud member of this diverse family, the Commonwealth represents more than just a coalition of nations; it embodies shared values, aspirations and a commitment to collective progress. At its essence, the Commonwealth symbolizes unity in diversity, showcasing the power of collaboration across continents, cultures and languages. As an Indian, I take immense pride in our nation's rich heritage and the contributions we offer to the Commonwealth's collective fabric. Our dedication to democracy, pluralism and inclusivity resonates deeply within the Commonwealth framework, reinforcing the bonds that unite us as a community of nations. Dr Shanker Dayal Sharma, former President of India, aptly captured the vision of India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, for the Commonwealth. Nehru believed the organisation could be an instrument to support the freedom struggles of colonized nations and dismantle racism. He also envisioned the Commonwealth as a source of economic assistance for newly independent countries during their crucial initial stages. This vision was echoed in December 1948, at the Jaipur Session of the Indian National Congress. Under Nehru's guidance, a resolution was passed stating India's commitment to a free association with independent nations of the Commonwealth, working together for world peace and common welfare.

The Commonwealth's role in strengthening parliamentary democracy cannot be overstated. In an era rife with unprecedented challenges, the imperative for effective governance and democratic principles has never been more pronounced. As custodians of democracy, Parliaments play a pivotal role in upholding the rule of law, safeguarding human rights, and fostering transparency and accountability. Platforms like the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) serve as vital conduits for this endeavour. By facilitating the exchange of ideas and best practices among Parliamentarians from diverse member states, the CPA strengthens democratic institutions and fosters greater understanding and cooperation between nations. Furthermore, the Commonwealth provides a crucial forum for dialogue and collaboration on pressing global issues, ranging from climate change to economic development to gender equality. By leveraging the collective wisdom and resources of its diverse membership, the Commonwealth amplifies the voices of member states on the global stage, advocating for inclusive solutions that benefit all.

As we commemorate this significant milestone of the 75th anniversary of the 'modern' Commonwealth, it is incumbent upon us to reaffirm our commitment to the ideals and principles that underpin the Commonwealth. By upholding the values of democracy, human rights and inclusivity, we can chart a course towards a more equitable and prosperous future for all. In conclusion, the Commonwealth holds a special place in the hearts of millions, particularly in the CPA India Region. As we reflect on its 75 years of progress and accomplishments, let us renew our resolve to collaborate and work in solidarity, paving the way for a brighter tomorrow for generations to come. Happy anniversary to the Commonwealth!

CPA PACIFIC REGION



Rt Hon. Gerry Brownlee, MP is the Speaker of the House of Representatives at the New Zealand Parliament.

The New Zealand Parliament is proud to be one of 180 Parliaments and Legislatures making up the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. 75 years ago, our nation was one of the founding members of the 'modern' Commonwealth. While the world looks vastly different than it did when the Commonwealth 'London' Declaration was signed in 1949, the support, kinship and collaboration we have enjoyed with our fellow Commonwealth nations has not changed. We may be a small island nation, but being a part of the Commonwealth has provided New Zealand with the support, experience and knowledge of all our fellow member nations. We have seen this illustrated in recent years, as our Parliament - like many in our 'family of nations' - has faced unique and unprecedented challenges including financial crises, pandemics and terror attacks. Throughout it all, being part of the Commonwealth has been invaluable in providing our small country with support to weather these storms. For New

Zealand, being part of the Commonwealth is about reciprocity. As we look to larger nations for knowledge and collaboration, we use our position to support emerging democracies and promote the role and rights of our diverse community.

New Zealand is one of 13 Parliaments and Legislatures in the wider CPA Pacific Region, and we value working closely with our Pacific neighbours. Since 2019, we have enjoyed providing support and technical assistance to Pacific Parliaments through the Tai a Kiwa: Stronger Pacific Parliaments Programme. We are excited that this programme has recently been renewed and extended to 2028. Here at home, we have an increased focus on promoting youth engagement, including through the Commonwealth Youth Parliament, which we will host in September 2024. We also have an active Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians group, which meets regularly and facilitates different activities. Over the past 75 years, the Commonwealth has played a critical role in developing and maintaining international unity. I look forward to New Zealand's role in furthering this work and promoting peace and prosperity.



CPA SOUTH-EAST ASIA REGION



Hon. Tan Sri Dato' Dr Johari bin Abdul is the Speaker of the House of Representatives (Dewan Rakyat) at the Parliament of Malaysia.

Seventy-five years ago, in April 1949, the Commonwealth was formed, marking a big moment for countries working together globally. Now, as the Commonwealth celebrates its 75th anniversary, it's a time to think about its impressive journey of coming together and making progress since it started. The Commonwealth is a special group of 56 Member States, including countries that were once part of the British Empire and some that were not, spread across six continents. These countries are linked by shared values, history and a commitment to democracy, progress and diversity. It was created after World War II and has grown into a dynamic and inclusive community, with countries of different sizes, cultures and levels of development, representing over 2.4 billion people. At the core of the Commonwealth's beliefs are equality, teamwork and mutual aid among its members, in spite of their economic status or global influence. As we mark this important anniversary, it's crucial to recognise how relevant and resilient this organisation has remained in the face of today's challenges. From COVID-19 to climate change, from social inequality to global tensions, the need for worldwide teamwork and democratic leadership has never been more urgent. Member States come together to discuss common issues through the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA).

Looking forward, we must consider the lasting importance of the Commonwealth and the key role of parliamentary democracy in ensuring good governance and accountability across member nations. Many Commonwealth countries, including Malaysia, follow

the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy inherited from the UK. This model guides how their Legislatures operate, how powers are separated and how fundamental rights are protected. Parliaments in Commonwealth countries are crucial for upholding democratic values and advancing the interests of their citizens. They are where elected representatives make laws, keep a check and balance on the government's actions, and represent the diverse voices of their people. Through parliamentary democracy, Commonwealth nations have made strides in social justice, gender equality and inclusive development. Electoral system reforms, stronger parliamentary powers and advancements in technology have made governance more transparent, participatory and effective. By sticking to democratic norms, encouraging dialogue and consensus-building, and passing laws to tackle global crises like COVID-19 and climate change, Parliaments have shown their resilience and importance in today's interconnected world. Malaysia has also benefited from this democratic empowerment through its involvement with the CPA, where it engages in capacity building, shares best practices, supports democratic reforms, advocates for human rights and promotes parliamentary diplomacy.

As a trusted member of the Commonwealth, Malaysia continues to play a significant role in promoting democratic governance and international cooperation for the greater good. As we look ahead to the next 75 years, we must reaffirm our commitment to the values and principles that unite us as a community of nations. In a time of uncertainty and change, the Commonwealth stands as a symbol of hope and solidarity, offering a platform for cooperation in building a fairer, more peaceful and sustainable world.



Mas Liza Maslan is a Parliamentary Research Officer at the Parliament of Malaysia.

As we celebrate the Commonwealth's 75th anniversary, its significance holds a special place in my heart, personally and professionally. It's a testament to the lasting impact of a union built on shared values and a reminder of the power of collaboration and cooperation in achieving common goals. The Commonwealth represents a vibrant community of nations bound by shared values, history and aspirations. It embodies a vision of unity amidst diversity, offering a platform for collaboration, understanding and mutual support among its diverse member states. Growing up in a Commonwealth country, I have witnessed first-hand the positive impact of this unique association, fostering connections and opportunities across borders. As we celebrate this milestone, the Commonwealth symbolises not only a legacy of the past but also a beacon of hope for the future, promoting peace, prosperity and sustainable development on a global scale. The Commonwealth strengthens parliamentary institutions worldwide by promoting the rule of law, democratic principles and human rights. Various Commonwealth initiatives empower Parliamentarians to engage in meaningful dialogue, share best practices and collaborate on critical issues facing their nations. In an era marked by complex geopolitical challenges and rapid

technological advancements, parliamentary democracy faces numerous obstacles, including declining trust in institutions, polarisation and the erosion of democratic principles. Consequently, the Commonwealth provides an important platform for consensus-building, ensuring that democracy remains transparent, responsive and accountable to citizens. The Commonwealth strengthens the foundations of parliamentary democracy, advancing social justice, equality and human dignity for all by promoting inclusive decision-making processes and amplifying the voices of marginalised communities. Furthermore, the Commonwealth is crucial in promoting parliamentary diplomacy and multilateralism globally. Through its diplomatic engagements, the Commonwealth advocates for peaceful conflict resolution and promotes dialogue between nations. As a voluntary association of 56 independent countries, the Commonwealth reflects the diversity of its membership, representing a wide range of political systems, cultures and socio-economic contexts. This diversity enriches the discourse on parliamentary democracy, fostering a greater understanding of different perspectives and approaches towards governance. Celebrating the Commonwealth's 75th anniversary indicates its ongoing relevance and importance in advancing parliamentary democracy. It is incumbent upon us to harness the potential of the Commonwealth in order to strengthen democratic institutions, uphold the rule of law, and promote the values of freedom, justice and democracy for all.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: HOW DID THE EVENTS OF 1948-50 AFFECT THE CREATION OF THE 'MODERN' CPA?

Article by CPA Research Intern, Maddie Rafferty.

As the Commonwealth marked its 75th anniversary on 26 April 2024, it is fitting to reflect on the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) over the last 75 years. This article brings together a historical perspective of the establishment of the 'modern' Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in 1948-50 as the transition from the Empire to the Commonwealth took place.

Building the Commonwealth

The Speaker of the Lok Sabha of the Parliament of India, Hon. Seth Govind Das, was a delegate at the 2nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) in 1950 held in Wellington, New Zealand, and he wrote in his published account of the conference titled *'On Wings to the ANZACs'*:



Seth Govind Das

"The old body obviously did not fit in well with the changed circumstances and were not only out-of-date but also out-of-tune with the political views and aspirations of the Commonwealth people." – Hon. Seth Govind Das, 'On Wings to the ANZACs' p.5.

Creating the Commonwealth as we understand it today was an incremental process. The transition to the Commonwealth of Nations became official in April 1949 with the London Declaration, but it was preceded by and built upon the 1931 *Statute of Westminster* and the *Balfour Declaration* of 1926.

The Empire Parliamentary Association had originally been founded in 1911 and had played a key role in convening Parliaments for these declarations in the periods both pre- and post-First World War. The Empire Parliamentary Association's transition to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in 1948, however, pre-dated the 'official' governmental establishment of the 'modern' Commonwealth in 1949, with the purpose of introducing an Association based on equality, peace and co-operation for governments to follow.



Image credit: Commonwealth Secretariat.

This transition to the 'modern' Commonwealth signalled a change in attitudes towards the former Empire, seeing the decline of Britain as a 'paternalistic figure' and instead it began the era of greater equality and co-operation between the countries and nations of the new Commonwealth.

"We believe that the word 'Commonwealth' is a better word in spirit and accuracy to use in describing this extraordinary assembly of nations than the words 'British Empire'... I would say that the spirit of unity and common purpose in the Commonwealth today and the wish to agree are, I should be inclined to think, greater than they ever were in the history of this great community of nations." - Lord President of the Council and Leader of the UK House of Commons, Rt Hon. Herbert Morrison, MP (Lewisham), 1948 Journal of Commonwealth Parliaments, p. 531.

1948-50: A new era for the CPA

In a post-World War Two era, the Members of the Empire Parliamentary Association felt that they needed to establish a camaraderie, equality and modernisation within the organisation to ensure a unified and functional Association. 'Commonwealth', as opposed to 'Empire', embodied the spirit and community that the Association was searching for; and so, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association was born after a resolution was introduced by the Canadian Parliamentary Association in February 1948, which was accepted by the General Council, the governing body at the time. Later that year, the official name change took place for the Association at what would be the first Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference held in London in October 1948.

Calls also came earlier from the Republic of Ireland's Branch of the Association in 1947, spearheaded by Mr James Dillon (Teachta Dála for Monaghan) as the Members of the Irish Parliament debated their continuing membership within the Commonwealth and the Empire Parliamentary Association. In the same year, the House of the Oireachtas (Parliament of Ireland) removed the word 'Empire' from the title of the *Journals of Parliaments of the Empire* that were distributed in Ireland. Similarly, in 1947 the India Union Branch also passed a resolution suggesting that the Association's name be changed to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

Although overwhelmingly accepted by the organisation, there was some initial opposition to the change in the name of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. The Commonwealth was seen by many as a more inclusive and inviting term, while others opposed the name change, preferring to maintain the tradition and grandeur that was associated with Empire.

Left: King George VI met with the Heads of the 'new' Commonwealth nations at the time of the London Declaration in 1949 when he became the first 'Head of the Commonwealth'.



Above: Delegates outside the UK Houses of Parliament at they attend the first Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in London in 1948.



Above: Delegates to the first Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in 1948 also visited the port of Liverpool to see its work as the largest in the UK.

A primary concern for the Speaker of the Parliament of India, Hon. G.V. Mavalankar, MCA during discussions at the 1948 Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference was that a change of name would not necessarily bring about a change of attitude.

"If it is expected that a mere change of name without a change of heart and attitude is going to achieve what we have in view, then I would, with all earnestness at my command, say to this Conference that we are moving in a direction in which success does not lie." - Hon. G.V. Mavalankar, MCA (Speaker of the Parliament of India) Report of Proceedings of the 1st Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in 1948 – London, p. 131.

Next steps for the CPA in New Zealand in 1950

The second Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference was held in Wellington, New Zealand in 1950 and was the first conference in which the transition from Empire to Commonwealth had been made at both the CPA's institutional level and the governmental level. The 1950 Conference was a turning point at which the impacts of a changing organisation could be felt.

Indian MP, Hon. Seth Govind Das noted that the changes from the Empire Parliamentary Association into the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association brought the organisation into much greater harmony with the changing political views, aspirations and corpus of the Commonwealth. It was also in Wellington, at a Meeting of the Association's General Council, that the first Constitution of

the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association was presented and passed.

"The General Council – we meet entirely as equals" - Chairman of the meeting, Senator Hon. A.W. Roebuck, KC (Canada), Report of Proceedings at the General Meeting Held in Wellington, New Zealand, 21st November 1950, p. 46.

"...the Parliamentarians representing each country comprising the Commonwealth should understand the difficulties and problems and the circumstances of the other countries of the Commonwealth." - Hon. M.H. Oram MBE, MP, Speaker of the New Zealand House of Representatives, Report of the General Council 1950-51, p.11.

The growth of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association over the last 75 years

Following the changes made to the Association in 1948-50, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) has undergone many transformations over the last 75 years, with eight different CPA Secretaries-General, at least 48 countries who have transitioned to independence while continuing as CPA Branches, and almost 180 CPA Branches today formed in nine CPA Regions. Despite these many changes, the fundamental tenets of the CPA of *"promot[ing] understanding and co-operation"* (as set out in the 1950 CPA Constitution) remain.

"We no longer live in a world of super powers but in a world of networks and friendships – and that makes the Commonwealth as relevant as it has ever been" - Former United Kingdom Prime Minister, Rt Hon. David Cameron, MP, 2011 The Parliamentarian p.238. Quoted from Plenary Session of 57th CPC in London, July 2011.

Below: Delegates at the second Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in 1950 are pictured during their deliberations in New Zealand..



The past 75 years have seen the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association develop into an organisation that not only connects Commonwealth Parliaments and their Members and parliamentary staff, but also supports their journey to uphold and strengthen parliamentary democracy across the Commonwealth.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND ELECTED OFFICIALS: CYBERVIOLENCE AND ITS EFFECTS ON POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

A view from Québec.

Social media has become an essential communication tool for Parliamentarians, who use the various platforms for many different purposes, such as reaching out to the public and sharing information, while fostering the transparency of political and parliamentary activities. During election periods, social media platforms are used in particular to disseminate information on the electoral process and on candidates' political platforms. Despite their democratic benefits, social media platforms bring their own set of challenges. In some cases, they are a vehicle for disinformation and social polarization. Individuals with bad intentions sometimes use them to harass, bully and make threats. Public figures, like Parliamentarians, are often the targets of cyberviolence, as I have seen, having met with parliamentary delegations from all over the world since I became President of the Assemblée nationale du Québec. Cyberviolence is a problem that knows no borders and has been spreading for many years.

Social media in parliamentary work

Smartphones have blurred the lines between parliamentary work, work done in electoral districts and our personal lives. With the news broadcast cycle around the clock, Members of Parliament must be ready to act at all times, instantaneously. In a survey conducted by the Bureau de l'Assemblée nationale du Québec in 2019, Québec Parliamentarians reported that being connected with work, e.g., answering emails and texts, during personal and family time is a regular occurrence.¹

This has an impact on elected officials. In particular, it increases their workload, makes it more difficult to balance work and family life, and exposes them to violence in the digital environment.

An increased presence on social media requires Parliamentarians and their teams to develop new skills, in particular in the areas of communication and image management. How to deal with hate messages is certainly a challenge. Should you reply, ignore the messages, delete them, report them in accordance with the platform's procedure or file a complaint with the police? In some

cases, such as when a criminal offence has been committed, the course of action is obvious. However, there are situations where the line between freedom of speech and harassment is very thin. In a context where the public's trust in democratic institutions is tenuous, this remains a sensitive issue.

As a forum for communication, social media has changed considerably in recent years, in particular with the rise of disinformation, which polarizes debates. As pointed out in a recent report led by the Public Policy Forum of Canada, the consequences of disinformation are manifold.²

At the societal level, disinformation can lead to radicalization of certain groups, the polarization of debates and social division. Disinformation also significantly weakens the quality and integrity of information. It discredits expertise, arouses cynicism, discourages informed decision-making and undermines public trust in institutions. Ultimately, it can dampen participation in democracy and lead to civic disengagement. At the level of individuals, disinformation can result in harm, such as financial losses and damage to reputation, not to mention psychological damage.

Many consequences of disinformation affect elected officials directly and indirectly. Our institutions' legitimacy crisis impacts our work, for Parliamentarians are the 'public' faces of our political, democratic and institutional structures. As public figures, Parliamentarians are more prone to being victims of personal attacks, especially when debates are polarized.

Violence against elected officials

In Québec, the increase in violence against elected officials affects Parliamentarians from all parties represented in the Assemblée nationale, as well as many members of municipal councils. In this regard, there were some dark moments during the 2022 provincial election campaign. No fewer than 31 arrests were made following threats against candidates across the party spectrum. In the face of this wave of violence, multiple initiatives were put in place.



Hon. Nathalie Roy, MNA is a journalist, lawyer and politician and has been President of the Assemblée nationale du Québec since 2022. A lawyer by training, she worked in radio and television journalism from 1990 to 2012. In 2010, she opened a private penal and criminal law practice while continuing to work in television production, before entering politics. First elected in 2012 as the Member for Montarville, she was subsequently re-elected three times. During her second term, she served as Caucus Chair and Second Opposition Group Critic for Justice, the Status of Women, Immigration, Integrity and Laicity. In October 2018, she was appointed as Minister of Culture and Communications, a position she held for four years.



Security around party leaders was significantly heightened and an emergency telephone number, available 24/7, was given to candidates of five of the parties who felt their safety was at risk. The Director of Criminal and Penal Prosecutions led an awareness campaign on social media to make it clear that comments made on those platforms could constitute criminal offences.

Of course, in Québec as elsewhere, the upsurge in cyberviolence against Parliamentarians is nothing new. In 2021, the *Le Devoir* newspaper surveyed the 125 Members of the Assemblée nationale to measure their experience with intimidation.³ Of the 95 respondents, 32% said they had filed a complaint with the police after receiving a threatening message on social media and close to 35% said they received unpleasant, intimidating, hateful or threatening messages multiple times per week.

Women are more likely than men to be the targets of incivility and intimidation. In a report on violence against elected municipal officials, researcher Mireille Lalancette found that women politicians seem to experience more violence, intimidation and threats. They also seem to bear psychological scars from what they experience during their term of office.⁴ The violence can also take place on social media platforms. Elected officials and women in the public sphere are more likely to be sexualized or threatened with rape, and such violence is more likely to target certain groups of women, including younger women, women from minority groups and those in male-dominated environments.⁵ A report by the Fédération québécoise des municipalités on the concerns of elected municipal officials showed that the types of harassment most frequently reported by respondents were defamation, verbal abuse and, to a lesser extent, physical and sexual harassment.⁶

Women and cyberviolence

Anyone who has a digital presence is at risk of cyberviolence. The risk is strongly correlated with Internet and social media use - the more time a person spends in cyberspace, the more likely they are to be the target of online hostility.⁷ This explains why public figures such as politicians are subject to threatening or aggressive behaviour online.

Cyberviolence can take different forms, depending on the perpetrator's degree of intentionality, the frequency of the acts and the number of people or groups involved.⁸ Examples of such violence include cyberstalking, doxing (posting someone's personal information online without their consent), stalking and sextortion. Some forms of online hostility, such as gender-based hate speech or sexual stigmatization (slut-shaming), are more often aimed at women.⁹

Online violence against women replicates patterns of violence outside the digital environment. For example, cyberviolence often occurs on a routine basis and in various forms and may include elements of a sexual nature and sexist or derogatory remarks about women.¹⁰ Cyberviolence often seeks to make the women who are victimized feel as though they are to blame. Most of the time, the perpetrators of this type of violence are men.¹¹

The statistics on this phenomenon are alarming. Nearly two-thirds of people in Canada know a woman who has experienced emotional, physical or sexual violence.¹² According to Statistics Canada's *2018 Safety in Public and Private Spaces Survey*, 18% of women reported having experienced online harassment, compared with 14% of men. Women are also more likely than men to take steps to protect themselves from cyberbullying.¹³



Image: Assemblée nationale du Québec.

Above: The President of the Assemblée nationale du Québec, Hon. Nathalie Roy, MNA at work in her office.

The latest data from the *Institut de la statistique du Québec* confirms this trend. Approximately 12% of people aged 12 years or older have experienced bullying or cyberbullying, whether at school, at work or in the community. This violence affects certain groups more than others, such as young people, women and people from minority groups.¹⁴

The consequences of cyberviolence: a deterrent to political engagement

Cyberviolence has numerous consequences for both individuals and society. On an individual level, it can damage a person's psychological health and sense of safety. Cyberviolence can also lead to disengagement from political and public life, the closure of social media accounts and self-censorship.¹⁵

A survey of Quebec Parliamentarians showed that close to 40% of respondents avoid discussing certain topics, such as immigration and health measures, on social media, for fear of being insulted or receiving unpleasant comments. Some prefer to communicate through other channels, such as interviews with traditional media or active participation in the Assemblée nationale.¹⁶

This withdrawal from public and political life is currently underway in Québec's municipal sector. According to a survey of elected municipal officials, 43% of respondents who have experienced problematic situations such as bullying or harassment have considered leaving their political functions. Since the last municipal elections in 2021, nearly 9.5% of elected officials have resigned.¹⁷ The hostile political climate, intimidation and harassment are among the reasons given for their departure.¹⁸ As a result, many elected officials have chosen to limit their online presence, with a view to reducing their exposure to cyberviolence.¹⁹

CYBERVIOLENCE AND ITS EFFECTS ON POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

This disengagement from the public arena has repercussions for the very essence of our democracy. Self-censorship and the resignation of elected officials undermine the quality of public debate and the proper functioning of our political institutions.

Possible courses of action

To combat this scourge, our institutions can carry out certain awareness-raising, prevention and victim support initiatives to make the digital space safer. In recent years, a number of Québec public bodies have introduced measures to address the issue. The Ministère des Affaires municipales et de l'Habitation addresses intimidation against elected officials in its *Plan d'action pour favoriser le respect et la civilité*, an action plan to promote respect and civility, published on 6 October 2021. It includes 11 measures to encourage candidates and ensure a climate conducive to the exercise of democracy in the municipalities of Québec. The Ministère also produced a *guide to good practices* (in French) for contending with cyberbullying in municipal politics.

In January 2021, the *Sûreté du Québec* (Québec's provincial police) launched the *Plan de lutte contre l'intimidation des élus* (PLI-Élus), a plan to counter intimidation of elected officials. PLI-Élus is aimed at elected officials and municipal managers in the territory served by the *Sûreté du Québec*. Its purpose is to raise awareness among the target group, offer support, protect and make public administrators feel safe, and record acts of intimidation and violence to provide an up-to-date portrait of the phenomenon.

Since December 2022, the Union des municipalités du Québec has been offering elected officials and senior public servants insurance that provides protection against defamation, invasion of privacy, harassment and hate speech. It gives victims access to legal assistance from a lawyer.²⁰ In October 2023, the *Fonds d'assurances des municipalités du Québec* began offering a new insurance policy to cover legal costs related to anti-bullying recourse for elected officials, municipal staff and their immediate families.²¹ However, the insurance does not cover actions for damages. A psychological support programme is also available, providing victims of bullying with up to five hours of free counselling.

In addition to these initiatives at the municipal level, various campaigns have been launched to raise awareness of the effects of intimidation and cyberviolence. In fall 2023, as part of the Visitor's Program, the Assemblée nationale du Québec hosted a screening of the feature film *'Je vous salue salope: la misogynie au temps du numérique'*, a documentary also produced in English under the title *'Backlash, Misogyny in the Digital Age'*. The film highlights the stories of several women who have experienced cyberviolence. The screening was followed by a roundtable discussion with Léa Clermont-Dion, co-director of the documentary, Marwah Rizqy, Member for Saint-Laurent, Mireille Lalancette, Professor of Political Communication, and Louise Langevin, Professor of Law.

Parliaments also have a role to play. As institutions with legislative powers, they can make laws on these matters. For example, states such as France, Italy and New Zealand have passed cyberbullying legislation. These laws are designed to bring the legislative framework into line with the transformations taking place in the digital environment.

The Parliament of Canada is currently seeking to address this issue with *Bill C-63 on online harm*.²² The legislation would create



Above: The President of the Assemblée nationale du Québec (centre) spoke with children participating in the Québec Youth Parliament.

a new regulatory body, the Digital Safety Commission, which could order the removal of online content within 24 hours of receiving a complaint. It also aims to hold platforms accountable for the content they host, in addition to imposing harsher penalties on those convicted of hate crimes. The UK Parliament also recently passed the *Online Safety Act 2023* which puts the onus on social media companies to protect children from some legal but harmful material with extra enforcement powers and age verification for adult sites, as well as protections against cyberbullying.²³

In Québec, the Members of the Assemblée Nationale examine acts of incivility toward elected officials. Under *Bill 57, An Act to enact the Act to protect elected officers and to facilitate the unhindered exercise of their functions and to amend various legislative provisions concerning municipal affairs*, "an elected municipal officer or a Member of the National Assembly who, due to being an elected officer, is the subject of comments or actions that unduly hinder the exercise of their functions or invade their privacy, may apply to the Superior Court for an injunction to put an end to the situation."²⁴ Such actions are also punishable by fines ranging from \$500 to \$1,500. The Court can order a person to not be in the Member's electoral division office, to not attend the meetings of any municipal council of which the elected officer is a member, to cease communicating with the elected officer and to cease disseminating comments about the elected officer.

Faced with this societal problem, it is up to all of us to take action to stem the scourge of incivility and cyberviolence. The well-being of our society and the relationship between our elected officials and our fellow citizens are at stake. We all have a role to play in creating a healthy digital environment conducive to democratic debate.



QUÉBEC SPEAKER VISITS THE WELSH AND THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENTS TO PROMOTE BILATERAL EXCHANGE

The President of the National Assembly of Québec (Assemblée nationale du Québec), Hon. Nathalie Roy, MNA led a delegation of Members and parliamentary staff on bilateral visits to Wales and Scotland in June 2024.

In Wales, the Québec delegation was met by Hon. Elin Jones MS, Llywydd (Presiding Officer) of the Welsh Parliament (Senedd Cymru) before discussing the working of the Welsh Parliament with Members including Hon. Natasha Asghar, MS.

In Scotland, the Québec delegation met with Rt Hon. Alison Johnstone, MSP, Presiding Officer of The Scottish Parliament before meeting with CPA Scotland Branch Members and viewing a Parliamentary session in the Chamber.

The bilateral visits were an opportunity to discuss areas of common interest between Québec and both Wales and Scotland, to learn from each other and to grow the valued relationship. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association is the only inter-parliamentary organisation to include sub-national Legislatures like Québec, Wales and Scotland which have an equal membership with national Parliaments.

The Québec delegation included Hon. Lucie Lecours, MNA; Hon. Elisabeth Prass, MNA; and Hon. Claude Reid, MNA.



Image credits: National Assembly of Québec/Welsh Parliament/The Scottish Parliament.

*This article is based on a presentation given by the author at the 59th CPA Canada Regional Conference in Saskatchewan in July 2023.

**The author would like to thank Véronique Boucher-Lafleur, Catherine Lanouette and Simon Mayer for their contributions to the drafting of this article.

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ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE IN PARLIAMENT

The experiences of a young Member of Parliament from South Australia.

We have all heard the expression, “*you cannot be what you cannot see.*” I think to an extent this rings true to younger voters.

Voters may feel like they cannot see themselves, or their demographic, represented in their Parliamentarians. This may at times leave some feeling disenfranchised with our political systems and the decisions that ultimately affect them.

As a young Member of Parliament, I believe that young people should have a seat around the table to discuss the issues that impact their lives. I believe it is important they can see themselves reflected in their Parliamentarians. Ultimately, increasing youth representation in our Parliament is crucial to ensuring the Legislature is more reflective of our diverse communities.

There are over 400,000 South Australians aged between 15 and 34, equating to nearly 25% of South Australia’s population. Youth have the power to change the outcome of an election. Engaging with our youth should not just be with the intention of winning votes.

Ultimately, to enable young people to have their voices heard means that they need to be empowered at all levels. They need to have the knowledge to be able to engage with their Parliamentarians and our democratic system should they choose in order:

- To be able to develop policy and enact real change.
- To gather signatures for a petition of significance.
- To provide submissions to a Parliamentary Committee.
- To write to their Member of Parliament when there is a matter of concern.

Before we can run, we must first walk. It starts with strong civics education at a young age about the pillars of our Westminster system and how this system sits within a free democracy. Fundamentally, the importance of civics education cannot be understated in the engagement of young people in our political system. It can be the difference between apathy and engagement.

There were reports after the 2019 Australian Federal Election (where voting is compulsory for eligible voters over the age of 18 under Australian electoral law) that there was a low voter turnout, with voting figures suggesting less than 91% of people cast their ballot. According to reports ‘*Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide - all either the youngest or among the youngest electorates in their respective states - had among the lowest state turnouts.*’ We need to engage with those who are disenfranchised or disengaged.

If we want to see young people engaged in political dialogue, it is my view that it is important they see themselves in their Parliamentarians. Key to that, is seeing more young people elected to the Parliament.

In writing this article, I reflected on my own journey to being elected to the South Australian Parliament. I first ran for Parliament when I was 21 years old in what was considered an ‘unwinnable’ State electorate for my party. A year later, I would contest the Australian Federal election, again in what was an ‘unwinnable’ seat. It was not until I was 25, that I was elected to the Legislative Council of the South Australian Parliament, in March 2022.

In the lead up to, and since my election, I have often had commentary about my age. I am often met with a sense of support and enthusiasm at the notion that a young woman would run for politics in our country. I think this is a testament to the warm nature of Australian people and our great democratic system.

However, my time as a candidate in these campaigns also provided me with great insight into some of the challenges faced by prospective young candidates on their journey to Parliament. It would be remiss of me to not highlight some of these challenges,

Below: Hon. Laura Henderson, MLC and Hon. Vincent Tarzia, MP welcome students from East Marden Primary School on a tour of the Parliament of South Australia in Adelaide.



Image: South Australia Parliament/Laura Henderson.



Hon. Laura Henderson, MLC is a Liberal Member of the Legislative Council of South Australia. She serves as the Opposition Whip in the Legislative Council and is the Shadow Assistant Minister to the Shadow Attorney-General, Responsible for Child Protection and the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence. She was elected to the South Australian Parliament at 25 years old in 2022.



should we wish to see greater representation of this cohort in the future. To acknowledge some of the barriers that may limit their ability to run for, or be successful in, an election. I acknowledge this may not be reflective of all young people in politics and is by no means a comprehensive list.

- 1. Financial stability** - naturally, young people are not as established in their careers and likely do not have the same financial stability as some of their older counterparts. Putting aside the cost of election materials (often borne by candidates or their supporters), candidates will often need to take time from their employment to be able to run for office, with no guarantee as to any prospects of success. Whilst this is true for all candidates, young candidates arguably are not as established financially, or in their careers, to be able to facilitate such risk.
- 2. Political Experience** - sometimes young people may wrongly be perceived as not having the requisite experience to be a Member of Parliament. I would argue that our Parliamentarians should come from diverse backgrounds. They should be reflective of people from all walks of life, as is true of the communities they serve.
- 3. Importance of civics education** - whilst many young people may be engaged in world politics through social media, and the 24/7 news cycle, it would be fair to say that many do not engage in politics beyond such mediums. For some, this may be as they do not have an interest in politics. This is perfectly fine; politics is not everyone's cup of tea. For others, it may well be they do not know how to take that next step in getting involved. Ultimately, such disengagement comes back to my earlier point about the importance of civics education. A solid civics education gives those who wish to be involved the tools and knowledge to be able to take that next step, should they choose.
- 4. Focus on family life** - whilst for the most part, the interest around my age has been positive, there has been an unusual interest in my intentions to start a family. The nature of this interest has gone beyond the typical "do you have children?" small talk. The questions have varied from *if* I want to have children, to *when* I would like to have children, to *how many* children I would like to have, and *who* would raise my children (that I do not yet have) should I be elected? I have had more than one instance where people have approached myself, or my now husband, insistent that I was in fact pregnant (spoiler alert, I was not).

From speaking with some of my male colleagues, I understand they are not met with the same level of interest or



Image: Queensland Parliament/Laura Henderson.

Above: Hon. Laura Henderson, MLC (right) reflects on her role as a young Member of the Legislative Council of South Australia alongside Hon. Te-Hani Brown, MP from the Cook Islands in a session on the importance of electing young people to Parliaments at the 40th CPA Australia and Pacific Regional Conference in Queensland in November 2023.

scrutiny on this subject. I attribute this interest to both my age and my gender. I raise this not as a complaint of the 'cut and thrust' of politics, but that, if we are to engage young people (particularly young women), then we need to think about how cultural change in our roles is enacted to make that happen. From young women I speak to, from all walks of life, scrutiny around a young woman's desire to have a family, or not to have a family, is a barrier to entry into a role in Parliament. This issue must be addressed, should we wish to see more young women putting their hands up to run for Parliament. To not address this, further contributes to concerns some may have about the *perception* that politics and family life cannot go hand in hand.

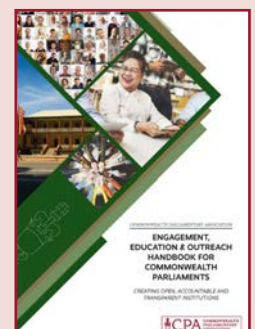
Ultimately, the more diverse our Parliaments are, the more it will accurately reflect the nature of our communities. Our democracy is made richer by the many, rather than the few. We have a fundamental need to get more youth into our Parliaments, and to engage them more broadly in our political systems.

This article is based on a presentation given by the author at the 40th CPA Australia and Pacific Regional Conference in Queensland in November 2023 on the theme of 'Representation for the Future: Young People and Parliaments'.

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PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES IN QUEENSLAND: ENGAGEMENT WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Queensland, Australia, is one of 180 Parliaments and Legislatures across the Commonwealth. Queensland is known as the Sunshine State. Our people are warm and friendly, and our youth are sporty, fun-loving and generally optimistic about their future.

They are, however, not as politically active as European youth or even our Southern counterparts in the State of Victoria. Overturning this youth apathy when it comes to their level of engagement in parliamentary democracy requires consistent effort and strategic thought on the part of government.

Engaging young people with Parliamentary Committees is a critical aspect of a vibrant and inclusive democratic process. Ensuring that the voices of our younger generation are heard in the policymaking and legislative processes is not only a matter of fairness but also essential for addressing their unique concerns and needs.

In this article, I would like to discuss various factors that impact the engagement of young people with Parliamentary Committees, highlighting the importance of topic relevance, time availability and the role of existing networks and organisations. We will also explore specific case studies from Queensland, where efforts have been made to engage young people in Parliamentary Committee work.

There are various factors influencing young people's engagement with Parliamentary Committees. Evidence suggests that young people, in particular 16 to 24 years old, are interested in issues that affect their lives, but feel that party politics and Parliament may not be relevant to them. In short, they feel alienated by the political parties.

They may also not be aware of the political or parliamentary process, as well as that Committee inquiries provide an opportunity for community, and in this instance young people, to be heard and to contribute to the decision-making process and how to engage.

One of the key factors influencing young people's engagement with Parliamentary Committees is the perceived relevance of the topic under discussion. Both the Committee and the young people themselves need to see the topic as significant and directly related to their lives. When topics are abstract or seemingly disconnected from the daily experiences of young individuals, their engagement is likely to be severely limited.

For example, inquiries into issues such as mental health, environmental, education and youth-related policies tend to garner

more interest from young people as these topics directly impact their well-being and future. On the other hand, complex or niche subjects may struggle to attract their attention.

The time available for young people to engage with Parliamentary Committees is crucial. Some inquiries have tight schedules, requiring quick turnarounds for submissions and participation. However, such short timeframes can be a barrier to meaningful engagement, especially for young people who have various commitments, including school, work and extracurricular activities.

Inquiries that offer longer timeframes for engagement, allowing young people to express their views without feeling rushed, tend to attract more participation. Young individuals need time to understand the issue, consult with their peers and provide thoughtful input.

Engaging young people effectively often involves leveraging the existing networks and organisations that cater to their needs and interests. In the case of Queensland, organisations like the Queensland Family and Child Commission, Multicultural Australia, Youth Parliaments and youth advocacy groups have played a significant role in connecting young people with Parliamentary Committees.

These organisations often have established channels of communication with young people and can help in disseminating information about Committee inquiries, encouraging submissions and even providing support during the engagement process.

Understanding where young people are most active and engaged is crucial for promoting Committee inquiries. Social media platforms like *Instagram* and *LinkedIn* are particularly effective in reaching young people. Committees can create engaging content, such as videos and graphics, to raise awareness about their inquiries and call for submissions.

Committees and secretariats have ethical considerations in relation to interactions with young people, particularly those under 18 years.

- For instance, has the young person been provided age-appropriate information about Committee processes?
- Does the young person understand this information, and are they able to understand the purpose and consequences of participating?



Hon. Joan Pease, MP is a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Queensland for the electorate of Lytton. She was first elected in January 2015 and has been a Senior Government Whip since 2017. She also serves on the Supermarket Pricing Select Committee and the Clean Economy Jobs, Resources and Transport Committee. Prior to her election, she worked as a Teacher/Trainer for adults and as an Electorate Officer providing advocacy advice.



Image: Queensland Parliament.

Above: The Queensland Parliament holds regular Youth Parliaments throughout the year. At this event in April 2024 in the Parliamentary Chamber, students from 33 schools in Brisbane, South-East Queensland and as far away as Cairns and Bundaberg, participated in the 2024 Legal Studies Youth Parliament. The Youth Parliamentarians debated a Bill relating to big data collection, storage and use by the government, followed by a general debate on youth issues.

- Is parental/carer consent required and if so, has a method been put in place to obtain this consent? For example, broadcast of proceedings (or publication of images) of young people who can't provide informed consent.
- Have privacy and confidentiality issues been considered where appropriate? Is consent required from the organisation that has responsibility for the young person at the time of the consultation?
- Are secretariat staff aware of their legal obligations around privacy, mandatory reporting and information sharing?
- Are Committee members and staff aware of what to do if they see or hear something that raises concerns about a young person's safety?

Further the Committee may need to consider how information gained from young people, particularly those under 18 years of age, is to be presented in the final report. Young people may be less forthcoming if their name is to be attached to a particular statement or be cautious about attributing statements due to the nature of the inquiry.

Case Studies

Inquiry into Serious Vilification and Hate Crimes: This case study demonstrated the success of a Communications campaign in engaging young people. The Committee employed a multi-channel approach, including social media, newspapers, radio interviews and promotional materials, to reach a broad audience. Multicultural Australia played a pivotal role by facilitating various forms of submissions, including videos, audio and written content. This approach enabled diverse cultural communities, including young people, to participate effectively.

Vaping: An Inquiry into Reducing Rates of E-Cigarette Use in Queensland: The Health and Environment Committee (HEC) recognised the importance of engaging young people due to the direct relevance of the vaping issue to their lives. Social media promotion and advertisements in digital newspapers were used to raise awareness about the inquiry. Approximately 10% of the submissions were from young people, while an additional 5% were from organisations advocating for young people. The HEC also



ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE IN PARLIAMENT

dedicated a specific day of public hearings to listen to young people's perspectives.

As previously stated, young people tend to engage more actively with Parliamentary Committees when the subject matter directly affects their lives. The success of the Vaping Inquiry in Queensland is a good case in point. However, Committees should continuously explore new channels for engaging diverse groups of young people. Online platforms, video submissions, videoconferencing and online forums can also be effective means of reaching out to tech-savvy youth.

Paid, targeted advertising on social media platforms, based on age and location, has shown promise in increasing awareness about Committee inquiries. Additionally, Committees must consider issues like parliamentary privilege, managing inappropriate language and ensuring the protection of young people's rights and privacy.

The data, regarding the reach and engagement of the various social media posts, have been utilised by the Committee offices. Further, whilst the Committee office does keep statistics on the number of submissions received and witnesses at hearings, the data collected from submissions does not include demographic statistics. For example, the age of submitters or focus areas, such as groups advocating on behalf of young people.

In the 57th Queensland Parliament (which runs from October 2020 to September 2024) the Committee office has held 523 briefings/hearings with 1,398 witnesses from government, 1,548 organisations and 390 individuals to date. The Committee office has received 19,507 submissions across 92 inquiries. However, as stated earlier, no demographic data is systematically collected from these inquiries, submissions and hearings.

A good communication plan is critical to identify key stakeholders. Whilst the Committee office has a combined database of approximately 2,800 stakeholders, structured by organisation type or focus areas, this data does not include demographic or youth specific details.

Strategies to reach out to young people through educational programmes has seen the Queensland Parliament education team deliver over 100 education programmes across the state in 2022-2023. This work is essential.

During the 2022-2023 financial year, they engaged with 14,000 students and teachers, through some 9 Youth Parliaments,



Image: Queensland Parliament

Above: The Queensland Parliament's regional education team visited Cloncurry State School and St Joseph where students who might not get the opportunity to visit the Parliament in person got a chance to learn about the legislative process.

regional education activities and in partnership with the Department of Education and Training, conducted school constitutional conventions in the satellite city of Townsville and in metropolitan Brisbane, our State Capital.

These sessions provided opportunities for young people to understand the parliamentary process, and how they can engage with Parliamentary Committees and the Queensland Parliament in general.

In summary, engaging young people with Parliamentary Committees is essential for a thriving and inclusive democracy. It requires a combination of factors, including topic relevance, adequate time for participation and the use of existing networks and digital platforms as well as continually exploring new channels that reach young people.

The case studies from Queensland illustrate the positive impact of effective engagement strategies. As Committees continue to adapt to the evolving needs and preferences of young people, they can ensure that the voices of the next generation are heard and incorporated into the legislative and policy-making processes. Any thriving society demands it.

This article is based on a presentation given by the author at the 40th CPA Australia and Pacific Regional Conference in Queensland in November 2023 on the theme of 'Representation for the Future: Young People and Parliaments'.



REPRESENTING OLDER PERSONS IN PARLIAMENT: A CASE STUDY FROM UGANDA

Parliaments rightly focus on youth representation to ensure that young people are engaged in the political process. However, do Parliaments need to represent older persons in their Chambers?

In 2021, elderly Ugandans elected five persons aged over 60 to represent them in Parliament; the elderly created a new ‘special interest group’ in Uganda. Representatives of older persons was the latest ‘special interest group’ introduced in Ugandan politics and is probably not found anywhere else in Parliaments around the world. The Constitution of Uganda provides the composition of the Parliament to include:

- Members directly elected from constituencies;
- special interest groups of the Youth, Army, Persons with Disabilities, Women and Workers.

The Uganda Parliament has leave to create other groups of representation. The Constitution also provided for a review of this ‘special interest group’ representation, ten years after the commencement of the Constitution (2005), and five years thereafter for the purposes of retaining, increasing or abolishing these groups.

In August 2020, Hon. Ephraim Kamuntu, the Minister for Justice and Constitutional Affairs tabled the Parliamentary Elections (Amendment)(No. 24) Bill, 2020, which sought to provide for the inclusion of older persons as a ‘special interest group’ in Parliament under the Constitution. The Bill also sought to provide for the manner of election of representatives of older persons in Parliament by an electoral college.

“In the past, older persons were not included among the special interest groups represented in Parliament to participate in the governance of Uganda, yet during the Constitution-making process, the people of Uganda emphasised that one of the main principles that should govern the composition and functioning of Parliament is participatory democracy and inclusiveness,” said William Byaruhanga, former Attorney-General.

Members argued that the elderly were quietly suffering due to the lack of an instrument and a Government Minister specific to them and their concerns. However, some legislators opposed this argument saying that the elderly were already over represented in government.

“The elderly are the most represented in Government; the Head of the Executive is above [the age of] 60; so is it procedurally right to say that the elderly are not represented yet they are the ones who lead the three arms of Government?” said Hon. Elijah Okupa, MP.

Hon Muhammad Nsereko, MP (Kampala Central) warned that the move to give the elderly seats in the House could lead to other categories of people demanding similar treatment.

The Uganda Parliament, voting on the Bill, created the five positions, one for each of the four regions in Uganda: Eastern,



Above: Hon. Catherine Akumu Mavengina (Northern Region) takes her oath at the Parliament Building in May 2021 when she was elected to represent older persons.

Western, Northern and Central, and one national female representative. MPs in these positions would first be elected in the 2021 general elections.

The qualifications for one to stand for election as a representative of older persons included being more than 60 years of age and being qualified to be a Member of Parliament (in conformity with Article 80 of the Constitution and section 4 of the *Parliamentary Elections Act, 2005*).

The mode of elections was through the Elders’ Council constituting all the districts in a particular region. The National Female MP would be elected by the National Elders’ Council constituting delegates from all the regions.

A 2022 in-house Parliament compilation shows that less than 50 legislators or about 9% were over 60 years of age. Figures from the Ministry of Gender, and the Uganda Bureau of Statistics put the number of older persons (60 and above) in the country at about 1.6 million and rising. These are the persons represented by the five MPs.

Five persons were elected to represent the older persons in the 11th Parliament: Hon. Dominic Mafwabi Gidudu (Eastern), involved in farming but with UK qualifications in purchasing and supply; Hon. Joram Ruranga Tibasiimwa (Western), a retired teacher and Chair of the National Council for Elderly Persons; Hon. Catherine Akumu Mavengina (Northern), a former MP and Minister in government; Hon. Peninah Busingye Kabingani (Central), a retired civil servant,

Mohammed Katamba is the Information Officer at the Parliament of Uganda.



REPRESENTING OLDER PERSONS IN PARLIAMENT

and Hon. Joy Peggy Waako, a former community development officer, who was elected as the national female representative for older persons.

Although having the entire country as your constituency, and especially for someone above 60 years would not come easy, Hon. Joy Waako, the national female representative, has none of that.

In an interview, she admitted not knowing much about the workings in Parliament before joining it, but added that she has found it very busy, involving Committee sittings in the mornings, plenary sittings in the afternoon, and visiting older persons or taking part in oversight visits with Parliamentary Committees.

“I am enjoying it. I’m really enjoying it. When I was young, I worked at the district and used to see older people suffer and neglected. There was no policy to cater for them,” she said, adding that *“I am happy that government has started programmes to cater for older persons, in which I am participating.”*

Waako sits on the House Committees on gender; and the national economy. She’s happy with her three years of speaking for the older persons in Uganda. She was part of the team that originated the idea of having parliamentary representation, in 2016. Then, the Elders Council also requested a specific grant dedicated to the same group. Although both of these (the representatives in Parliament, and the grant) were approved, older persons waited for five years. The general election, in which older persons would finally get representation was held in 2021. Upon election and taking oath, one of her first tasks in the House was to follow up on the grant, which had only been partially honoured.

Older persons were advised to form groups through which they benefited from the grant. *“So many people have benefited from this*



Image: Parliament of Uganda.

Above: Hon. Joy Peggy Waako, a former community development officer, who was elected as the national female representative to represent older persons in Parliament

grant. I have been to the regions of the country and discovered that this money is doing lots of wonders,” she said.

Further, older persons had been left out of the Parish Development Model (PDM), a new government programme intended to improve household incomes. Waako together with colleagues intervened and pushed for their inclusion, in addition to setting a specific fee of 10% of PDM releases to go to older persons.

Interventions by the MPs representing older persons has led to the inclusion of medicines meant for older persons in packages sent to health facilities at lower levels. Now, their target is to push for older persons’ friendly bathrooms around the country.

In Parliament, Waako says they are much loved and respected by their colleagues but suggested that a designated sitting area from where they *“can easily catch the Speaker’s eye”* could be reserved for them.

Upon their election, Dominic Mafwabi was appointed as a Minister of State for Gender in charge of the elderly persons. Representing the full Minister, he presented the National Social Security Fund (Amendment) Bill for its First Reading in Parliament; and also presented a government statement on the celebrations of the International Day for Older Persons (1 October 2021).

In July 2022, Ruranga Tibasiimwa presented a petition by pensioners from his home area. *“Our fellow MPs recognise us as older persons. Where we need help, they’ll easily give [it]. Some of them call us mother or jjaajja [granny], [and] we love it. Some of them [legislators] studied with our children,”* she said.

When Waako is not in Parliament or in the field with House Committees or with voters – areas that she loves as they keep her busy – she rests at home where she spends time with her grandchildren.



The Parliament of Uganda in Kampala.



PARLIAMENT AS A FORUM FOR SCRUTINY AND ACCOUNTABILITY: COMPARISON OF INDIAN AND UK PARLIAMENTARY DEVICES FOR BACKBENCH MPs

Parliaments all over the world have assumed added responsibilities in response to the growing aspirations of the people. As representatives of the people, Members of Parliament can bring up matters of public interest concerning their constituents or electorates on the floor of the House. In the Indian Parliament, a number of devices are available to the Members to achieve this objective under the *Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business of Houses of Parliament and State Legislatures* as well as through conventions. These parliamentary devices can be termed as ‘procedural devices’ that can be used by Members to discuss public grievances. These also afford opportunities to Members to review the workings of the Executive and to constructively criticize the policies, programmes and actions of the Government.

While leaders and senior leaders get opportunities to speak on the floor of the House as decided by their party leaders or the Chief Whips, this advantage is not as such enjoyed by other Members who serve as backbenchers. One reason is that any discussion or legislative measure has to be disposed of within the time allocated by the Business Advisory Committee or by the House.

In the Indian Parliament, no Members are officially referred to in any parliamentary terminology as ‘backbenchers’. This expression is however used in an informal manner. The distinction is made that on one side there are Ministers from the ruling party and senior leaders from the Opposition parties, and on the other side, there are all *other Members*. For the purpose of this article, all ‘other Members’ are being referred to as ‘backbenchers’.

By comparison, in the UK Parliament, ‘backbenchers’ are the Members of the House of Commons or Members of the House of Lords that are neither Government Ministers nor Opposition (or Shadow) spokespeople. These Members are so called because in the Chamber, they usually sit in the rows of benches behind their parties’ spokespeople, who are known as the ‘frontbenchers’.

During ethnographic research on the Indian Parliament, including interviews with Members of Parliament, it was found that backbenchers had many topical matters effecting their constituents which they wanted to raise on the floor of the House but lacked

the knowledge of parliamentary instruments to do so. The thrust of this article is to briefly outline the various parliamentary devices available to Members of the Indian Parliament, including those which benefit backbenchers. Parliamentary devices available to Members of UK Parliament are also briefly discussed.

As the focus of this article is to highlight those parliamentary devices which enable backbenchers to raise matters on the floor of the House, devices such as ‘Confidence’ and ‘No Confidence’ *Motions, Motions of Thanks on the President’s Address, and Discussions on the Budget* that are usually taken up by senior leaders of parties in Indian Parliament, have not been discussed.

Parliamentary Questions

This device of parliamentary questions includes Starred and Unstarred Questions as well as supplementary questions to Starred Questions and these can be utilised by all Members (which includes backbenchers too). In the Lok Sabha, as per the rules of procedure, unless the Speaker otherwise directs, the first hour (11.00 hrs to 12.00 hrs) is usually available for asking and answering questions. In Rajya Sabha, the Question Hour is usually from 12 noon to 1pm, unless the Chairman otherwise directs. In both Houses of Parliament, a *Starred Question* is one to which a Member desires an oral answer in the House and which is distinguished by an asterisk mark. When a Question is answered orally, supplementary questions can be asked thereon. The replies to the Starred Questions and supplementary ones are given by the Minister In-charge of the concerned Ministry in the House.

An *Unstarred Question* is one which is not called for oral answer in the House and on which no supplementary questions can consequently be asked. To such a question, a written answer is deemed to have been laid on the Table after the Question Hour by the Minister to whom it is addressed. It is printed in the official report of the sitting of the House for which it is put down.

A *Short Notice Question* is one which relates to a matter of urgent public importance and can be asked with shorter notice than the period of notice prescribed for an ordinary question. Like a starred question, it is answered orally followed by supplementary



Ravindra Garimella is Secretary to the Leader of the Opposition in Rajya Sabha at Parliament of India. Ravindra is a former Joint Secretary at Lok Sabha and has been involved in CPA activities for over 20 years. He has attended numerous CPCs and CPA seminars, written for *The Parliamentarian* many times, and contributed to the CPA Parliamentary Academy.

Professor Rochana Bajpai is a Professor of Politics at SOAS University of London.





PARLIAMENT AS A FORUM FOR SCRUTINY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The Parliament of India with the new Parliament Building in the foreground and the 'old' Parliament Building behind.

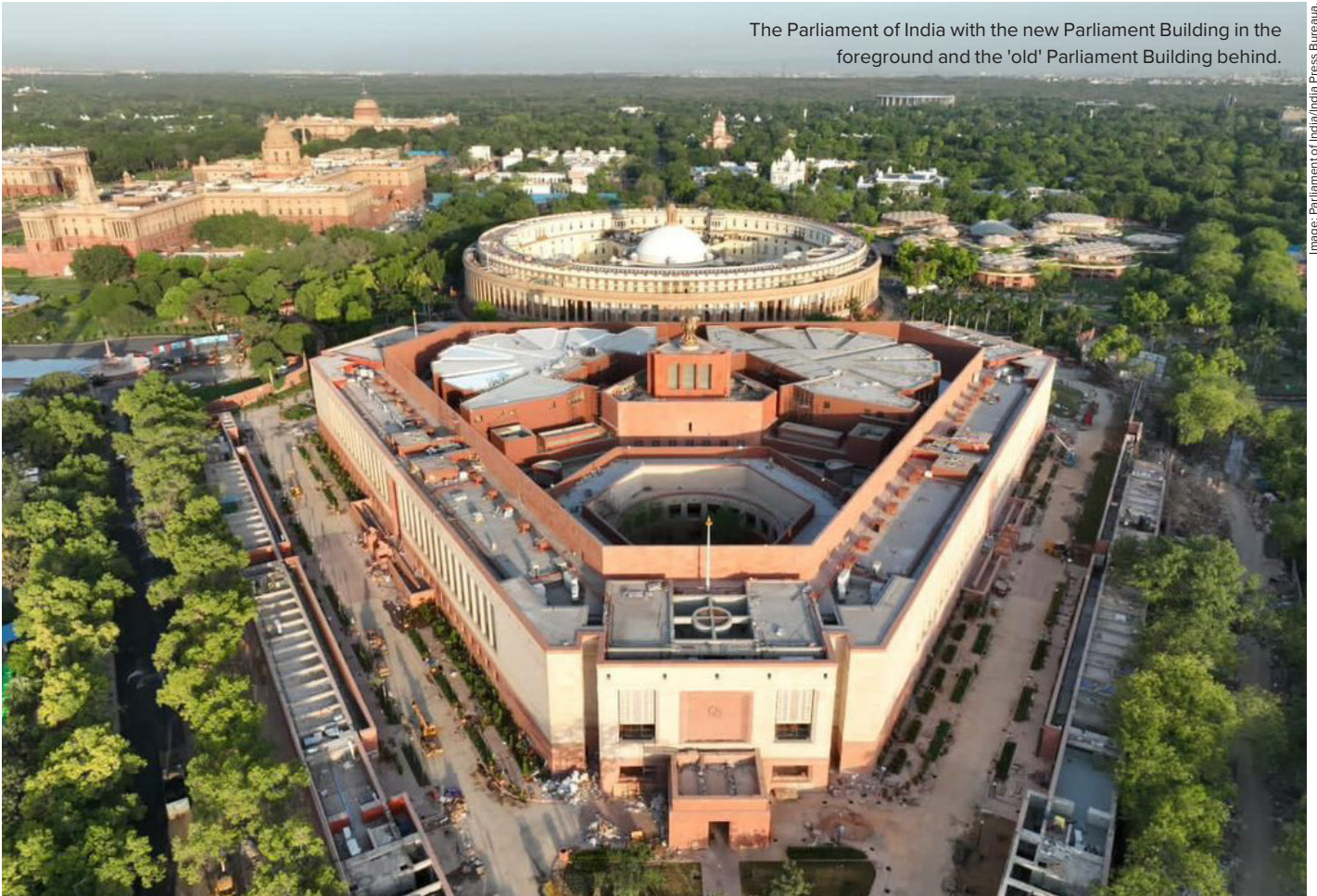


Image: Parliament of India/India Press Bureau.

questions. Short Notice Questions are taken up immediately after Question Hour is over. All questions are admitted /chosen through a ballot and all Members including backbenchers have the opportunity to raise these.

In the Indian Parliament, there isn't as such a solely dedicated Prime Minister's Question day. The practice is that all Ministries and Departments in the Government of India are classified in five groups and are distributed amongst the five working days in a week when Parliament is in Session, which are known as Question Days (of the concerned Ministry/Department). By convention, the Prime Minister's Office and Ministry/Departments under the charge of the Prime Minister are listed on Wednesdays in Lok Sabha and on Thursdays in Rajya Sabha. It is usually the Minister of State in-charge of the Departments under the Prime Minister who gives replies to the questions.

Half an Hour Discussions

Members can utilise this parliamentary device when they feel that the answer given to a question — Starred or Unstarred or Short Notice — is not complete or does not give the desired information or needs elucidation on a matter of fact. By giving notice at least 3 days in advance, Members may be allowed by the Speaker to raise a discussion in the House for half an hour. 'Half-an-Hours' are generally held on three sittings in a week. The reply to the discussion is given by the concerned Minister on the floor of the House.

Short Duration Discussions

This is one of the popular parliamentary devices in both Houses of Parliament. These provide an opportunity for backbenchers to express their views on a particular subject that is selected, if the discussion is admitted by the Presiding Officers.

A Member who wishes to raise a discussion on a matter of urgent public importance may give notice accompanied by an explanatory note stating their reasons and supported by the signatures of at least two other Members. The notices of Short Duration Discussion can be given immediately after summons for the Sessions are issued and are valid until the duration of the Session (unless these are disallowed earlier).

The discussions under Short Duration Discussion can continue for more than one day depending upon the number of Members who wish to speak on the subject. These discussions do not involve a formal motion before the House. Hence, no voting can take place after discussion on matters under this rule. The Member who raises the discussion has no right of reply. At the end of the discussion, the Minister concerned gives a brief reply.

Calling Attention

The concept of 'Calling Attention', which is an innovation in modern parliamentary procedure, is of Indian origin. This device was introduced in the Indian Parliament on 1 January 1954. This parliamentary device is very effective as in just 40 minutes or so, a



topical issue is able to be raised in the House with a response from the concerned Minister. Notices for 'Calling Attention' are required to be given on the last working day of a week and these are valid for the entire following week.

A Member may, with the prior permission of the Speaker, call the attention of a Minister to any matter of urgent public importance. The Minister concerned thereafter makes a statement.

Under the Rules, 'Calling Attention' matters can be raised on all working days in a week and not more than two 'Calling Attention' on a particular day. After the statement by Minister, each Member in whose name the item is listed, may with the permission of the Speaker ask a clarificatory question, and the Minister replies to all such questions at the end.

'Calling Attention' notices were admitted very frequently till the 14th Lok Sabha (2004-2009). However, since then, there has been a decline in the number of notices of 'Calling Attention' submitted as well as the admission of these notices for discussion in both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha.

Matters under Rule 377 in Lok Sabha

This procedural device provides an opportunity for Members to raise matters of general public interest. As many as 40 matters can be listed on a given day. The number of Members from a given party allowed to raise matters in this way is determined through a formula/quota system ascertained according to the respective strengths of different parties in the Lok Sabha. Members will have to give notices under Rule 377 between 10.00 hrs and 10.30 hrs on the last working day of the week for the following week. All such notices received during this period are deemed to have been received at the same point of time and a ballot is held to determine their *inter se* priority.

The Minister does not immediately respond to the matters in the House. However, a reply under the signature of the Minister is directly sent to the Member who has raised this matter within one month of the matter being raised in the House.

Special Mention under Rule 180A in Rajya Sabha

This rule is akin to matters under Rule 377 in Lok Sabha. Matters of public importance can be raised as 'Special Mention' in the Rajya Sabha (Upper Chamber in the Indian Parliament). A ballot is held to determine *inter se* the priority of names of Members and ten such matters are allowed to be raised on a given day. Notices remain 'live' for the week in which these were given. Ministers do not immediately respond to the 'Special Mentions' in the House. A written reply by the concerned Minister under his or her signatures is sent to the Member directly within one month of the matter being raised in the House. In the case of both 'Matters under Rule 377' in Lok Sabha and 'Special Mentions' in Rajya Sabha, a response of the Government has to be given to the Member within one month of the matter being raised.

Points of Order

A Point of Order can be raised by any Member (including backbenchers) with the permission of the Speaker or Presiding Officer. A Point of Order needs to relate to the interpretation or enforcement of the Rules of the House or such articles of the Constitution as regulate the business of the House.

A similar device exists in the UK House of Commons where a Point of Order is an appeal to the Speaker or their Deputy for clarification or for a ruling on a matter of procedure in the House. The Member of Parliament must explain their reasons for believing the rules of the House have been broken and the Speaker decides whether it is a valid Point of Order or not. Often, Members use this device to raise a complaint against a Minister or the Government.

'Zero Hour'

This is a unique Indian procedural innovation. As there is no requirement of notices for 'Zero Hour' in the Rules of Procedure in either House of Parliament, this device enables Members (including backbenchers) to raise matters of urgent topical interest on a day-to-day basis in the House at a very short notice with the permission of the Speaker or Presiding Officer. The emergence of 'Zero Hour' can be traced back to the 1960s, however this procedural arrangement began to have a more structured format during the 14th Lok Sabha (2004-2009). The 'Matters under Rule 377' in Lok Sabha and 'Special Mentions' in Rajya Sabha and the matters under the 'Zero Hour' are amongst the most popular parliamentary devices among Members of the Indian Parliament, particularly the backbenchers.

UK Parliamentary devices for backbench MPs

By way of comparison, we briefly outline some of the parliamentary devices available to backbenchers in the UK Parliament.

Backbench Business Committee

While in India there is no dedicated Committee for backbenchers, in the UK, following a recommendation in 2009 by the House of Commons Reform Committee (colloquially known as the 'Wright Committee' after its first Chair, UK MP Tony Wright), a Backbench Business Committee was established by the House of Commons with a view to giving adequate opportunities to backbenchers. The rationale of the House of Commons Reform Committee was to establish the Backbench Business Committee during a period of unprecedented crisis in public confidence in Parliament, largely due to the expenses scandal involving UK Members of Parliament at the time. Public dissatisfaction with the UK Parliament had soared to 71% in 2009 up from 30% in 2001.

The Committee sought to restore public trust by proposing structural changes to make the UK House of Commons more transparent, responsive to public concerns, and providing opportunities for effective scrutiny and accountability. It recognised the frustration among backbenchers regarding their limited influence and the burden of outdated procedures. Backbenchers play a crucial role in Parliament as representatives of their constituents, yet they often feel sidelined in decision-making processes. The report proposed reforms to empower them, such as separating Government control from House business and enhancing opportunities for backbench initiatives. By addressing the concerns of backbenchers, the Committee sought to rejuvenate the House of Commons and strengthen its democratic function.

Other parliamentary devices in the UK Parliament used by backbencher MPs include the following:

- **Early Day Motions (EDMs)** - these are motions submitted for debate in the House of Commons for which no day has been



PARLIAMENT AS A FORUM FOR SCRUTINY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

fixed. As there is no specific time allocated to EDMs very few are debated. However, many attract a great deal of public interest and media coverage. EDMs are used to put on record the views of individual MPs or to draw attention to specific events or campaigns, and by attracting the signatures of other MPs, they can be used to demonstrate the level of parliamentary support for a particular cause or point of view. Members can file as many EDMs as they wish.

- **Question Time** – this is an opportunity for MPs and Members of the House of Lords to question Government Ministers about matters for which they are responsible. These questions are asked at the start of business in both chambers and are known as 'oral questions'. Each government department answers questions according to a rota and questions asked must relate to the responsibilities of the government department concerned in the House of Commons while questions in the House of Lords are to the Government as a whole, not to particular government departments. Members may also be given the opportunity to ask a supplementary question which must relate to the same topic as the original question.
- **Prime Minister's Question Time** – an additional opportunity for backbenchers arises when the Prime Minister answers questions from Members in the House of Commons, chosen through a ballot every sitting Wednesday. The session normally starts with a routine question from an MP about the Prime Minister's engagements. This is known as an 'open question' and means that the MP can then ask a supplementary question on any subject. Most backbench MPs who have been chosen in the ballot will ask this open question which then allows them to ask a supplementary question on a different topic. The Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the second largest party are also called by the Speaker to ask questions to the Prime Minister.
- **Urgent Questions** - if an urgent matter arises which an MP believes requires an immediate answer from a Government Minister, they may apply to the Speaker to ask an urgent question in the House of Commons. Urgent Questions can be applied for on any sitting day, however it is at the discretion of the Speaker to decide if the question is of public importance. If an Urgent Question is granted, then the relevant Government Minister has to come to the Chamber to respond and this also offers other backbench MPs an opportunity to ask any supplementary questions in the Chamber at the discretion of the Speaker.
- **Ministerial statements** – these are a device for Government Ministers to bring an important matter to the attention of the House, often at short notice. This can include major incidents, government policies or actions. Once the Minister has made the statement then backbench Members have an opportunity to ask questions on its topic for an hour in the Chamber. Ministerial statements can take place in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords.
- **Written questions and answers** - In addition to oral questions, MPs and Peers can ask Government Ministers written questions. These are often used to obtain detailed information about policies and statistics on the activities of government departments. There are three main types of written parliamentary questions: '*Ordinary Questions*', '*Named Day*



Image: UK Parliament

Questions' and '*Oral Questions not answered during Question Time*'. '*Ordinary Questions*' are sent to the Government Minister and also appear on the Order Paper of the day. The convention is that the MP or Peer can expect it to be answered within seven days of the question being tabled. '*Named Day Questions*' only occur in the House of Commons and the MP tabling the question specifies the date on which they should receive an answer (with a minimum of two days' notice). '*Oral Questions not answered during Question Time*' record the questions originally tabled for oral answer that do not get answered at Question Time, which are then submitted to the Government department as written questions.

- **Adjournment debates** – these short 30-minute debates at the end of the sitting day are a way of enabling a debate to take place but without a question which the House must then decide. An individual backbench MP can raise a particular issue and receive a response from the relevant Government Minister. Applications for Adjournment debates are made to the Speakers Office. In the House of Lords, this is termed '*Questions for Short Debate*' and they allow for a short debate that lasts for up to one-and-a-half hours.

Conclusion

Parliamentary devices available to MPs in the Indian Parliament are regulated by detailed '*Rules of Procedure for the Conduct of Business*' for each House. In the UK Parliament, it is mainly Standing Orders which regulate the parliamentary devices available to Members.

From a comparative standpoint, the Indian Parliament's innovations of '*Calling attention motions*', and '*Zero hour*' are useful procedural devices that can enable backbench MPs to scrutinize the Executive. Similarly, UK parliamentary devices such as '*Early Day Motions*' could be adapted to increase the opportunities open to MPs in the Indian Parliament. The adoption of a Backbenchers Committee similar to the kind instituted in Westminster would also strengthen the position of backbench MPs in the Indian Parliament. It is hoped that our account will prompt further studies and assist backbench MPs in the scrutiny of the Executive and its accountability to the Legislature.



MAKING SOUTH AFRICA'S TRANSPORT SYSTEM ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL ITS CITIZENS

This case study shows how policy implementation and practical application need to coincide to deliver the best results for people with disabilities.

South Africa hosted a Transport Summit on Universal Accessibility in April 2024 where the Minister of the Department of Transport presented an Action Plan, 'Accessible transport for all', a series of resolutions and commitments¹ to people with disabilities, transport officials across all the spheres of government, transport operators and other government stakeholders in attendance.

The Action Plan spans the forthcoming period between 2024 and 2030. It commits the Department to make all forms of transport accessible to people with disabilities, whether transport trips are taken by walking, cycling, minibus taxi, regular taxi, e-hailing service, bus, coach, train, boat or plane. This is already required in the national Constitution of South Africa and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which South Africa signed in 2007 including the optional protocol.

This article explains the journey that the South African Department of Transport took to get to the Summit and complete its action plan.

South Africa is burdened with an inaccessible transport system. In 2019, the President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa called the Minister of Transport and other Ministers to answer questions from the Presidential Working Group on Disability² on inaccessibility across all sectors and services. The Presidential Working Group on Disability (PWGD) developed a concept paper on the travel experiences of people with disabilities. It covered transport that people with disabilities use or try to use daily; walking, minibuses, buses, trains and e-hailing services. Transport services such as these are 'bread and butter' transport. If we are unable to use them to get to and from the activities that we participate in daily, we are seriously disabled by their inaccessibility and lack of reasonable accommodation.

The South African Department of Transport put in place an ambitious programme to transform these forms of transport in daily use in 1999, resulting from research undertaken in the early years of democracy. Legislation was developed, strategies written and white papers published. Yet implementation did not take place, the bus did not seem to arrive.

In 2010, as a result of the FIFA™ Football World Cup, the Department of Transport developed a series of 12 pilot projects that would take place in the largest cities in the country. Together, these cities account for about half the national population of South Africa and transport accessibility in these cities would make a significant impact on the lives of people with disabilities in the country. These cities were requested by the Department of Transport to formulate



Image: South African Department of Transport.

Above: The Minister of Transport, Ms Sindisiwe Chikunga officiated at the National Transport Summit on Universal Accessibility (JA) which was held from 25 to 26 April 2024 in Gauteng, South Africa.

integrated public transport networks (IPTNs), covering both new Bus Rapid Transport and Quality Bus Services, and existing forms of rail, bus, and minibus taxi services, with new forms of transport contracts with operators. For passengers, all services would be universally accessible, including walking and cycling.

In 2014, another city requested to join the programme, George, in the Western Cape. It presented convincing research as to why it should do so, and in partnership with the Province, was able to roll out its universally accessible public transport system faster than any of the other cities. Through the public transport system, it has now been able to join the largest suburb, where mostly black South African's reside, with the rest of the city that the transport system has already connected; the suburbs that predominantly houses residents who are coloured or white. There are still some outstanding rural areas to connect, the coastal villages and the airport. Nevertheless, 80% of the city has now been joined together, for the first time.

Other cities have made some progress towards the same goal, Johannesburg was the first city to connect its suburb of Soweto by a formalized bus service to the centre of town. It is a far larger city than George with a far more complex public transport system. Nevertheless, the entire transport system is still not accessible to everyone. The other IPTN cities are Ekurhuleni, Tshwane, Polokwane, Rustenburg, Mangaung, eThekweni, Nelson Mandela Bay and Cape Town. All have made progress, some more than

Amanda Gibberd is the Director of Universal Design and Universal Access (UDA) at the South African Department of Transport. With additional research by Khibi Manana and Tebogo Elias Rankoe.



IMPLEMENTING ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORT SYSTEMS IN SOUTH AFRICA

others. Three cities were suspended in 2020 and one of those, Msunduzi, has now become more stable and can be readmitted to the programme.

The description above shows that there are complications in a simple idea such as an accessible transport system that connects an entire city. The country's checkered past is suddenly present. Dealing with transport means that we deal with the complexities of social integration, including the history of discrimination which did not leave when democracy replaced apartheid. Even the words used in this article with reference to race may be uncomfortable to some reading it although they are widely accepted terms, nationally. Nevertheless, the Department of Transport recognises that a cohesive society remains an illusive goal when some people remain deprived, and that it is impossible to conceptualize deprivation without including universal accessibility.

People with disabilities are a uniting force in our common humanity. Disability is an experience of the human condition regardless of race, gender or any other social marker of difference. We are united in disability, and as we age, we will all become disabled. It is our future, and it is why an accessible transport system is such an important part of a transformed city, however difficult it may be to change current planning and practice.

The dissatisfaction with the lack of progress expressed by the Presidential Working Group on Disability resulted in a concept note being presented to the Department of Transport by the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities. On receiving it, the Department of Transport realised that it had received complaints from people with disabilities in all these daily modes of travel, as well as people using cars, trains, planes and boats. Given the Constitutional right to Freedom of Movement, the Department had a responsibility to consider transport in its totality and not limited to certain forms of transport used in the IPTNs alone. The President then announced in December 2022, that the Department of Transport would be hosting a Summit on universal accessibility, presenting a conundrum to the departmental officials responsible for universal accessibility in public transport.

Departmental officials approached the Minister and requested that before hosting a Summit, the Department host an internal 'roundtable' to discuss the inaccessibility of all modes of transport that fell under the responsibilities of different branches. To add to the institutional complexity, the functions of different branches now fall under the jurisdiction of several agencies, resulting in an extremely large 'transport family' of different spheres of government at national, provincial and municipal level, and their state-owned agencies.

The issues illustrated through the example of the city of George, demonstrate the partnerships between government departments and stakeholders needed for policy implementation affecting the built environment and digital technology. Spatial transformation of which transport is a small part, is a far bigger conceptual challenge.



Above: The South African President, His Excellency Cyril Ramaphosa spoke at the National Transport Summit on Universal Accessibility (UA).

The experience of this challenge is felt daily by the residents of each city, town and village, especially people with disabilities living in them.

The Department of Transport used the Transport Roundtable held on 26th and 27 October 2023, to consider the problems that the Presidential Working Group on Disability's concept note raised, and the other complaints about transport inaccessibility received. Piecing together the achievements that support universally accessible transport and identifying legislation, policy or strategy that has assisted with implementation despite the difficulties, the Department's officials concluded the Roundtable with a greater sense of responsibility, an understanding of their role in solving this far bigger challenge and an outline of the Action Plan to be presented at the Summit.

The Department of Transport held the Transport Summit on Universal Accessibility, in partnership with the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, on 25 and 26 April 2024, six months after the Roundtable. Some of the key issues and commitments mentioned by both the President and the Ministers of Transport and Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities are in response to walking, cycling and minibus taxi use. These are:

Hon. Sidsiwe Chikunga, Minister of Transport, Republic of South Africa: *"Transport is key to the normal functioning of every society, and it is at the heart of social and economic development. After several years of gathering information from complaints ... The Department of Transport has hosted (an online travel) survey for two years, 2023 and 2024. In addition, the Department participated in an online platform for parents with children with disabilities with nearly 800 members. The greatest concerns were minibus taxi and bus accessibility and walking.*

The survey results demonstrate that forms of transport remain a challenge for people with disabilities, where they can use them, from either a point of accessibility or cost. Crime and the fear of vulnerability is a growing barrier to people with disabilities and their families. It prevents them from using transport and makes

Image: Parliament of India/India Press Bureau.



them prisoners in their own homes. The treatment of people with disabilities on public transport by operators and their staff has emerged as a concern in these surveys.

The survey results also echoed other survey results from women who also expressed their concern about the fear and reality of gender-based violence on public transport, which was documented by the Department from 2016 to 2018. Accessibility concerns were registered across all the modes of transport which include roads, rail, aviation and maritime.”

Hon. Cyril Matamela Ramaphosa, President of the Republic of South Africa: “The National Land Transport Act requires universal access as a minimum requirement in forms of land-based public transport. Despite this enabling legislation there are still many areas where a lot more work is needed to make the national transport system fully accessible. There is an acknowledgement that transport is not sufficiently accessible to all categories of passengers, including persons with disabilities. This must change. We have to address issues of safety and accessibility of the learner transport system. We have to address similar issues in the taxi industry, which transports around 70% of the South African population and is the dominant mode of public transport.

Walking and cycling should not cost anyone their life. It requires a change in the behaviour of drivers and in the culture of enforcement. Solutions cannot be designed in offices far away, but must be developed in direct response to user needs. I have great hopes for this conference and its outcomes. The goal of a universally accessible national transport system is not only within reach. It is also a vital part of our efforts to build a South Africa that truly belongs to all who live in it.”

Departmental officials are very aware of the weight of responsibility on them to ensure that the Action Plan is implemented

within the timelines provided. The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), signed in 2015, also commit to implement accessible transport under Goal 11 on inclusive cities by 2030. The burden of transport accessibility is a burden shared by the other 190 countries that have signed the UN SDGs. Investment in transport accessibility should be a concern to all of the Commonwealth nations that have already signed it. The standards, regulations and implementation mechanisms governing public transport on land, sea and air, are of joint interest to all governments of the Commonwealth, and particularly Parliamentarians with disabilities in all Commonwealth countries and territories.

Officials of the Department for Transport in the United Kingdom provided clear strategic direction on transport universal accessibility to the Department of Transport in South Africa between 2010 and 2020, through relationships between responsible government officials, with grateful thanks. Partnerships and relationships of this nature are an important part of understanding how to tackle the enormity of transport inaccessibility. Communities such as the Commonwealth can encourage and support these relationships to make more accessible transport happen, faster.

References:

- ¹ The statement of commitment and resolutions of the Transport Summit on Universal Accessibility is available on the Department of Transport website, www.transport.gov.za.
- ² The Presidential Working Group on Disability (PWGD) is a working group of people with disabilities who are recognised experts in their field. They are national representatives of the broadest range of organisations of and for people with disabilities; hand-picked to raise strategic concerns affecting people with disabilities with the President of South Africa.
- ³ A record of the meeting is available on *You Tube* at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8_cAQSfyat4.



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GO BESPOKE: DEVELOPING A WEB-BASED VOTING APP FOR SMALL PARLIAMENTS

Guernsey’s Legislature provide an interesting case study of how they developed a bespoke new voting app.

The historic tradition of using the French language for votes in Guernsey’s Legislature provided an interesting background to the development of a bespoke new voting app. Parliaments and Parliamentarians are partial to traditions particularly when it comes to how they vote, whether it is going into a division lobby, a rising vote or pressing a button on a desk. Whether votes are item by item or held all at once at the end of the session (a Scottish innovation), voting and how it is done is part of any assembly’s self-understanding.

Guernsey, together with its sister island Jersey, has had a direct and unique historic relationship with the Crown of England since 1204, which has enabled it to develop its own laws and taxation system. However, its proximity to continental Normandy means for most of its history French has been the language of the Parliament and the legal system. French remains one of the two official languages of the Assembly but in practice is now only used for prayers, the roll call of Members at the beginning of each days sitting and for voting.

In the Royal Court House in Guernsey where the Island’s Parliament meets, The States of Deliberation (the States) have sat for over two hundred years, and its voting was, until 2022, chiefly carried out by way of a called vote known as an *Appel Nominal*, a term which will be familiar to Canadians, but which is unlikely to resonate with Parliamentarians from other parts of the Commonwealth. A proposition was put to Members by the Presiding Officer with those in favour being invited to shout “*Pour*” (Aye) and those against being invited to shout “*Contre*” (Noe). The outcome then rested with the Presiding Officer, who would decide on the basis of volume who had won and who had lost. In the event of a shouted vote being too close for that distinction easily to be drawn a recorded vote, the *Appel Nominal*, would then be taken, either at the direction of the Presiding Officer or at the request of a Member. The Clerk would then read out a register of all those present and able to vote with each Member answering either *Pour* or *Contre* or in the case of a deliberate abstention “*Je ne vote pas*” (“*I do not vote*”). A stressful hiatus for the Clerk followed while the basic arithmetic was worked out and checked before the result of the division was announced by the Presiding Officer. The average time



Image: Guernsey States Assembly.

for voting in this way in an Assembly of forty Members was between three and four minutes.

In the simpler environment of twenty years ago when most divisions went on the shout and calls for a recorded votes were the exception rather than the rule the *Appel Nominal* was a picturesque and effective way of establishing, when necessary, which way the Assembly had voted and how individual Members had voted. The *Appel* was part of the Assembly’s tradition. With the passage of time however, an ever-increasing amount of parliamentary business and an information revolution that made it more important than ever for the public to see how their Members had voted, calls for propositions to be put to a recorded vote became the default position for most of the matters that were put to the Assembly. A system that had worked well for two hundred years began to seem antiquated and unfit for purpose. Measures brought before the States containing twenty or more individual propositions were often taking up to an hour to vote on. Amendments, procedural motions and even decisions as to whether to curtail the lunch recess were being resolved by a lengthy *Appel Nominal*. These problems were aggravated by the fact that in the States the great majority of



Simon Ross was educated at London University, Nottingham Law School and the University of Caen. He was appointed Greffier (Clerk) of the States of Deliberation in Guernsey in 2020, following many years of service at the States Assembly in several different roles. His association with the CPA goes back over twenty years since he attended his first CPA event, a Regional Conference for the CPA British Islands and Mediterranean Region in 2000.



Members sit as independents, there is virtually no party system and no whipping.

In 2012, a successful *Requête* (Private Members' Bill) secured the 'in principal' agreement of the States to the introduction of a system of simultaneous electronic voting. A decade of meetings, stops, starts, Committee papers and discussions followed until in February 2022 the States approved concrete proposals for the introduction of Simultaneous Electronic Voting (SEV).

During this period, the options considered for digital voting included hand wired voting buttons in the Chamber, voting handsets, voting tablets and an online voting system or app. In some ways Guernsey's delayed engagement with the world of electronic voting enabled the Assembly to take a bold approach. A resolution to go for digital voting twenty years ago would certainly have resulted in buttons being installed on Members' desks. Late arrival to the digital voting world meant that the States were able to go for the very latest technology, the online voting system or app.

Having decided on a web-based approach a local company was engaged to develop a bespoke web-based app for use by the States of Deliberation. The app had to take into account three necessary factors; the needs of the voting Members of the States and their Presiding Officers; the requirements of the parliamentary staff who would be responsible for the administration of the system; and the viewing needs of the public.

The voting app was launched on 8 September 2022, which as it turned out was a poor choice of date, as this was the day on which HM Queen Elizabeth II died. There have been difficulties along the way, not least in the early days with an unforeseen need to strengthen Wi-Fi connectivity in the Chamber, however in terms of efficiency and transparency the app has proved to be, in the two years since its introduction, a decisive success changing the Assembly for ever. The principal reason for this success is down to the high quality and intuitive design provided by the software engineers. Other Parliaments, particularly small ones considering upgrading or redesigning their own voting systems may wish to note the following essential features of the Guernsey app.

Members log into the app using their existing States of Guernsey log-in details. The system is not device specific so Members can use any device on which to vote whether it is their own or a government provided one, whether it is a laptop, a smart phone or a tablet. This ensures flexibility.

The system enables the Clerk to upload all known propositions in advance of a debate but also to respond during the meeting to any further propositions such as amendments that may be submitted. Built into the design are functionalities for a full range of parliamentary circumstances. Propositions and motions can all rapidly be moved, grouped, revised and deleted during debate. Members themselves do not need to perform any actions as the interface controlled by the Clerk will change automatically for them with prompts appearing on Members' screens for the items under discussion.

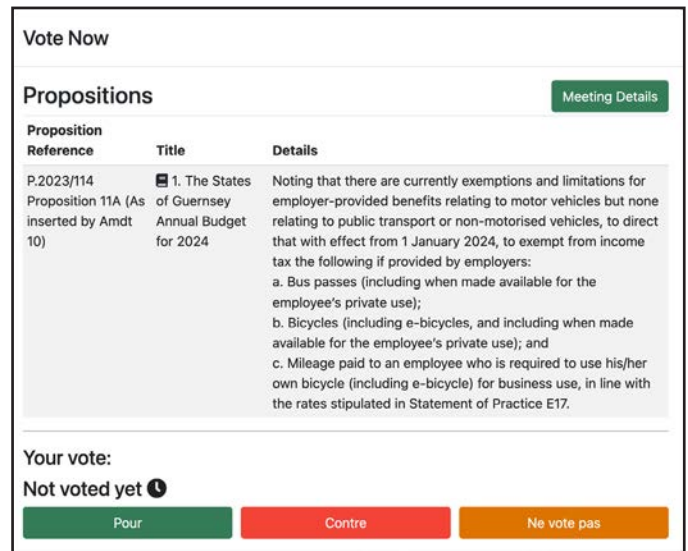


Image: Guernsey States Assembly.

Above: The Guernsey Voting App as it appears to Members.

To vote, Members click on the "pour", "contre" or "je ne vote pas" buttons. The system confirms how they have voted and allows them to change their vote up until the vote closes, usually about twenty seconds. The Presiding Officer declares the vote orally before the result appears on Members' devices. The result of the vote is also then immediately available to the public and is sortable alphabetically or by how Members voted. It is also simultaneously available pictorially on the parliamentary website with a pie chart showing the breakdown of the vote. In addition, the Clerk has the ability immediately to publish the result on social media. All votes in the States, with the exception of simple procedural motions including the guillotine, are now taken in this way. Not only has this system delivered in terms of parliamentary time saved and immediacy of information available, it has also had the unsought but considerable benefit of imposing through its rapid adaptability to whatever situation is before the Assembly, a coherence and structure to the living organism of a sitting, which in past in the heat of debate, these sessions did not always have.

Bespoke has worked very well for Guernsey. The system itself is complex but like the best bespoke the presentation to the outside world is one of understatement and simplicity. Also like the best bespoke the app is a good fit and can always be taken back to the tailor for letting out or taking in. The States are a distinctive Parliament where nearly all Members sit as independents and off the shelf solutions to the voting problem would have been a poor fit for the way in which the States conduct their business. As Commonwealth Parliaments evolve and develop their own ways of doing things that diverge from the Westminster model, bespoke solutions for the digitisation of key Chamber activities are the most effective way ahead.

“The Guernsey app had to take into account three necessary factors; the needs of the voting Members and the Presiding Officers; the requirements of the parliamentary staff who would be responsible for the administration of the system; and the viewing needs of the public.”



DOES ELECTION OBSERVATION MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Examining evidence from the Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories Election Observation Missions in light of a new report from the CPA British Islands and Mediterranean Region.

Election observation has become big business. Every year, the industry disperses its small army of technical experts across the world to monitor election campaigns and attend polling stations. They are frequently joined by politicians and other dignitaries who add a sense of gravitas to the delegation. Observers interview key leaders and officials. They hold press conferences and provide briefings. They attend hustings. Indicators are measured. Reports are drafted and tabled. Recommendations are made. Then the coterie packs up and moves on to the next country or jurisdiction to begin the process again. At which point, it is not unreasonable to wonder - especially if you are an official in the host country that often foots the not-inconsiderable bill - whether the whole exercise was worth it.

The question of value is important, despite (or perhaps because of) its nebulousness. Effectiveness can mean many things to many people, making it difficult to define what impact is, let alone measure or compare it to the outcomes of other observer missions. One simple yardstick is the extent to which recommendations are adopted, but this reinforces the point: a well-worn cliché amongst insiders is that the findings of observation reports are nearly always ignored. Elites may pay lip service to them publicly, but - especially in large and politically fractured societies - they rarely occasion a serious cabinet discussion, and even less frequently result in substantive electoral reform. As one veteran of the observation circuit commented to us: *“you’re lucky if you can get one half of one recommendation implemented”*.

But, if that is the typical impact of all of this effort, what, exactly, is the point of such a costly endeavour? The academic consensus is that election observation offers two main benefits. The first is legitimisation: host countries agree to be observed because it enables them to bolster their claim - to their publics first and foremost, but also the international community - that the election is free, fair, genuine and credible. The second is advocacy: the international community gets a chance to make recommendations that assist local activists in their bid to improve democratic accountability. The first rationale justifies the cost. The second the effort.

The Commonwealth has long been in the business of election observation. But the Crown Dependencies (CDs) and Overseas Territories (OTs) are relative newcomers to this practice. There

are several reasons for this. One is that election observation as we know it today is a product of decolonisation. Departing metropolitan powers retained an interest - and some would say an obligation - in the functioning of government in their former colonies. Monitoring elections was a way of enabling them to pass comment on politics more broadly, and gently intervene if necessary. But the CDs and OTs were not, strictly speaking, independent, so these subtleties were not required when metropolitan oversight was omnipresent. Another reason was that these jurisdictions are very small and so the cost of observation seemed excessive.

Times have changed. Between 2011 and 2023, the CPA British Islands and Mediterranean Region (BIMR) has conducted 18 observations in the Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories. The larger, wealthier jurisdictions generally paid for these observations themselves; others were supported by the UK through the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). Laudably, CPA BIMR felt that, after more than a decade of work, it was time to take stock and engage with the “value” question. So, they engaged us - two academics then based at the Universities of Sheffield and Southampton respectively, and also Co-Directors of the London-based thinktank, the ODI Resilient and Sustainable Islands Initiative (RESI) - via the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) to undertake an independent evaluation. Crucially, we were not paid consultants, but drew on our academic and policy expertise to generate new research about, and a deep analysis of, the observation process in these distinctive territories.

To do so, we first read all the reports, alongside the relevant academic literature, which, perhaps unsurprisingly - and, in our view, somewhat revealingly - does not generally focus on these small non-sovereign jurisdictions, something that we consider a significant and problematic oversight. We then interviewed numerous observers who had been on mission previously and officials from the various jurisdictions to find out when and how recommendations were developed and implemented (or not). We did many virtual interviews, both with individuals and groups of experts, while also participating in events organised by the CPA UK Branch: e.g. sitting in as delegations from these jurisdictions undertook training at Westminster. We also visited three of them ourselves: Jersey, during the 2022 election, to *“observe the*

Matthew Bishop is Senior Lecturer in International Politics at the University of Sheffield, UK. **Jack Corbett** is Professor of Politics and Head of the School of Social Sciences at Monash University, Australia. Between them, they have undertaken academic research in almost every country in the Caribbean and Pacific, and published well over 100 pieces - books, peer-reviewed articles, reports, policy briefs and op-eds - on issues pertaining to small-island politics, governance, democracy and development. They also co-direct, with a number of other colleagues, the Resilient and Sustainable Islands Initiative (RESI) based at ODI in London.



Image: CPA BIMR.

observers” at work; the Cayman Islands, in January 2023, between elections; and the British Virgin Islands (BVI), in July 2023, shortly after an election. The following outlines some of the key points that we found (distilled from the longer report published by CPA BIMR in March 2024).

Assessing CPA BIMR Election Observation

Election observation in the CDs and OTs is overwhelmingly valuable and effective. In all likelihood, CPA BIMR election observation is actually among the *most effective* in the world, precisely because these jurisdictions take the process very seriously and do implement some - and sometimes many - of the recommendations. Indeed, it is not uncommon for the host territory to discuss *most* or *all* of them in cabinet, even implementing the lion’s share of them on occasion. In some cases, the recommendations stimulate deeper reform agendas, with reform proceeding beyond - and sometimes far beyond - the suggestions made by the observers.

There are a number of reasons for this, and they stem, first and foremost, from the legitimacy rationale outlined above. The CDs have developed incredible wealth via offshore finance sectors that want to know that these havens are safe and secure. A successful independent election observation is one small way of reassuring the industry and its international client base that governance arrangements are appropriate. The same is true for many OTs, with the added incentive that, in the Caribbean, in particular, the prospect of direct intervention in local governance by the UK is real, as evidenced historically in Turks and Caicos and more recently in BVI. The legitimacy rationale is thus much stronger for these jurisdictions than other countries and this can help explain why they take the reports so seriously.

However, this is not the only impact that observations have. As above, advocacy is important, too. Specifically, running a democracy with a small population - and, in the case of many OTs, a considerably smaller “belonger” population with the right to vote - embodies unique challenges that election observation can help to overcome. One is that meaningful public debate can be difficult in tiny jurisdictions where “*everybody knows everybody*”. Having an outside observer present can create a temporary space for small and often beleaguered civil society organisations to raise awareness of their issues. Likewise, political reform is often difficult to stimulate in insular, and, to some extent, conservative communities. Election observation can nudge it along, amplifying the voices and demands of reformers in their Sisyphean struggles. It can also raise awareness of international best practice and provide important training and skills transfer for local officials and the wider community. The upshot of our assessment is that election observation for the CDs and OTs is unquestionably both positive and extensive. In fact, these jurisdictions might be among the few cases in the world where the impact is as clear and obvious.

That does not mean it is without problems, though, all of which are also a function of small population size (and, to a lesser extent, non-sovereignty) and the tacit assumption that international best practice can be straightforwardly translated to these distinctive jurisdictions. We have both dedicated our careers to studying small islands: it is no overstatement to remark that almost all of the dominant assumptions that pervade our understanding of democratic politics - in academic, policy and public debate alike - are, at root, distilled from the experiences of a handful of large countries. Democracy is seen to be synonymous with what happens at Westminster, meaning that the theoretical norm is often conflated



ELECTION OBSERVATION IN THE COMMONWEALTH

with (or reduced to) “actually existing” practice in places like the UK that may well be exceptional in comparative terms. It barely needs saying that, at best, this offers only a partial picture. At worst, it renders the experiences of large parts of the world aberrant, reinforcing the notion that they are problems to be solved by making them more like the dominant cases (rather than the inverse).

This matters, because an implicit assumption underpinning the observation process in small, non-sovereign jurisdictions is that they can and should be a bit more like the bigger, sovereign states that inform the expectations of international best practice. To be clear: we are not saying that this conventional wisdom is always wrong. But we are saying that, because it assumes, almost by definition, that reform agendas should follow the idealised form embodied in the various international handbooks that guide the observation industry, it can sometimes be blind to the dynamics underpinning local political practices that are explicable in their own terms. These may appear problematic to outsiders, but when recommendations are made to upend them - based on an international consensus that was never shaped by or for small states - those ostensibly pro-democratic reform agendas can have counter-productive effects. Moreover, these can be magnified dramatically in tiny polities: even seemingly innocuous reforms - such as equalising constituency boundaries - can have enormous consequences for democratic legitimacy in places where elections may turn on, quite literally, a handful of votes.

This in turn generates a number of dilemmas for actors involved in the process. For CPA BIMR, the key dilemmas are:

- (i) can they apply international best practice while maintaining local credibility;
- (ii) how long does the mission need to be to generate genuine insight;
- (iii) is this just a narrow observation of a discrete election or a broader audit of the political system;
- (iv) are they neutral observers or the unwitting hostage of specific local interests and agendas;
- (v) and how do they manage the career incentives of their sector specialists - saying everything is fine is unlikely to land them their next contract in another country - versus the “do no harm” imperative?

Tying these dilemmas together, it seemed to us that the big tension coalesces around the third issue: even the narrowest “technical” recommendations inevitably reach deeply into a small society’s political system, implying that this is about more than just elections. The jurisdictions involved also face analogous dilemmas when being observed, which reflect the difficult business of balancing the expectations of international best practice with minimising harm through disruptive reforms. These manifest themselves in questions about whether:

- (i) inherited Westminster institutions are best suited to the imperatives of conducting democracy in a very small population;
- (ii) the desire to create an inclusive franchise in a context where significant migration can lead to a loss of local control on the part of “belongers”;



Image: CPA BIMR.

Above: During the election observation in Jersey, report author Matthew Bishop is pictured along with Wes Howell, the Cayman Islands Supervisor of Elections.

(iii) the need to maintain international legitimacy while at the same time ensuring the democratic system is viewed as credible by domestic publics;

(iv) the related problem of balancing domestic autonomy versus the UK’s “red lines” and the potential threat of direct intervention; and

(v) the desire to create political parties that larger countries would recognise in a context where independent candidates are entrenched, highly visible and successful.

These tensions are not by any means fatal to the processes and practices that are currently in place. However, they do provide cause to pause and reflect on whether CPA BIMR’s processes might be improved in such a way that would further enhance their effectiveness.

What next for CPA BIMR Election Observation?

Let us start by reiterating the main takeaway message for CPA BIMR and their funders: that election observation is unquestionably worth the cost and effort. They are having a hugely positive impact. Their product adds value, both because it bolsters an industry - financial services - that is crucial to the viability of many of these jurisdictions, but also because it can lead to genuine pro-democratic reform. Indeed, there is a sizeable market for this product amongst reform-minded actors within the jurisdictions themselves who are frustrated with what they see as often-ossified and even archaic political systems and practices where change occurs glacially.

But this also reinforces our earlier point: these missions are not - indeed, cannot be - just about elections. They are unavoidably political, and arguably they need to be, explicitly so, for their full impact to be realised. It may well be CPA BIMR’s work in this area is both more effective than other election observations and other types of interventions attempted by the UK to improve governance because they play to the incentives already embedded in the local political economy. Audits are part and parcel of participating in the financial services sector. When understood as an audit of



government function, an election observation is part of the price of doing business.

But there are ways in which the missions could be made more effective. Our report makes three broad suggestions for further consideration by CPA BIMR to better serve its stakeholders in the Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories.

First, slightly longer missions and the incorporation of local experts into missions in some form could increase the deep contextual knowledge of observation teams and thus ensure that recommendations are based on “best fit” as well as “best practice”. This is especially important because there is a real likelihood that recommendations will be implemented if they make sense in local, as well as international, terms.

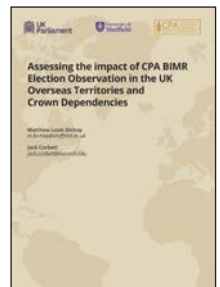
Second, the tension between narrow election observation and broader systemic audit could be resolved decisively in favour for the latter, with the work of the mission teams taking place alongside a more robust programme of ongoing governance assessments and support for, especially, election supervisors.

Third, CPA BIMR should invest in creating best-practice guidelines for undertaking observations in small, non-sovereign territories to better balance the demands of international best practice with the realities of insular island politics, thereby helping to render the dominant global common sense more inclusive.

This latter point is especially important - certainly in terms of our own obsessions - because the small, non-sovereign island context shapes almost everything about these election observations: it explains why they are so important; why they are so impactful; and why they can, at times, generate unintended consequences when off-the-shelf solutions are recommended without due consideration for the ways in which their function will be altered by size.

CPA BIMR is thus well placed to recognise this unique contextual specificity and to shape international best practice in ways that properly acknowledge and account for how democracy functions differently in different settings. As a result, it is almost too obvious a point to make that election observation should consequently be tailored to the needs of the societies involved and their desires for better governance rather than a one-size fits all process that can, by definition, never fit every polity in the world in the same way.

The final report ‘*Assessing the impact of CPA BIMR Election Observation in the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies*’ was published in March 2024 and is available from the CPA UK website www.uk-cpa.org.



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DEVELOPING A CODE OF CONDUCT FOR PARLIAMENT: A CASE STUDY FROM THE GAMBIA

The National Assembly of The Gambia recently approved a new Code of Conduct for Members. This article sets out how it was developed and achieved with assistance from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA).

Introduction

Parliament with its core functions of legislation, oversight and representation is critical for effective democratic governance. The ability of a Legislature to perform these functions depends not only on its technical capacity but also its legitimacy. Legitimacy, on the other hand, depends on people's perception of the institution of Parliament, and Parliamentarians, as acting in the public interest instead of private or partisan political interests. Thus, it is widely agreed that Parliaments should foster integrity, legitimacy and citizens' confidence.¹

The general perception of elected representatives has been adversely affected by some allegations of ethical misconduct and misbehaviour towards the integrity of the institution of Parliament. Ethical failings and the misconduct of Parliamentarians, especially in their own Assembly, may have the negative impact of undermining the legitimacy of the institution that is responsible for holding the Government to account. Essentially, "any form of legislative misconduct undermines the public trust in the democratic system", threatening its legitimacy and, by consequence, its survival.²

A study by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) noted that public trust in Parliamentarians and in Government is declining in many advanced democracies, while in some developing democracies such trust is even yet to be established. Thus, it is opined that attempts to build up the public trust in the institution of Parliament and to strengthen the integrity and transparency in governance systems is urgently required to consolidate and strengthen democratic institutions. Thus, the efficacy of codes of conduct or ethics should be considered, particularly for Parliamentarians, in fostering ethical behaviour and conduct among those to whom it applies. Generally, it is agreed that codes of conduct or ethics may be instrumental in combating corruption as well as increasing public trust.³

Why develop a code of conduct for Parliamentarians?

Parliamentarians are entrusted with significant power and responsibility in a democratic society and as such, must demonstrate

the highest ethical standards and conduct in the exercise of their mandate as people's representatives. As suggested in the CPA *Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures*, Parliaments should encourage values around ethical governance, and in particular, "maintain a high standard of accountability, transparency, responsibility, and propriety in the conduct of all public and parliamentary matters including strict adherence to codes of conduct, and interest disclosure rules."⁴

Essentially, a code of conduct is important in every professional or working setting, be it in a public or private institution, most especially in representative institutions. Thus, the institution of Parliament is not an exception to establishing an ethical regime to regulate the behaviour and conduct of its Members, especially in a setting where Members come together with the same mandate and power under one roof of authority. In The Gambia, a fundamental constitutional principle imposes responsibility on Members of the National Assembly to maintain the dignity of the Legislature both during the sittings of the Assembly and in their acts and activities outside it.⁵

The allegations of misconduct or inappropriate behaviour by Parliamentarians may be common in many countries. This has contributed to low public trust in Legislatures in general, including their legitimacy to effectively hold the Executive to account. In the face of examples of inappropriate behaviours and other misconduct, parliamentary codes of conduct can set benchmarks for acceptable behaviour against the values of integrity, honesty, impartiality and objectivity, as well as providing clarity on ambiguous aspects of the law. Codes of conduct contribute to professionalising politics and enhancing public trust in Parliaments, allowing Parliamentarians to demonstrate high levels of ethical behaviour.⁶

It is believed that a code of conduct serves as an institutional measure and check on Members of Parliament in their individual and fundamental responsibilities for the functioning and integrity of the institution of Parliament. These responsibilities include upholding the ideals of democratic governance, of the separation of powers and the rule of law; as well as demonstrating high standards of integrity and ethical behaviour, including workplace behaviour, consistent



Kalipha MM Mbye is the Deputy Clerk (Legal and Procedural Matters) at the National Assembly of The Gambia. He holds an LLB degree (Bachelor of Laws) from the University of The Gambia and LLM degree (Master of Laws) in International Legal Studies from the University of Bradford, UK. His interests are in parliamentary democracy, constitutional law, public international law and the rule of law.



with their important public interest roles.⁷ The importance of a code of conduct for Parliamentarians cannot be overstated or overlooked in any parliamentary democracy as it helps to set the standards of behaviour expected of all persons in the parliamentary workplace. This can help a Parliament to function with integrity, to encourage ethical behaviour as well as build public trust in the institution of Parliament and its Members.

The development of a code of conduct

It may be critical to develop or approve a regulatory regime for oneself on his or her behaviour and conduct especially in a parliamentary environment where the process is intricately bureaucratic and cannot be avoided. Parliaments must navigate a difficult path where the perception can often be that administrators are controlling the Members and vice-versa. It is therefore critically important for Parliament to ensure that the development and approval procedures of the code of conduct is inclusive, transparent and consultative. The access to the code is essential, as is the establishment of clear and transparent procedures for monitoring breaches of the rules, investigations of misconduct and the sanctions available for offenders.

It is for this reason that the National Assembly of The Gambia worked with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)

Secretariat on a technical assistance programme to assist in the development of a ‘Code of Conduct for Members of the National Assembly of The Gambia’. This was primarily important to ensure independence of the process. The CPA was therefore crucial in the assistance given in drafting of the first ever official Code of Conduct of the National Assembly of The Gambia, that once adopted, would serve to regulate the conduct and behaviour of Members of the National Assembly, both inside and outside of the Legislature.

During their technical assistance programme, the CPA provided two experienced parliamentary consultants and an officer of the CPA Secretariat⁸ to assist the National Assembly in the development of a code of conduct. The leadership, and all Members of the National Assembly, welcomed the support from the CPA, and the Speaker, Rt Hon Fabakary Tombong Jatta welcomed the delegation stating:

“Enhancing public trust in our Parliament and its Members is of vital importance and so we are delighted to be working with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) in the development of our first Code of Conduct for Members. The CPA has led the way in parliamentary strengthening through the development of the ‘Benchmarks for Codes of Conduct’ and the updated ‘Standards for Codes of Conduct for MPs and the Parliamentary Workplace’ and in the implementation the good governance values of the

CPA PROVIDES TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO THE GAMBIA FOR ITS FIRST CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

The CPA Headquarters visited The Gambia from 26 to 29 March 2024 to provide technical assistance in the drafting of the National Assembly’s first Code of Conduct for Members. The CPA Gambia Branch President, Rt Hon. Fabakary Tombong Jatta, MP, Speaker of the National Assembly welcomed the CPA delegation of Eve Sampson, Clerk at the UK House of Commons, Michael Torrence, Clerk at the UK House of Lords and Avni Kondhia, Programmes Officer at CPA Headquarters.

The CPA team’s programme included meetings with the Speaker, Members of the Committee of Privileges and Ethics, Members of the National Assembly and Clerks of the Assembly.

Speaking about the project, the Speaker of the National Assembly of The Gambia said: *“Enhancing public trust in our Parliament and its Members is of vital importance and so we are delighted to be working with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) in the development of our first Code of Conduct for Members. The CPA has led the way in parliamentary strengthening through the development of the ‘Benchmarks for Codes of Conduct’ and the updated ‘Standards for Codes of Conduct for MPs and the Parliamentary Workplace’ and in the implementation the good governance values of the Commonwealth. We look forward to developing these Codes of Conduct for the National Assembly of The Gambia.”*

In recent years, the CPA Gambia Branch has worked closely with the CPA Headquarters on a self-assessment against the CPA’s *Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures* for the National Assembly and the CPA’s *Model Law for Parliaments* was utilised in the revised Standing Orders for the National Assembly.

The CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg also visited the National Assembly of The Gambia in June 2023, the first visit by a CPA Secretary-General since the CPA Gambia Branch re-joined the Association in 2019.



Commonwealth. We look forward to developing these Codes of Conduct for the National Assembly of The Gambia.”

The Privileges and Ethics Committee of the National Assembly whose mandate the issue falls within, is engaged in consultation with stakeholders, particularly all Members of the National Assembly for the validation of the draft Code of Conduct. The Committee is expected to table the draft Code to the Assembly sometime in June 2024 for formal approval.

The content

The content and specifics of a code of conduct for Parliamentarians differs from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. However, the commonality is the ultimate interest and disposition to protect the dignity and integrity of the institution of Parliament.

The general nature of many parliamentary codes of conduct provides a fairly general rule on the standards for codes of conduct recommended by the CPA in its Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures.⁹ The general principles of “*selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, leadership*” are essential in every Code of Conduct irrespective of the environment or jurisdiction. For example, the United States House of Representatives provides a twelve point code of conduct for its Members, who along with officers and staff, “*must conduct themselves at all time in a manner which reflects creditably on the House*”.

The Code of Conduct for the Members of Parliament in the United Kingdom stresses that Members “*shall at all time conduct themselves in a manner that will tend to maintain and strengthen the public’s trust and confidence in the integrity of Parliament and never undertake any action which would bring the House of Commons, or its Members generally, into disrepute.*”

The South African Parliamentary Codes of Conduct urge its Members to “*maintain the highest standards of propriety to ensure that their integrity and that of their political institutions in which they serve are beyond question.*”

The general principle in The Gambia’s parliamentary law requires Members to remember their role in upholding the dignity of the National Assembly and as servants of the people of The Gambia.¹⁰ Members of the National Assembly are expected to act professionally towards everyone and ensure the National Assembly meets the highest ethical standards of integrity, courtesy and mutual respect.

The content of codes of conduct for Parliamentarians may include conflict of interest provisions, asset declaration requirements, rules on gifts and hospitalities, and elements of lobbying regulation. Although they are designed to regulate the conduct of Parliamentarians, they should not or cannot regulate all aspects of their lives, nor should they interfere with the independence of Parliament and Parliamentarians or threaten their ability to carry out their public duties. The Gambia’s draft code of conduct requires Members not to bully, sexually harass or discriminate against any other Member, National Assembly staff or other person, or take any bribe, or permit any connected person to take any bribe, for promoting a cause or Bill in the Assembly or its Committees.

The development of the code is just as important as the final content of the code of conduct as it relates to ensuring its effectiveness. International standards recommend that the adoption procedure should be inclusive, transparent and consultative. Dissemination of the code, through its publication, communication in different media and training courses, is essential for implementation, as is the existence of clear and transparent procedures for monitoring breaches of the rules, for investigating misconduct and for sanctioning offenders.

Application and scope

Generally, in Parliament, codes of conduct are applicable to Members of Parliament in their official dealings and conduct. For example, in all cases in the UK Parliament, the respective Code only applies to Members of the UK House of Commons, and in the UK House of

Lords, the Code does not apply to Members who are on leave of absence, disqualified from sitting or suspended from the service of the House.¹¹ In The Gambia, the draft Code of Conduct which is under consideration is also applicable to all Members in their parliamentary and public roles, noting that no Member is above the law. However, it does not seek to regulate what Members do in their purely private and personal lives.¹²

In many jurisdictions, the common scope relates to which aspect of Members’ lives the Code applies. The UK House of Commons just like the National Assembly of The Gambia “*does not seek to regulate what Members do in their purely private and personal lives*”, and the UK





AN EXPERT'S VIEW: BEHIND THE SCENES OF PROVIDING TECHNICAL EXPERTISE TO A COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENT: THE GAMBIA

Michael Torrance, former Standards Clerk, UK House of Lords, United Kingdom

Following earlier contact between the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the National Assembly of The Gambia, which produced a self-assessment against the CPA's *Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures* and the revision of the Assembly's Standing Orders, I was invited to join a CPA delegation assisting the Assembly's Members and officials in developing its first Code of Conduct, which was a priority for the Speaker of the Assembly.

To provide technical assistance in support of this work, I was joined by Eve Samson, the UK House of Commons Clerk of the Journals and Avni Kondhia from the CPA Headquarters on a visit to Banjul from 26 to 29 March 2024.

The Gambia is geographically the smallest country in Africa with a population of 2.5 million. A former British colony which became independent on 18 February 1965, The Gambia became a member of the Commonwealth in 1970 – initially as a constitutional monarchy and then as a republic. While The Gambia left the Commonwealth in 2013, it subsequently rejoined the body in 2018, following a change of government and policy.

The Gambia has a written constitution, which is currently being reviewed. Its parliamentary system includes some features familiar in Westminster systems, combined with elements from more Presidential systems. The National Assembly is a unicameral Legislature with 58 Members who serve a five-year term. 53 of these Members are directly elected while the remaining five are appointed by the President, including the Speaker.

The development of the Code of Conduct

Our initial brief for this piece of work was provided by Assembly officials and Members of the Committee of Privileges and Ethics. The issues that they felt could potentially be addressed by the adoption of a Code of Conduct included the late attendance of Members at plenary and Committee sessions, strained relations between Members and parliamentary staff, and conduct and standards of dress in the chamber. In general terms it was felt that clearer rules and guidelines were required to regulate conduct inside and outside the Assembly to increase its standing and reputation with the electorate.

We reviewed the existing constitutional provisions and the current Standing Orders, and noted that these already contained several relevant provisions, such as on the registration and declaration of interests, as well as sanctions for failing to do so. However, following the recent review of the Standing Orders, these provisions had not yet been operationalised and the role of the Committee of Privileges and Ethics in overseeing the standards system was unclear. Alongside our preliminary engagement with the Assembly's Members and officials, the existing constitutional and Assembly provisions formed the basis

of an initial draft Code of Conduct which was produced by the CPA team before arriving in The Gambia.

After we arrived in Banjul productive and constructive engagement took place with the Speaker, Members of Parliament (particularly from the Assembly's Committee of Privileges and Ethics), female Members, and senior and junior Clerks. At the end of each day the draft Code of Conduct was revised in response to feedback and re-issued for further feedback. The issues discussed during the engagement centred around the scope of the Code, who should be able to make a complaint about possible breaches, logistical issues surrounding Member attendance and enforceability challenges, as well the need to specifically tailor the Code of Conduct to take account of local political and cultural issues.

Overall, we were impressed by the level of engagement by the stakeholders and noted that many of the issues that arose were not unfamiliar in the Westminster context. While engaging with stakeholders, we were conscious of the need to ensure that the Code of Conduct was – and was seen to be – owned by the Assembly Members, rather than being imposed upon them by an outside body. While the team would occasionally refer to established Westminster practice in some standards area, this was only to illustrate practical considerations and they took care not to assume the same approach would be either appropriate or desirable in the Gambian context. In this respect, we considered that as this would be the Assembly's first Code of Conduct, it was important to allow it time to develop and mature, rather than consider introducing independent enforcement mechanisms, such as third-party Commissioners for Standards, at this stage in the Code's development. While independent lay commissioners are now an established part of the Westminster standards systems, such roles are a relatively recent addition to processes that were previously overseen by Member Committees only.

Outcome

At the end of a stimulating and productive visit, we provided Assembly officials with a final draft Code of Conduct, which incorporated a guide to the registration of interests, and flagged possible consequential changes to the Assembly's Standing Orders for further consideration. All concerned were in agreement that it was important to be realistic about how much a document such as a Code of Conduct could achieve in isolation but recognised it as an important first step in establishing the Assembly's ownership of a Code which took account of its specific circumstances, as well as facilitating wider behaviour and cultural change among its membership.

Following our visit, the Committee of Privileges and Ethics held a general consultation workshop with all Assembly Members at the beginning of June 2024 and the final version of the Code of Conduct has now been presented to the Assembly for approval, by way of a resolution at the end of June 2024.

House of Lords equally “does not extend to Members’ performance of duties unrelated to parliamentary proceedings, or to their private lives” and as it is the case in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Sanctions

There is some variation in the severity of the sanctions established for the violation of a Parliamentary Code of Conduct. In Fiji, the violation of the code of conduct may be punished by the loss of mandate. In Grenada, the violation of the code of conduct is punished by warning, reprimand, order to withdraw, suspension and loss of mandate. In India, violations are punished with reprimand or admonition, imprisonment, suspension, expulsion or disqualification from membership on ground of defection. In Japan, violations to the code of conduct are punished with admonition to abide to the standards of conduct, admonition to refrain from presenting his/herself at the House for a certain period and admonition to resign from the Chairmanship of a Committee. In the UK, a violation of the code of conduct is punished by committal, reprimand or admonition, suspension from the house or expulsion. In the USA, violations to the code of conduct are punished with censure, reprimand, fines, loss of seniority or expulsion.

Conclusion

Essentially, therefore, codes of conduct for Parliamentarians help to maintain public trust, establish clear ethical standards and guidelines for Members’ conduct and behaviour as well prevent harassment and bullying within Parliament, and reaffirm the responsibility to uphold the highest standards of good governance.¹³

Since 2017, after the installation of a new Parliament following the change of a democratic dispensation, there have been several conduct issues in the National Assembly of The Gambia, although not uncommon to any new and young democracy. The continued untimely attendance to Plenary and Committee sessions by Members and the unregulated misconducts, has justified with utmost necessary to develop a code of conduct to arrest the unbecoming behaviour and conduct of certain Members of Parliament in order to preserve the integrity and dignity of the National Assembly.

There is, of course, the increasing recognition that Parliaments are both law-making institutions and workplaces in which Members, staff and others should be safe and respected. In same vein, the advent of social media and artificial intelligence and the ethical handling of information has become increasingly complex especially during sessions of Parliament.

While written guidance may be necessary to accompany the implementation of a code of conduct for interpretation purposes, it is recommended that a separate code of conduct is also developed for Ministers as well as for their staff within government. However, this should not exempt Ministerial staff from behavioural standards in the parliamentary workplace whenever they are on the parliamentary precinct.¹⁴

As dissatisfaction mounts over the conduct of Parliamentarians within and outside Parliament, it is necessary for Parliaments and Parliamentarians to take concrete efforts to improve public trust and confidence, principally by making concrete efforts to create ethics regimes. The National Assembly of The Gambia is not an exception, the regulatory framework prevents various forms of parliamentary misconduct as well as establishes clear sanctions for instances of

misconduct, and overall, to improve the behaviour of Members of the National Assembly.

Codes of conduct for Members of Parliament help to maintain public trust, establish clear ethical standards, help to prevent corruption and the abuse of power, seek to prevent harassment and bullying within the workplace, promote fairness and equity, and importantly for Parliamentarians, set guidelines for public officers to uphold the highest standards of good governance. Its importance to the fabric of parliamentary life is unquestionable.

It is envisaged that the adoption of the ‘Code of Conduct for Members of the National Assembly of The Gambia’ would effectively regulate the behaviour and conduct of Members of the National Assembly as well as greatly improve the smooth operation of the business of the National Assembly.

Subnote: The Code of Conduct for Members was formally approved by the National Assembly of The Gambia on 24 June 2024.

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GREAT EXPECTATIONS: CODES OF CONDUCT OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

Code of Conduct for Members



Chairperson of the CPA Small Branches, Joy Burch, MLA, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of the Australian Capital Territory

Though the Legislative Assembly of the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) is both a small Parliament and a Small Branch of the CPA, there is no such thing as being too small to have big expectations for how Parliamentarians will behave and conduct themselves. The Assembly is no exception and over many years the code of conduct has gone from strength to strength to ensure standards of expected behaviour loom large.

The ACT Legislative Assembly is Australia's youngest Parliament. Following its establishment in 1989, it did not take long for the Assembly to turn its attention to the conduct standards expected of its Members. In its first month, to address the potential for conflicts of interests, the Assembly adopted a resolution requiring Members to declare their private interests through a register. There were also a series of committee reports, the first in 1991, recommending the adoption of a code of conduct for Members.

However, despite some fits and starts, it was not until 2005 – following a report by the Assembly's Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure recommending that a code of conduct be adopted (the Committee's third report on the topic) – that the Assembly instituted an expansive code addressing Members' conduct across a range of fronts.

In the 19 years since, that code has been added to and amended to become a comprehensive statement of the behavioural requirements that the Assembly imposes on its Members. Among other matters, the code addresses expectations around integrity, honesty and diligence; upholding the separation of powers; acting in the public interest; avoiding conflicts of interest; being accountable and transparent; making proper use of public resources; and treating people with courtesy and respect.

The code also requires that Members eliminate and minimise health and safety risks in the workplace and adopt a zero-tolerance approach to bullying, sexual and other harassment, sexual assault and discrimination.

Within the first six months following an election, the Assembly reaffirms its commitment to the principles, obligations and aspirations of the code. Similarly, all Members elected outside of a general election (i.e. Members filling a casual vacancy) are required, before they make their inaugural speech, to affirm that they will abide by the code. The code is reviewed at the end of each Assembly and has been amended on seven occasions.

The Assembly's code of conduct is complemented by two additional parliamentary initiatives: 1. The establishment of the Assembly Ethics and Integrity Adviser to provide non-legal advice

to Members on ethical issues, including the operation of the code of conduct; and 2. The establishment of a Legislative Assembly Commissioner for Standards responsible for investigating and assessing complaints made against Members about possible breaches of the code or the Assembly's requirements for declaring private interests. Since the establishment of the Commissioner for Standards, there have been 12 reports on complaints made about the conduct of Members.

Ministerial code

Ministers are also subject to a Ministerial code of conduct issued by the Chief Minister. That code reinforces Ministers' accountability to the Assembly for their portfolio areas and their collective responsibility for cabinet decisions. The code requires that Ministers must act in accordance with a number of ethical principles such as integrity, honesty, diligence, accountability and fairness. Ministers are required to declare their pecuniary interests to the Chief Minister, to maintain confidentiality of cabinet deliberations and respect for Parliament, and to abide by caretaker conventions in the lead up to a general election.

Staff codes

There are separate codes of conduct for the staff of Ministers, staff of non-executive Members and staff of the Office of the Legislative Assembly (the administrative support agency of the Parliament headed by the Clerk of the Assembly).

These codes are made pursuant to legislative provision through the *Legislative Assembly (Members' Staff Act) 1989* and the *Public Sector Management Act 1994*. Ministers and Members are responsible for investigating and addressing any potential breaches of the applicable codes by their staff, while the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly is responsible for investigating possible breaches by staff of the Office.

Together, these initiatives operate to instil confidence that the Assembly, its Members, and its staff are meeting the expectations of the ACT community, remaining accountable to the institution and the people they serve.

For more information, visit the ACT Assembly's website: <https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/members/ethics-and-accountability>



UPDATED 'STANDARDS FOR CODES OF CONDUCT FOR MPS AND THE PARLIAMENTARY WORKPLACE'

Parliamentarians are entrusted with significant power and responsibility in a democratic society and as such must demonstrate the highest ethical standards. As stipulated in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's *Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures*, Parliaments should promote values around ethical governance.

Codes of conduct for Members of Parliament help to maintain public trust and establish ethical standards, help to prevent corruption and the abuse of power, and seek to prevent harassment and bullying within the workplace. Guidelines also provide a framework for public officers to uphold the highest standards of good governance.

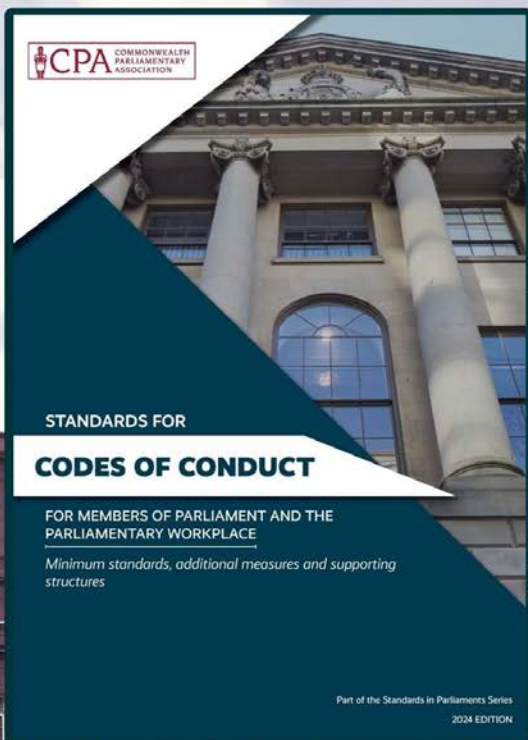
As a result of extensive research and consultation with Parliaments across the world, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association has published the '*Standards for Codes of Conduct for Members of Parliament and the Parliamentary Workplace*' for use by Parliaments and Legislatures.

Speaking about the updated standards, the CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg said: "*I strongly encourage all Parliamentarians and parliamentary officials to study the CPA's updated 'Standards for Codes of Conduct for Members of Parliament and the Parliamentary Workplace'. The CPA recognises that no single Parliament is a source of 'best*

practice' in all areas and that all Parliaments are sources of valuable innovations regardless of their size or age and that in fact there are many forms of 'good practice'; which is why the updated Standards for Codes of Conduct are so valuable as they are drawn from good practice across the Commonwealth. The CPA's commitment in championing the highest principles of parliamentary democracy mean that we will continue to work with Commonwealth Parliaments to help them adopt new or updated Codes of Conduct where requested."

The updated 'Standards for Codes of Conduct for Members of Parliament and the Parliamentary Workplace' have evolved from the CPA's previous '*Recommended Benchmarks for Codes of Conduct Applying to Members of Parliament*', first published in 2016 and utilised by many Parliaments in establishing their own Codes of Conduct. With the need for continuous improvement and tackling the additional challenges of harassment, bullying and abuse in the workplace as well as the challenges of new technology and online harms, the CPA Secretariat worked with Deakin University to develop an updated set of Standards for Codes of Conduct.

The CPA 'Standards for Codes of Conduct for Members of Parliament and the Parliamentary Workplace' are available to download on the CPA website or by emailing hq.sec@cpahq.org.



COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION CELEBRATES COMMONWEALTH DAY 2024 ACROSS ITS 180 PARLIAMENTS AND LEGISLATURES

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) celebrated Commonwealth Day on Monday 11 March 2024 across the CPA's nine Regions and around 180 Parliaments and Legislatures. This year's theme, and for the forthcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Samoa in October 2024, is 'One Resilient Common Future: Transforming our Commonwealth'. The theme highlights how the 56 member countries must harness their strengths by building resilience, unlocking potential, leveraging the 'Commonwealth Advantage' and fostering a connected, digital Commonwealth. This transformation is vital to ensure a resilient common future where no one is left behind.

As the Head of the Commonwealth, His Majesty King Charles III released a special video message, in which he said: *"The seventy-fifth anniversary of The Commonwealth is a moment to reflect on the remarkable journey that our unique family of free and independent nations has made since 1949. And the Commonwealth's growth, with new members continuing to join our family of nations, demonstrates clearly that whilst we may not all have a shared history, we have common ambitions for a better future – working together to build resilience and respond to global challenges. The Commonwealth family is strongest when we are connected, through friendship. We recognise today that our diversity is our greatest strength. The Commonwealth represents a third of humanity, from all regions of the world, with all the different experiences, knowledge, and aspirations that this brings. I cannot say often enough that it is by coming together that we create the best chances to improve our world and the lives of people everywhere. Indeed, over the years countless people across the Commonwealth have been inspired to form their own Commonwealth Associations, from lawyers and accountants, to business and trade networks, and many more besides. The work they do is absolutely vital, sharing professional knowledge, experience, and expertise across the Continents for the betterment of each one of us."*

The traditional multi-faith Commonwealth Service was held at Westminster Abbey in London where Queen Camilla and the Prince of Wales joined the Commonwealth Secretary-General, representatives of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, High Commissioners, dignitaries and over 600 schoolchildren.



Image credit: Commonwealth Secretariat/PCS

Commonwealth Day was marked in Parliaments across the world. The CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg attended the raising of the Commonwealth flag and commemorative event at the UK Parliament hosted by the Speaker of the UK House of Commons, Rt Hon. Sir Lindsay Hoyle, MP along with more than 20 Commonwealth Speakers in attendance. The UK Speaker hosted a special Commonwealth Speakers Summit to coincide with Commonwealth Day with Speakers and Presiding Officers attending from Australia, Bangladesh, Barbados, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Canada, Grenada, Isle of Man, Kenya, Kiribati, Malawi, Malta, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Northern Ireland, Pakistan, Saint Lucia, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Sri Lanka, St Kitts and Nevis, Tanzania, The Gambia, Tonga, Turks and Caicos Islands, Wales and Zambia. The CPA Headquarters also held a special meeting of the Commonwealth Speakers and Presiding Officers after their involvement in the Commonwealth Day Summit at the UK Parliament.

The CPA Secretary-General said: *"As we celebrate Commonwealth Day 2024, we recognise the work of Commonwealth Parliaments and Parliamentarians in promoting our democratic values and principles. 2024 is set to be a busy and important year for the CPA and the wider Commonwealth with the 27th Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) and the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC). In addition, the CPA will host the 12th Commonwealth Youth Parliament (CYP) which will be an important part of the CPA's contribution to the 'Commonwealth Year of Youth' which continues this year."*

2024 continues the 'Commonwealth Year of Youth' and so this Commonwealth Day, many CPA Branches used Commonwealth Day as an opportunity to engage with young people through their wider public outreach. Commonwealth Day is celebrated annually on the second Monday of March.

Left: More than 20 Commonwealth Speakers attended a special Commonwealth Speakers Summit to coincide with Commonwealth Day and marking the 75th anniversary of the 'modern' Commonwealth hosted by the UK Speaker of the House of Commons.



Image credit: UK Parliament/Speaker's Office



CPA SPEAKERS AND PRESIDING OFFICERS MEETING HELD IN LONDON



Image credit: CPA Secretary Jeffrey Hyland

The CPA Headquarters held a special meeting of Commonwealth Speakers and Presiding Officers at Speaker's House at the UK Parliament, following the celebrations for Commonwealth Day in March 2024. The Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee, Hon. Ian Liddell-Grainger, MP and the CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg updated Members on the progress of the CPA Legal Status Bill as well as updating on the latest Programmes and activities for CPA Branches.

Speakers and Presiding Officers attended the CPA meeting from Australia, Bangladesh, Barbados, British Virgin Islands, Cameroon, Canada, Cayman Islands, The Gambia, Grenada, Isle of Man, Kenya, Malta, Namibia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Sri Lanka, St Kitts and Nevis, Tonga and Zambia.

CPA FIJI BRANCH



Image credit: Parliament of Fiji

The Parliament of Fiji held a special event for Commonwealth Day 2024 that celebrated youth engagement while Members of Parliament joined a social media campaign to promote the day. The Speaker of the Fiji Parliament, Hon. Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu in his message for Commonwealth Day also highlighted young people

saying *"The focus on youth is highly commendable considering that 60% of citizens of the Commonwealth are aged 29 or under. In Fiji, more than 60% of the population is below the age of 40...the youth of today are expected to lead our country in the future. However, they are most likely to suffer should the leaders of today not make serious commitment to tackling some of the major challenges that are imminent today."*

CPA GHANA BRANCH

The Parliament of Ghana held a Commonwealth Day 2024 event on the theme of *'One Resilient Common Future: Transforming our Common Wealth'* which saw young people visit the Parliament for a debate led by local activists. The event was also attended by the Presiding Officers and Speakers of the Regional Youth Parliaments that are held across the country.



Image credit: Parliament of Ghana

CPA NAMIBIA BRANCH

The Parliament of Namibia held its annual celebration event for Commonwealth Day under the theme of *'One Resilient Common future: Transforming our Common Wealth.'* The Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, Hon. Loide Kasingo, MP; Members of Parliament and High Commissioners of some of the 56 countries of the Commonwealth based in Windhoek attended the event which included speeches, cultural performances and a display of the different traditional cuisines from Commonwealth countries.



Image credit: Parliament of Namibia



Commonwealth Day 2024

CPA NEW SOUTH WALES

On Commonwealth Day 2024, the Governor of New South Wales, Her Excellency Hon. Margaret Beazley, AC, KC, and members of the Commonwealth Day Council visited the New South Wales Parliament House in Sydney, where Her Excellency delivered His Majesty King Charles III's official Commonwealth Day message at an event attended by Members of Parliament. The flags of all 66 Commonwealth nations also flew proudly from the newly renovated Parliament House.



CPA RWANDA BRANCH

Members of Parliament gathered in the Plenary Hall of the Chamber of Deputies at the Rwanda Parliament to celebrate Commonwealth Day 2024 and reflect on the annual day's theme and held a debate on the mission of the Commonwealth. The President of the Rwanda Senate, Senator Hon. François-Xavier Kalinda said: *"It is imperative that those values of unity, good governance, inclusion and social justice continue to shape the decisions that the Parliament takes, and the choices that we make."*

The Speaker of the Rwanda Chamber of Deputies, Hon. Donatille Mukabalisa, MP said: *"As Parliamentarians, I challenge ourselves to make a critical reflection to come up with tangible and sustainable collective actions through our legislative and Executive oversight prerogatives."* The Permanent Secretary at the Rwanda Foreign Ministry Mukeka Clementine underlined the mission of the Commonwealth and highlighted the four key areas of focus outlined by Commonwealth Heads of Government at CHOGM 2022 held in Kigali: Sustainability; Prosperity; Health; Governance.



CPA ST HELENA BRANCH

Commonwealth Day 2024 was celebrated in one of the smallest jurisdictions on the Commonwealth. The Speaker of St Helena Legislative Council, Hon. Cyril Gunnell, MLC spoke at an assembly held at Prince Andrew School where highlighted 2024 as having a continued focus on young people and the hope for the restoration of a St Helena Youth Parliament and other initiatives. The Acting Governor, Stephen Thwaites read the message from the Head of the Commonwealth, King Charles III, the Attorney-General, David Ballantyne read the Commonwealth Secretary-General's message and School Student Council Vice-President, Erik Robbertse read the Commonwealth Affirmation. Shortly afterwards, the Speaker raised the Commonwealth Flag at the Francis Plain Pavilion as part of the 'Fly a Flag for the Commonwealth' initiative. Commonwealth Day 2024 assemblies were also held at the island's three primary schools attended by Members of the Legislative Council who read The King's Commonwealth Day message.





PRIORITISING ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT FOR WOMEN TO ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY AND POVERTY REDUCTION IN THE BAHAMAS

According to the United Nations, more women than men are living in poverty overall.¹ Globally, more than 10% of women are living in extreme poverty – which equates to living on less than US\$2.15 a day. Progress has been slow, and projections forecast that as many as 342 million women (8% of the global population) will still be living in extreme poverty by 2030.

UN Women outlines this inequality as follows: *‘Women’s poverty is fuelled by discrimination in the world of work, limited access to resources and financial assets, and deep-rooted stereotypes that limit women’s participation in education, decent employment and decision-making, while burdening them with a larger share of unpaid care and domestic work. Gender equality is a powerful catalyst for reducing poverty and driving sustainable development. By ensuring equal access to opportunities and decision-making for all, societies can create healthier and just economies.’*²

It is clear that women are disproportionately affected by poverty globally and the impact of climate-related and other disasters is also a key factor. In my own jurisdiction of The Bahamas, the dual impact of the category 5 Hurricane Dorian, which devastated The Bahamas’ second and third largest economic centers in September 2019, and the global COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown of the entire country in 2020, resulted in significant economic hardship at the start of the decade. Like many other jurisdictions, women and girls in The Bahamas, and the wider Caribbean Region, were disproportionately affected by the economic and social consequences of Hurricane Dorian and the COVID-19 pandemic as they were from single parent households who lost all employment and income, as well as losing their loved ones. Following these two disasters, many women migrated to Nassau, the capital of The Bahamas, to start over again, which further exacerbated poverty levels for women.

In order to address the gender poverty gap and promote equality for all, several key initiatives are outlined by UN Women including:

- Boosting productivity through access to quality jobs for women
- Promoting inclusive social and legal protections for all as key to global growth
- Creating a care society rooted in gender equality
- Ending gender-based violence
- Shifting to sustainable economies that include women



In an effort to reinvigorate gender equality and to ‘leave no woman or girl behind’, The Bahamas Government has focused on measures that promote the alleviation of poverty by engaging in a wide array of economic empowerment policies and initiatives that specifically target women. As we all know, it is an economic reality that women’s empowerment promotes financial stability and sustainable economic growth.

It was a theme that was highlighted by the Prime Minister of The Bahamas, Hon. Philip Davis in his remarks at the opening of the 13th Commonwealth Women’s Affairs Ministers Meeting (WAMM) in Nassau in August 2023 when he said: *“Only when we do more to protect and empower women in our societies, will our communities and societies achieve our full potential... While we acknowledge this progress, we still want to see more political and government participation, and we know that achieving this requires active leadership and thoughtful policies. We also know that despite the great strides which have been made by women in the workplace, women can occupy more of the top spots in our private sector corporate structures. One element to driving progress means doing more to make sure entrepreneurs have access to the capital and technical support necessary to bring their entrepreneurial dreams into fruition. It’s time to demolish the walls of the old boys’ clubs – only when opportunities are opened up more widely will we truly be making the most of the talent and ingenuity of all of humanity.”*³

In 1974, The Bahamas Development Bank was established by an Act of Parliament as the Government’s primary provider for



Senator Hon. J. LaShell Adderley is the President of the Senate of The Bahamas. She is a Bahamian lawyer and politician who has served as the President of the Senate since 7 October 2021, the fifth woman to hold the role. She previously worked as Legal Counsel for Bahamas First General Insurance and as a Legal and Compliance Manager then Corporate Secretary for Bahamas First Holdings.



promoting industrial, agricultural and commercial development, to stimulate and enhance the economic development of The Bahamas. The Bank has integrated the UN Sustainable Development Goals into its strategy and thereby provides equitable access to finance and resources for women entrepreneurs while ensuring that they have the support they need to succeed in the business world.

For example, the Bank's 'Microloan Program' provides loans of up to US\$15,000 for women who have graduated from the Academy for Women Entrepreneurs (AWE), a US training programme in partnership with the United States Embassy in The Bahamas.

In addition, the Bank recently launched the UN Joint Sustainable Development Goal Fund 'Building Back Equal Project'. This initiative supports women-led businesses in the agriculture, creative and tourism industries and will serve as a regional best practice in gender equitable financing in advancing small island developing states. The programme will mobilise US\$1.8 million over a two-year period.

UN Resident Coordinator, Dr Garry Conille highlighted at the launch that: *"The project is designed and expected to catalyze millions more in additional investment to support Bahamas' achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals; in particular, SDG 5 – gender equality; SDG 8 – decent work and economic growth; and SDG 9 – reduced inequalities."*⁴

The Bahamas Development Bank's Chairperson, Senator Quinton Lightbourne said: *"We recognise that men and women face differences in accessing socio-economic resources including financing. Men and women have different needs that shape how capacity building and programmes must be delivered to ensure that every person has equitable access to opportunity."*⁵

Another initiative from The Bahamas Development Bank offers preferential financing to women at incredibly low-interest rates, ranging between 0% to 2%. By offering low interest rates to women entrepreneurs, the Bank aims to address the unique barriers women face in accessing capital and resources.

Other policy initiatives undertaken by the Ministry of Economic Affairs in The Bahamas is the establishment of the Access Accelerator at the Small Business Development Centre (SBDC) that plays a vital role in narrowing the gender poverty gap by providing critical support and resources to entrepreneurs and micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) with a particular focus on women. Under the SBDC, women-owned businesses received over US\$28 million in grants, loans and equity funding.

In 2023, the Women Entrepreneurs Initiative was launched, which is a self-paced training programme that provides grant funding of up

to US\$10,000. The Initiative supported 87 women in 2023 with 525 training hours and approved funding of approximately US\$0.7million.

The Small Business Development Centre's flagship programme, the Guarantee Loan Programme (GLP), supported 25 women in The Bahamas with approved funding of over US\$1.8 million. The GLP has an approval rating of 61% which is on average 30% above the approval rate of regional counterparts.

The Government of The Bahamas recognised that affordable and reliable childcare was also a barrier to economic empowerment and workforce participation by women, especially those from low income and single parent homes. We know that women carry out more unpaid care and domestic work, including childcare, than men resulting in less time for women and girls to undertake opportunities to access education and paid employment. The Ministry of Education in The Bahamas implemented a 'Universal Pre-Primary Program' and free early childhood pre-school education for 3 and 4-year-olds in order to provide more opportunities for women to access opportunities for work and training.

The impact of gender-based violence has also had a huge impact on women in The Bahamas and tackling violence against women and girls has been a key priority. The recently passed *Protection Against Violence Act 2023* in The Bahamas establishes and protects the rights of victims, allows for the allocation of more resources, and focuses on sensitisation and training within the police force and other organisations that work directly with survivors.

Additional measures for economic empowerment included food security programmes, a recent reduction in Value Added Tax and an increase in minimum wage – all targeted at poverty reduction amongst communities and families.

There are positive signs in The Bahamas as a result of these initiatives for women's economic empowerment and the target of a reduction in poverty for all women remains our key goal.

This article is based on a presentation that the author gave at the joint Inter-Parliamentary Union – UN Women session on 'Gender-Sensitive Parliaments: Advancing Gender Equality to End Poverty' in the margins of the 68th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68) in March 2024.

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- ¹ United Nations: 'How Can Gender Equality Reduce Poverty?' <https://social.desa.un.org/sgn/how-can-gender-equality-reduce-poverty>
- ² UN Women: 'How Can Gender Equality Reduce Poverty?' <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/explainer/2024/02/how-can-gender-equality-reduce-poverty>
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- ⁴ UN Joint SDG Fund: 'Joint SDG Fund Project on Building Back Equal through Innovative Financing for Gender Equality' <https://www.jointsdgfund.org/article/joint-sdg-fund-project-building-back-equal-through-innovative-financing-gender-equality>
- ⁵ UN Joint SDG Fund: 'Joint SDG Fund Project on Building Back Equal through Innovative Financing for Gender Equality' <https://www.jointsdgfund.org/article/joint-sdg-fund-project-building-back-equal-through-innovative-financing-gender-equality>

Left: More than 50 women entrepreneurs in The Bahamas joined the launch of the 4th cohort for the Academy for Women Entrepreneurs (AWE) 17-week programme in January 2024 in partnership with Small Business Development Centre and the US Embassy in The Bahamas.

Image credits: Access Accelerator at the Small Business Development Centre.





EMPOWERING WOMEN TO LEAD AUSTRALIA INTO THE FUTURE: QUT PATHWAYS TO POLITICS FOR WOMEN

"If you believe, as I do, that merit is equally distributed between the sexes, then any result that isn't around half and half should be troubling." - Hon. Julia Gilliard, Australia's first female Prime Minister.

Introduction

Women in Australia make up just over half of the Australian population (*statista.com*) and 47.9% of all employed persons (*Workplace Gender Equality Agency WGEA, 2022*) yet leadership, decision-making and priority setting has largely been in the hands of men. Any democratic framework needs to take into consideration gendered perspectives and equal representation of both women and men (*Ballington and Karam, 2005*).

Research shows that increased female political representation leads to positive outcomes such as budgetary and financial stability, keeping within the legal debit limit in councils and the acceptance of more rigorous climate change policies across countries in national Parliaments (*Balaguer-Coll and Ivanova-Toneva, 2021; Mavisakalyan and Tarverdi, 2019*).

Countries led by women were better at controlling the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic due to a high level of trust and credibility given to these leaders, often based on their caring and nurturing style of leadership (*Maity and Barlashar, 2022; Bruce et al, 2022*).

Women Parliamentarians bring a distinctive leadership to Parliament that is having a positive impact on our political process and outcomes. As Gilligan (1982) puts it, women "*construe social reality differently*" which leads to a distinctive female voice that embraces ideals of responsibility, caring and interconnectedness (p. 171). Bullough et al (2012) found when there is a higher representation of female political leaders there is more likely to be support for upward mobility, equality and sharing information.

While over the past 25 years women's representation in the Australian Federal Parliament has grown at a quicker pace than in any other country in the Pacific region (*according to Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) data, 2020*) gender gaps persist as do significant barriers and hurdles faced by women in getting elected and pursuing a career in politics.

Female representation in the Australian Federal Parliament was ranked 26th out of 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index in

2023. While this is an increase from 43rd in 2022, it is still lower than the 15th place for Australia in 2006. Australia is also ranked 31st for Women in Parliaments which is an increase from 44th place in 2022. (*World Economic Forum, 2023*).

Total female representation in the Australian Federal Parliament is 45%, in State and Territory Parliaments it is 44% (*Australian Federal Parliament, Gender composition of Australian Parliaments by party: Table 1 as at 23 January 2024*) and it ranges from 43.8% to 31% in local councils across Australia (*Pathways to Politics for Women data*).

This article is based on a presentation that I delivered at the 40th CPA Australia and Pacific Regional Conference held in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia which outlined the importance of building capacity among women to stand for election and how the *Pathways to Politics for Women* supports women to overcome the barriers to entering politics in Australia.

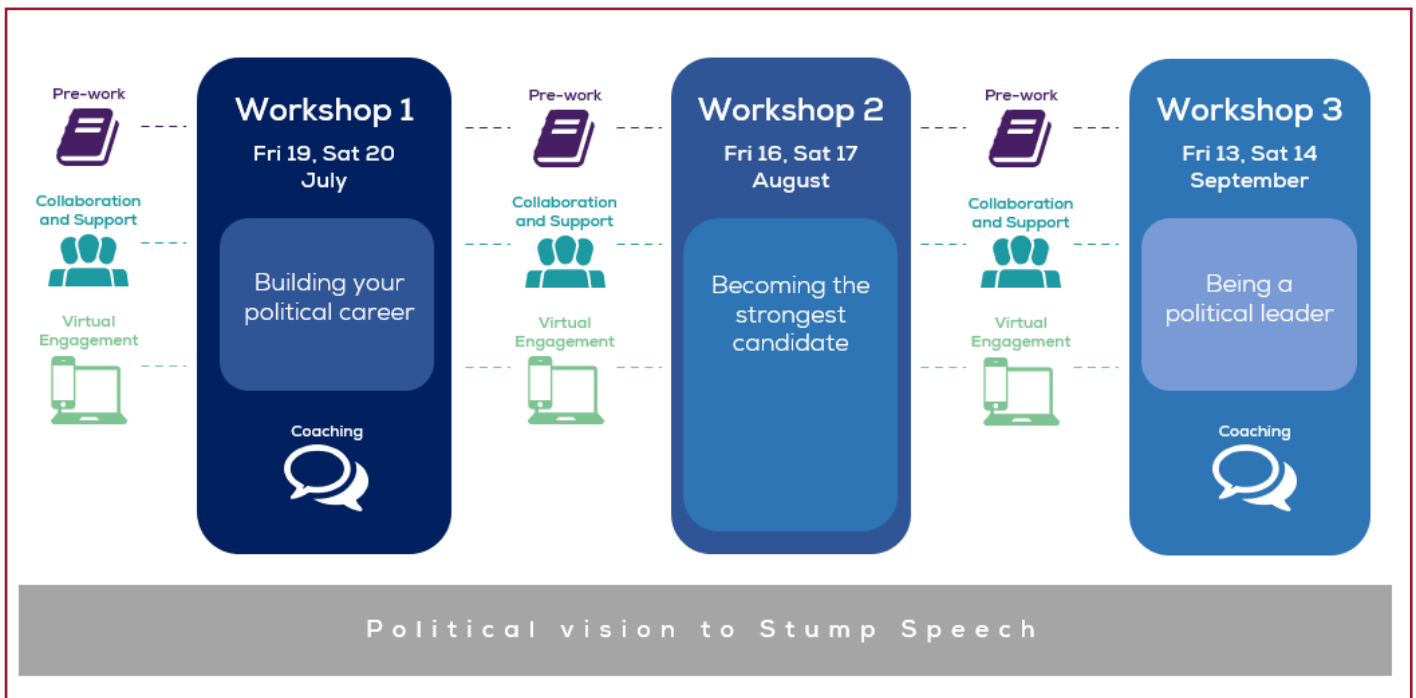
Pathways to Politics for Women

Established by founding partners the Trawalla Foundation, the Women's Leadership Institute Australia and the University of Melbourne, and inspired by the Harvard Kennedy School's "*From Harvard Square to the Oval Office*", the *Pathways to Politics for Women* (pathwaystopolitics.org.au) aims to redress the underrepresentation of women in Australian politics. Carol Schwartz, AO, Chair of the Trawalla Foundation, whose vision initiated the programme in Australia believes that women have a valuable contribution to make to politics and that a positive outcome for our country is to ensure that both men and women share power, leadership and decision making.

The foundational programme was launched in 2016 at the University of Melbourne and as from 2024, there is now a national network with programmes offered in every state and territory in Australia through the Queensland University of Technology (QUT), the University of New South Wales (UNSW), Charles Darwin



Professor Vicky Browning is qualified organisational psychologist and executive coach specialising in leadership and human resource development and with extensive experience in programme design and leadership in higher education. She is currently the Programme Director for the QUT Pathways to Politics for Women at the Queensland University of Technology. In 2020, the programme under her leadership received a Vice-Chancellor's Award for Excellence for Inclusion and Diversity. She is also the Chair of the University Equity Committee. Her current research focuses on exploring female political leadership and the enablers and barriers for women to enter politics and to exercise their leadership to make a difference for Australian communities.



University (CDU), the University of Adelaide, the University of Canberra (UC), the University of Western Australia (UWA) and the University of Tasmania (UTAS).

Participants are selected on a competitive basis, with those who demonstrate a commitment to seeking elected office, leadership experience, professional and life experience, political and community engagement and an ability to tell their story in a compelling way amongst those who are chosen.

To be eligible for the programme applicants need to be an Australian citizen/Australian permanent resident/holder of a permanent Humanitarian Visa and identify as a woman. *Pathways to Politics for Women* embraces an inclusive definition of 'women', acknowledging the diversity of women that the programme works with and aims to support, including cisgender and transgender women, and non-binary people. To increase diverse female representation applicants are encouraged who identify with equity criteria: Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander; LGBTQIA+; previous status as a refugee or current holder of a humanitarian visa; regional, rural or isolated background; disadvantaged socio-economic circumstances; person with a disability and/or chronic medical condition; or person from a culturally and linguistically diverse background.

Aim and ethos of the programme

The programme aims to support women from diverse backgrounds to overcome the barriers to reach elected office at all three levels of government. The ethos of the programme is non-partisan and is about creating a safe space under Chatham House rules and a Code of Conduct so participants can learn and connect with each other and with experienced politicians who share their stories and their expertise.

"I got to network with women who have experienced similar things, so I got to confirm that the things I was thinking weren't just

in my head. They were real. I got to meet a lot of other women in the same situation" (QUT *Pathways to Politics for Women* alumni).

A significant barrier to entering politics highlighted in a recent survey of alumni from the QUT *Pathways to Politics for Women* was having the required knowledge, skills, support and network to enable them to be elected.

The programme provides women with a deep understanding of what it means to be a female politician and how to navigate the political workplace.

"It humanised the prospect of being a politician through candid conversations with current and past female politicians." (QUT *Pathways to Politics for Women* alumni).

Below: 'Understanding how to campaign'. From left to right politicians Amy Macmahon, Corrine McMillan (on screen), Teresa Harding, Deb Frecklington and facilitator Ruth McGowan.



Image credits: QUT Pathways to Politics for Women.



OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN PARLIAMENT

QUT Pathways to Politics for Women

The QUT Pathways to Politics for Women (<https://www.qut.edu.au/study/professional-and-executive-education/pathways-to-politics-for-women>) is an example of one of the programmes delivered as part of the national network. Delivered since 2020, the programme offers three face to face weekend workshops across three consecutive months as well as online sessions, coaching and resources to build the participants' capacity to take on political leadership roles and build their political career.

Topics that are covered in 'Workshop 1: Building your political career' include sessions on making the decision to run, exploring why participants wish to enter politics, navigating the parliamentary workplace culture and understanding the party machine and pre-selection process.

In 'Workshop 2: Becoming the strongest candidate', participants learn about campaigning and fundraising, policy and how to conduct media interviews.

The final 'Workshop 3: Being a political leader' focuses participants on their political leadership and handling ethical dilemmas. Throughout the programme, participants develop their speech writing and presentation skills delivering a short 'stump' speech (campaign speech) in the Queensland State Parliament on the final day of Workshop 3.

Coaching is also incorporated into the programme to support women to build their self-confidence, to manage their wellbeing and competing roles and to set career goals to take forward after completing the programme.

Research conducted by Spark, Cox and Corbett (2019) reinforces the importance of the knowledge and skills women learn in this programme. They found that successful women politicians developed strategies which included investing in their education, developing strategies for working in a male-dominated environment, building strategic networks and managing their work life balance so as not to spend too much time away from home.

The impact of the Pathways to Politics for Women

The programmes offered nationwide have had a profound impact on female representation in politics in Australia and are building the confidence amongst aspiring female politicians to stand for election.

"After completing the QUT programme, I know I have a future in politics and now feel confident to step up into leadership roles in my party." (QUT Pathways to Politics for Women alumni).

Nationally, the programme now has 450 alumni with a projected 1,000 alumni by 2026. Since 2016, 47 alumni from the programme have been elected from all sides of politics and all levels of government, including 13 alumni in the recent Queensland local elections held in March 2024.

In addition to the programmes offered by each state, support and ongoing development is provided for the alumni through state and territory-based mentoring programmes, alumni events and masterclasses.

Both alumni from the programme and any women interested in entering politics have access to a rich selection of resources and research through the Knowledge Hub provided on the national programme site.

Conclusion

As female representation increases in Parliament though the impact of programmes like the *Pathways to Politics for Women*, so women and girls are more likely to participate and consider politics as a positive and viable career (Wolbrecht and Campbell, 2007)

To sustain the momentum to increase female representation at all levels of politics in Australia, it requires the implementation of strategies to overcome knowledge and information barriers, social and cultural barriers and structural and institutional barriers (Maguire, 2018).

The *Pathways to Politics for Women* builds women's self-confidence, knowledge and skills and access to supportive networks recognising and honouring the 'female style' of leadership and the distinct contribution that women can make to the political process and outcomes. At a structural and institutional level, the programme is creating an awareness of the systemic barriers faced by women entering politics through research and advocacy.

It would be fitting to leave the last word to one of our QUT Pathways to Politics for Women alumni who has recently been elected to her local council.

"The QUT Pathways to Politics Programme changed my life. Being able to live my truth and express myself with like-minded women only furthered my passion and aspirations to run for public office. The programme honours the 'female style' of leadership and value that this type of leadership makes to politics."

QUT Pathways to Politics for Women - As the only programme of its kind in Queensland, QUT's Pathway to Politics for Women is a national, non-partisan initiative that seeks to increase female participation at all levels of government by equipping women with the skills to succeed in being elected to public office, and to thrive as political leaders. <https://pathwaystopolitics.org.au/>.

This article is based on a presentation given by the author at the 40th CPA Australia and Pacific Regional Conference in Queensland in November 2023 on the theme of 'Representation for the Future: Young People and Parliaments'.

Below: Workshop participants begin with 'Building your base'. From left to right politicians Deb Frecklington, Nicole Johnstone, and Penny Allman-Payne.



Image credits: QUT Pathways to Politics for Women



Image credits: OJT Pathways to Politics for Women.

Above: 'Making their final speeches in the Queensland Parliament'. 2023 cohort participant, Pye Augustine and 2022 cohort participant, Emily Kim make their parliamentary speeches at the end of the final Workshop.

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How can you make your Parliament a gender-sensitive institution?

- The Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) network is an active advocate for women's representation in Parliament, seeking to ensure Parliaments are gender-sensitive institutions.
- The CWP network has produced two complementary publications to help Parliaments through the gender-sensitisation process.



Download your copy online at: www.cpahq.org or email hq.sec@cpahq.org to request a copy





COMMONWEALTH WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS CELEBRATE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2024 ON THEME OF #ACCELERATEPROGRESS

On International Women's Day 2024, the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) network joined Parliaments across the Commonwealth in celebrating the achievements of women and campaigning for women's full and equal participation in political and parliamentary leadership at all levels. This year's International Women's Day on 8 March 2024 was held under the theme of 'Invest in women: Accelerate progress'.

The CWP network also highlighted the achievements of women in sub-national Legislatures across the Commonwealth as the network is unique in connecting Parliaments at national, state, provincial and territorial levels. For example, the Parliaments of Victoria and Western Australia were both celebrating achieving gender equal Legislatures in the previous year.

The Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP), Hon. Dr Zainab Gimba, MP said: *"This year's theme underscores the critical role of investing in women to achieve true progress. International Women's Day is a powerful reminder of the remarkable achievements of women, from economic powerhouses to social changemakers. I'm filled with immense pride for the incredible women around the world. Today, we celebrate their strength, diversity and the undeniable impact they have on every aspect of society."*



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2024 ACROSS THE COMMONWEALTH

CPA ISLE OF MAN

The Parliament of the Isle of Man (Tynwald) held a special event with students from Ballakermeen High School to celebrate International Women's Day 2024 where students sat in the House of Keys to take part in their own debate, which included Motions on issues affecting young women on the Isle of Man such as period poverty and uniform policies in schools. Ahead of the sitting some of the students joined an online session hosted by the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) British Islands and Mediterranean Region to connect with the CWP Regional Conference in Malta as well as other young women to talk about modern day issues.

Reflecting on the sitting, student Lucie Hepworth said: *'I'm passionate about equality and I was keen to share my personal experience in the debate. To be able to speak on topics that matter to young women has been a great experience, and hearing from other women during the webinar was really eye-opening and made us feel that we're not just lone voices. We all believe that education before legislation is the way forward, so I think that if there were to be another event like this, there'd be value if boys were to take part as well.'*

Serving as Speaker of the House of Keys for the sitting was the former President of Tynwald, Hon. Clare Christian OBE, who praised the students for their well-prepared and also spontaneous contributions, and she concluded by underlining the importance of education to bring about change.





CPA VICTORIA BRANCH

The Presiding Officers of the Parliament of Victoria – the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, Hon. Maree Edwards, MP and the President of the Legislative Council, Hon. Shaun Leane, MLC - unveiled new portraits at Parliament House to honour Judy Maddigan, first woman Speaker of Legislative Assembly and Monica Gould, the first woman President of Legislative Council to mark International Women's Day 2024. Both became the Victorian Parliament's first female Presiding Officers in 2003 during distinguished careers in Parliament. Participating in the event were a range of inspirational women who were invited by their local Members of Parliament in gratitude for their work in their local communities.



Image: Parliament of Victoria.



Image: Queensland Parliament.

CPA QUEENSLAND BRANCH

To mark International Women's Day 2024, members of the Queensland Parliamentary Service came together to show their support for this year's IWD theme 'Inspire Inclusion'. The event recognised the women of the Parliamentary Service and the important work they do.

CPA WALES BRANCH

The Welsh Parliament (Senedd Cymru) held a special event for International Women's Day that heard from inspirational women

talking about the history of women's achievement in public life in Wales and what barriers remain in the way of equality. Member of Parliament, parliamentary staff and special guests attended the event which celebrated women in Welsh democracy.



Image: Welsh Parliament.

CPA NORTHERN IRELAND BRANCH

To celebrate International Women's Day 2024, the Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly, Hon. Edwin Poots, MLA hosted a special reception in the Parliament Buildings.



Image: Parliament of Zambia.

The event highlighted six inspirational women from across all sectors - Lady Chief Justice, Dame Siobhan Keegan; Lesley Hogg, the Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Assembly; Professor Cathy-Gormley Heenan, OBE, University Provost Ulster University; Natalie Niederman, Inclusive Participation Officer of the Female Sports Forum; Catherine McKeever, President of the Ulster Society of Women Artists; and Patricia O'Hagan MBE, Technology Entrepreneur - who in keeping with this year's theme 'Inspire Inclusion', provided keynote speeches on their remarkable lives and careers. The Speaker said: "When I was first elected to the Assembly in 1998, there were 15 female MLAs out of 108. In the Assembly that I now preside over as Speaker, we have

34 women in the Assembly out of 90. There are also very few roles in the Assembly that have not yet been filled by women and the Executive is led by two women leaders. I have no doubt that this will only encourage more women to consider entering politics to further increase representation in the Assembly."

CPA FIJI BRANCH

Members of the Parliament of Fiji's Women's Parliamentary Caucus held a special meeting for International Women's Day 2024 to plan new activities for the year ahead.



Image: Parliament of Fiji.

CPA NEW SOUTH WALES BRANCH

To mark International Women's Day 2024, the Parliament of New South Wales hosted over 1,000 students from schools across the state for the Young Women's Leadership Seminar.



Image: Parliament of New South Wales.

The future leaders attended the event in-person in the Legislative Assembly chamber with more attendees online. Students heard from keynote speaker, Associate Professor Lisa Williams from the University of New South Wales (UNSW) and engaged in conversation with a panel of women Members of Parliament. The CWP New South Wales Chair, Hon. Lynda Voltz, MP, also a new parliamentary network for young women leaders from across the state. The inaugural members of this network will be a group of incredible young women, each nominated by a woman Member of the New South Wales Parliament, who have already made impactful contributions to their communities.

COMMONWEALTH WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS NETWORK RELEASES NEW 2024 DATA ON WOMEN IN PARLIAMENTS

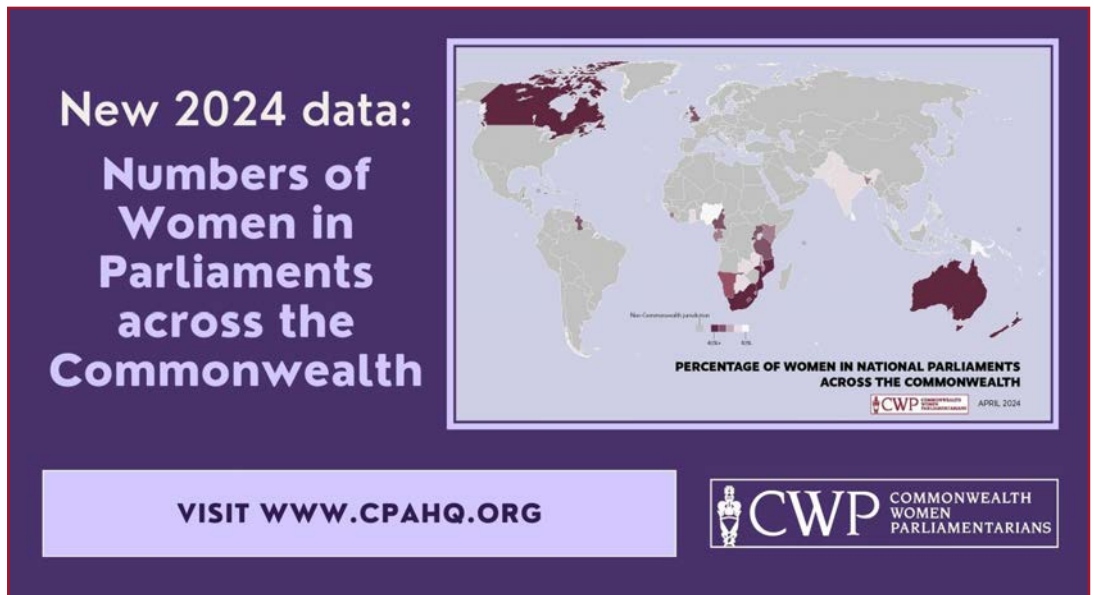
For the first time, the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) network has released detailed data on the numbers of Women Parliamentarians in Legislatures across the Commonwealth.

The importance of collecting this data for the CWP network is crucial as it shows how Commonwealth Parliaments are progressing in terms of representation, equality and equal rights, policymaking, role models, accountability and global development. Collecting data on the number of women in Parliaments serves as a barometer for measuring societal progress toward gender equality and ensuring that women have a meaningful voice in shaping policies that affect their lives.

In 2024, the CWP data shows that the total number of Women Parliamentarians (as at April 2024) in Commonwealth Parliaments is 4,205 with the average percentage of women in Parliaments at 25.9% across the Commonwealth. The CWP data takes account of both Houses in bi-cameral Parliaments and also includes both national and sub-national Parliaments.

The CWP data includes rankings for Women in Parliament in the nine CPA Regions and the top ten Legislatures for the number of Women in Parliaments in both national Parliaments and across all Legislatures within the CPA's membership. The data also includes a list of jurisdictions with no Women Parliamentarians.

- The top three national Parliaments in 2024 for women's representation are Rwanda (48.0% average for women Members across both Houses), Australia Federal (46.0%) and New Zealand (45.5% unicameral).
- The top three Parliaments from the CPA's membership in 2024 are Limpopo (55.1% unicameral), Australian Capital Territory (52.0%) and Tasmania (51.4%).



The CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg said “The CWP data on the numbers of women in Commonwealth Parliaments for 2024 shows that we are seeing some progress but that we are far from achieving the goal of gender equality in our Legislatures. More women than ever hold political decision-making posts worldwide, but we need to progress further to achieve women’s full and equal participation in all Parliaments.

Advances have been made in the Commonwealth with examples from the Parliaments of Sierra Leone and India where they have both passed recent legislation to increase their numbers of women Members. In the case of Sierra Leone, this has already resulted in an increase in women’s representation. There has also been good progress in the representation of women in the sub-national Legislatures in Australia and South Africa where they have a high number of women MPs.”

- To access the CWP data on the numbers of Women in Parliaments across the Commonwealth please visit the CPA website www.cpaHQ.org.
- Please note: The CWP data is likely to change by the end of 2024 due to a higher-than-average number of elections due to take place in Commonwealth Parliaments this year. Further data in subsequent years will also provide a comparative analysis in the future. We also acknowledge the IPU data for national Parliaments which is included as part of this analysis.

KENYA WOMEN’S PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION AND KENYA INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC FINANCE EMPOWER WOMEN LEGISLATORS WITH SKILLS FOR POSITIVE HEALTH AND GENDER OUTCOMES

The Kenya Women Parliamentary Association (KEWOPA) in partnership with the Institute of Public Finance (IPF) initiated a programme aimed at empowering women legislators with skills on appropriation and resourcing for positive health and gender outcomes. Women Parliamentarians said they look forward to working closely with the Members of Budget & Appropriations, Finance, Health, Social Protection and Labour Committees to address gender responsive budgeting. Speaking during the meeting, Kajiado County MP and KEWOPA Chairperson, Hon. Leah Sankaire raised concerns over insufficient funding and budgetary cuts to gender responsive programmes and emphasised the critical need for adequate financial support, particularly in light of reduced donor funding towards such programmes.





10th CWP BRITISH ISLANDS AND MEDITERRANEAN REGIONAL CONFERENCE IN MALTA

Women Parliamentarians from across the CWP British Islands and Mediterranean Region met at the Parliament of Malta for the 10th CWP BIM Regional Conference from 6 to 9 March 2024. The event was held under the theme of ‘Resilient Women: Moulding Girls into Strong Women’ and featured sessions on the issues and challenges affecting women across the Commonwealth including combatting violence against women and girls, examining the lack of women in leadership and the backlash against gender equality and women’s empowerment. The CWP Regional Conference coincided with International Women’s Day 2024 on 8 March. To mark the day, the CWP BIM Regional Steering Committee held an event led by two Scottish Members, Hon. Sarah Boyack, MSP and Hon. Michelle Thomson, MSP that linked virtually with a group of young women aged 19 to 30 years old from the Scottish Young Women’s Movement to discuss the issues which are seen as the main challenges faced by young women today. Delegates in Malta and the young participants in Scotland and other CPA Branches from the Region joining virtually had the opportunity to ask questions virtually with group discussions and breakout rooms. Hon. Sarah Boyack, MSP said the objective of the event was ‘to bring together young women in groups across the BIM Region to discuss the issues which are seen as the challenges faced by young women today’.



Image: Parliament of Malta/CPA BIM Region.

MPs FROM UK AND SOUTH AFRICA JOIN ICWS PANEL DISCUSSION ON COMBATTING ONLINE ABUSE AGAINST WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS

Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians from the UK and South Africa joined global experts for a panel discussion on 20 March 2024 to discuss combatting the online harassment of women in Parliament and solutions to promote women’s equal participation in politics with the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, the Canadian High Commission and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. The CPA Secretary-General Stephen Twigg chaired the panel discussion with CPA UK Chair, Rt Hon. Dame Maria Miller, MP; Hon. Yasmin Qureshi, MP (both UK); Hon. Fasiha Hassan, MPL (Gauteng); and lawyer Jen Robinson. The Members of Parliament spoke of the abuse that they have received online and the effects that it has on women entering political life. The keynote speaker was Catherine McKenna, former Cabinet Minister in Canada, who spoke about her experiences a prominent woman in public life. ICWS Director, Kingsley Abbott welcomed the event ‘to raise awareness of the online harassment against Women Parliamentarians and to identify solutions across the Commonwealth’.



Image: Institute of Commonwealth Studies (ICWS).

CWP AFRICA REGION ADVOCATE FOR GENDER EQUALITY

The CWP Africa Region Steering Committee has undertaken a visit to Ghana from 6 to 8 May 2024 to conduct an election sensitization campaign, advocating for gender equality in the upcoming general elections due in December 2024. The delegation met with the Women’s Parliamentary Caucus at the Parliament of Ghana along with the Caucus Chair, Hon. Patricia Appiagyeyi, MP and the Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection, Hon. Dakoa Newman, MP. Led by the CWP Africa Region Vice-Chairperson, Hon. Talita Monnakotgla, MP (Botswana) and the CWP International Chairperson, Hon. Dr Zainab Gimba, MP (Nigeria), the delegation also met with various organisations including the Chairperson of the National Commission for Civic Education (NCEE), Ms Kathleen Addy as well as the National Women’s Organizer of the governing party, New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the opposition party, National Democratic Congress (NDC). Other Members of the CWP Africa Region Steering Committee attending were Hon. Dr Beatrice Adagala, MP (Kenya - Sub-Regional Representative for East Africa) and Senator Linda Nxumalo (Eswatini - Sub-Regional Representative for Southern Africa).



Image: Parliament of Ghana.

COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARIANS CALL FOR END OF ABUSE TOWARDS WOMEN MPs



Image: CPA UK Branch.

Twenty-seven MPs from 14 Commonwealth jurisdictions called for an end to the abuse aimed towards women politicians, highlighting this as a global issue and as a form of gender-based violence. Parliamentarians raised awareness of the disproportionate levels of violence directed towards women MPs and the increase in gender-based violence after attending a session on online abuse and equal right to political participation at the 72nd Westminster Seminar held at the UK Parliament in March 2024.



COMMONWEALTH LEGISLATIVE NEWS

PARLIAMENTARY REPORTS AND THIRD READINGS FROM
PARLIAMENTS AROUND THE COMMONWEALTH



AUSTRALIA

Budget Night and retirement
of former Prime Minister

Page 187

UNITED KINGDOM

Parliament reports in the run-
up to the UK General Election

Page 195

INDIA

Parliamentary business and a
security breach

Page 199

CANADA

Foreign interference in
Canadian democracy

Page 193

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Salary Review report and
Property Tax

Page 198

THIRD READING REPORTS

- Australia Federal **Page 190**
- British Columbia **Page 192**
- Uganda **Page 197**
- New Zealand **Page 201**



REPORTS FROM THE PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA

Parliamentary Report by Fleur Hall, Parliament of Australia.

BUDGET NIGHT 2024

On 14 May 2024, the Treasurer, **Hon. Dr Jim Chalmers, MP** (Australian Labor Party), introduced Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2024-2025 (the Main Appropriation Bill). During his Second Reading speech, the Treasurer described the Budget as ‘*responsible*’ and said that it had been ‘*framed in fraught and fragile economic conditions*.’ Before making specific announcements, the Treasurer elaborated on the global economy, which he said is ‘*resilient in parts but subdued overall ... inflation is lingering in North America, growth is slowing in China and tepid in Europe, tensions have escalated in the Middle East and persist in Ukraine, global supply chains are fragmenting*.’

The Treasurer said that the main priorities in the Budget were:

- helping with the cost of living.
- building more homes.
- investing in a ‘future made in Australia’.
- strengthening Medicare and the care economy.
- responsible economic management.

The Treasurer also reminded the House that ‘*last year, our responsible economic management delivered the first surplus in 15 years. We now expect another surplus, of \$9.3 billion this year*.’ But he observed that in coming years, it was expected that pressures on the Budget would ‘*intensify, rather than ease*’, with a deficit of \$28.3 billion forecast in 2024-25.

Concluding his speech, the Treasurer said that the Budget ‘*reflects our biggest ambitions and our highest aspirations - to make Australians the primary beneficiaries of a world of churn and change; tapping their confidence, their compassion and their creativity to manage their pressures and maximise our advantages to forge a new economy and a new generation of prosperity and, in that effort, to make Australians and Australia more secure in the bigger opportunities that we shape and in the future we make together*.’

Following the Budget speech, Appropriation Bill (No. 2) 2024-2025 and Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments)



Image credit: Parliament of Australia/AUSPIC/DPS.

Bill (No. 1) 2024-2025 were presented by the Assistant Treasurer, **Hon. Stephen Jones, MP**.

On Thursday 16 May, the Leader of the Opposition, **Hon. Peter Dutton, MP**, gave the Budget reply, describing the Budget handed down on Tuesday night as one of the most ‘*irresponsible*’ he had seen.

Mr Dutton said that he would ‘*outline part of my vision for Australia to get our country back on track, to keep our nation safe and secure, to make life easier and better for all Australians*.’ During his speech, he outlined several Opposition policies, including to:

- implement a two-year ban on foreign investors and temporary residents purchasing new homes in Australia.
- reduce migration numbers to ease pressure on housing.
- increase the amount that older Australians and veterans can work without reducing pension payments.
- restore the number of Medicare-subsidised psychological sessions from 10 to 20 on a permanent basis.
- work with states and territories to develop uniform knife laws across all jurisdictions.
- make it an offence to use mobile phones and computer networks to cause an intimate partner or family member fear for their personal safety, to track them

using spyware or to engage in coercive behaviours, and to toughen the bail laws that would apply to these new Commonwealth offences.

Mr Dutton concluded by telling the House that ‘*as each day passes, this Government increasingly shows how disconnected it is from the views, the values and the vision of everyday Australians*’ and he argued that ‘*my team and I have the experience to get our country back on track and to support everyday Australians*.’

When the debate on the Second Reading of the Main Appropriation Bill resumes, it is customary for there to be a cognate debate covering Appropriation Bill (No. 2) and Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments) Bill (No. 1). It is expected that many Members will contribute to the Second Reading debate, during which the requirement that debate be relevant to the subject matter is waived, under the Standing Orders, and public affairs may be debated.

While the Second Reading debate is occurring in the House of Representatives, the particulars of expenditure contained in the Bills will be examined by the Senate through its Estimates Committees. The Budget Bills are expected to pass both Houses by 30 June 2024.



Image credit: Parliament of Australia/AUSPIC



RETIREMENT OF FORMER PRIME MINISTER AND BY-ELECTION FOR THE DIVISION OF COOK

On 28 February 2024, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, **Hon. Milton Dick, MP**, announced that he had received from **Hon. Scott Morrison, MP** a letter resigning his seat as Member for the electoral division of Cook, in the State of New South Wales. Mr Morrison was first elected to the House of Representatives for Cook in 2007. He was re-elected in 2010, 2013, 2016, 2019 and 2022 and was Prime Minister of Australia from 24 August 2018 to 23 May 2022.

In his valedictory speech, Mr Morrison thanked his constituents, saying *'it has been my great privilege to have served you as your local Member in this Parliament for these past more than 16 years, where you have been kind enough to elect me on six separate - six successive - occasions. I thank you for the tremendous and steadfast support you've provided to me and my family, who join me here today, during this time.'* Mr Morrison said that in his *'local and national roles, including as Prime Minister, I have always been guided by the strong local values of my community - family, community, small business - and what I describe as the fair go for those who have a go.'*

Mr Morrison then offered some reflections about things he had learned, which, he said, might help those dealing with the challenges of the future. He said that *'without a strong economy, you cannot achieve your goals as a nation...and we must be careful not to re-institutionalise our economy.'* Secondly, he said that *'our global rules-based order is being challenged by a new arc of autocracy [that] ranges from Pyongyang to Beijing to Tehran and Moscow'*, adding that he was *'proud of our swift response to support Ukraine.'* Finally, Mr Morrison observed that we continue *'to stand on the very same ground that established our western civilisation and that inspired and enabled the modern, pluralist representative democracy we now enjoy. We stand on the values that build a successful, free society, like individual liberty, the rule of law, equality of opportunity, responsible citizenship, morality and liberty of speech, thought, religion and association. All of these stem from the core principle of respect for individual human dignity.'*

On 18 March, the Deputy Speaker, **Hon. Sharon Claydon, MP** announced that the date of the by-election for Cook would be 13 April. The seat was won by **Mr Simon Kennedy** (Liberal Party of Australia). The Australian Labor Party did not contest the seat. Mr Kennedy was sworn in on 14 May, and will make his first speech in the coming weeks.

The electorate of Cook is named after Lieutenant (later Captain) James Cook, who first landed at Kurnell in 1770. The name also commemorates Sir Joseph Cook, Prime Minister 1913-14. It covers 94 square kilometres in southern Sydney, from Kurnell and Cronulla in the east to Sylvania and Gymea Bay in the west and from Kyle Bay, Monterey and Botany Bay in the north to Dents Creek and Hacking River in the south.

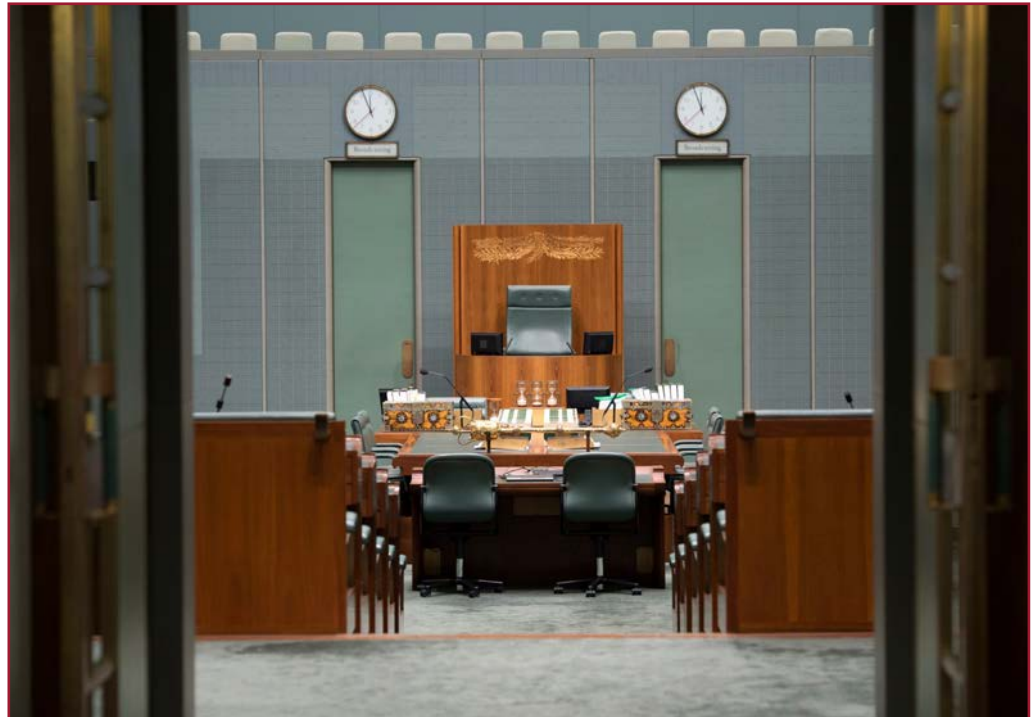
NEW MEMBER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

On 6 February 2024, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, **Hon. Milton Dick, MP**, announced that he had issued a writ for the election of a Member to serve for the electoral division of Dunkley, in the State of Victoria, to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Ms Peta Jan Murphy. The Speaker said that the date of the by-election would be 2 March 2024.

The seat was won by **Ms Jodie Belyea** (Australian Labor Party), who defeated Liberal candidate Mr Nathan Conroy. Ms Belyea was sworn in on 18 March and gave her first speech on 27 March. Describing herself as ‘a mum from Frankston with a husband, a son, two dogs and a mortgage’, Ms Belyea said that she was ‘conscious of the tragic circumstances that bring me here: the passing of my predecessor, Peta Murphy. I acknowledge the pain that many in this place and in our community feel for the loss of such a remarkable, strong warrior for justice as Peta was.’

Ms Belyea thanked the people of Dunkley ‘for the immense privilege and honour’ of representing them in the federal Parliament. Speaking about her priorities as the new Member, Ms Belyea said that she would champion the development of policies and programmes for women that strengthen their health and wellbeing, including for women recovering from family violence. She said that she would also advocate for the recommendations of the ‘*You win some, you lose more*’ report into the adverse social effects of online gambling, and its impacts on those experiencing gambling harm. Ms Belyea told the House that Ms Murphy, the Chair of the Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, had ‘*driven the report’s commonsense recommendations with great empathy and care [and] it falls on us to meet her political courage with a bit of our own.*’ Finally, she said that she would do ‘*whatever is within my power to ensure that young people from all walks of life have the skills and confidence to live into their potential and navigate the complex issues they face now and into the future.*’

The electorate of Dunkley was first created in 1984 and is named after Louisa Dunkley, an early campaigner for equal pay for women and a founder of the Victorian Women’s Post and Telegraph Association. It covers 152 square kilometres and consists of Frankston City Council, and part of the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council.



PARLIAMENTARY REPORTS FROM THE CPA AUSTRALIA REGION

UPCOMING ELECTIONS FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY AND THE STATE OF QUEENSLAND

Queensland’s next general election is scheduled to be held on 26 October 2024. At this election, 93 Members, representing 93 electorates, will be elected to the Queensland Parliament. Queensland is led by **Hon. Steve Miles** (Australian Labor Party), who was sworn in as the state’s 40th Premier following the resignation, on 10 December 2023, of Hon. Anastacia Palaszczuk. The Leader of the Opposition is **Mr David Crisafulli** (LNP).

The next election for the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Legislative Assembly is due to be held on 19 October 2024. The Assembly is made up of 25 Members of the Legislative Assembly who are elected from five different electorates. The Chief Minister for the ACT, **Andrew Barr, MLA** (Australian Labor Party), has held the position since December 2014. The Leader of the Opposition is **Elizabeth Lee, MLA** (Canberra Liberals). At the last election, in October 2020, the Labor Party won a sixth consecutive term of government.

AUSTRALASIAN STUDY OF PARLIAMENT GROUP – UPCOMING ANNUAL CONFERENCE, NEW ZEALAND PARLIAMENT

Registrations are now open for the annual conference of the Australasian Study of Parliament Group, which will be hosted by the New Zealand Parliament from 2 to 4 October 2024. The ASPG annual conference brings together those with an interest in parliament and parliamentary affairs, such as parliamentary officers, academics, staff and former and current Members of Parliament, and the media. The theme for this year’s conference is ‘*Te Manawaroatanga o Pāremata i tea o Hurihuri – Parliament’s Resilience in a Changing World*’.

Established in 1978, the ASPG is a politically non-partisan body, focused on encouraging and stimulating research, writing, teaching and discussion about parliamentary institutions, particularly those of Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific. The ASPG has a main Executive body and has established Chapters in all States and Territories of Australia and in New Zealand. The official journal of the ASPG, the *Australasian Parliamentary Review*, is available at <https://www.aspg.org.au/a-p-r-journals-2/>.

To register for the 2024 Conference, and to find out more, see: <https://www.aspg.org.au/conferences/2024-new-zealand/>



Defence Amendment (Safeguarding Australia's Military Secrets) Bill 2024 and Defence Trade Controls Amendment Bill 2024

The Defence Amendment (Safeguarding Australia's Military Secrets) Bill 2024 ('the first Bill') and the Defence Trade Controls Amendment Bill 2024 ('the second Bill') were introduced in the Australian House of Representatives on 14 September 2023 and 30 November 2023 respectively. The first Bill was referred to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security and the second Bill was referred to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee. The reports of both Committees contained recommendations, including that the Bills be passed.

The first Bill amends the *Defence Act 1903* to establish a framework to regulate the:

- work that certain former defence staff members ('foreign work-restricted individuals') can perform without a foreign work authorisation.
- training that Australian citizens and permanent residents, other than foreign work restricted individuals, may provide without a foreign work authorisation.

The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence, **Hon. Richard Marles, MP** (Australian Labor Party) told the House that

the first Bill '*reflects Australia's commitment to enhance our security standards to safeguard sensitive technology and information, as we embark on work through our AUKUS partnership with the United States and the United Kingdom. Elements of this Bill are modelled on similar provisions that exist in United States domestic law.*' He said that the first Bill was a response to a recommendation by the Department of Defence that Australia should strengthen legislation preventing former defence personnel from transferring sensitive defence information to foreign militaries with interests inimical to Australia's.

The Deputy Prime Minister said that the Bill establishes a framework that requires certain former defence staff members (including former members of the Australian Defence Force, former Australian public servants of the Department of Defence and the Australian Submarine Agency, and former members of the reserves who rendered continuous full-time service) to obtain authorisation if they intend to perform work for a particular foreign military, foreign government or foreign government entity. He noted that the penalty in the Bill for performing work or specified training with a relevant foreign country without authorisation is 20 years' imprisonment. The Deputy Prime Minister told the House that the first Bill

contained some exemptions in relation to offences.

These include where an individual's work or training is in relation to providing aid of a humanitarian nature or if the individual performs an official duty for the United Nations, an agency of the United Nations or for the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The second Bill amends the *Defence Trade Controls Act 2012* to:

- regulate the supply of certain military or dual-use goods and technology on the Defence and Strategic Goods List (DSGL) from Australia to certain foreign persons both within and outside of Australia.
- regulate the provision of services in relation to DSGL Part 1 military goods or technology to foreign persons or entities.
- remove the requirement to obtain a permit for supplies of certain DSGL goods and technology and the provision of certain DSGL services to the United Kingdom or the United States.

The Deputy Prime Minister said that '*to give effect to these changes, the Bill creates new offences with appropriate penalties and exemptions.*' He said that the penalty in the Bill for engaging, without a permit, in the new activities regulated by it is a maximum of 10 years' imprisonment or a fine of 2,500 penalty units, or both. The Deputy Prime Minister explained that the second Bill also contained exemptions to the offences it creates – namely, for supplies by employers to their foreign national employees from countries on the Foreign Country List, for supplies undertaken in the course of employment or engagement by the Commonwealth, and for people holding covered security clearances.

He said that the second Bill complemented the first Bill, and that it would '*bolster Australia's national security and protect our sensitive defence goods and technology by enhancing our defence trade controls [and] unlock defence trade, innovation and collaboration with our AUKUS partners.*'



During a cognate debate on both Bills, the Shadow Minister for Defence, **Hon. Andrew Hastie, MP** (Liberal Party of Australia) observed that the House was ‘*debating legislation to enable AUKUS...it’s about building a uniform system of export controls and offences across the US, the UK and Australia.*’ Mr Hastie further explained that the legislation would interact directly with the ‘*hugely significant*’ 2024 National Defense Authorization Act passed by the US Congress in 2023, which ‘*established a national exemption for Australia and the UK from US defence export licensing and adds Australia and the UK to the Defense Production Act. Specifically, it authorises the transfer of three Virginia class submarines to Australia. It also authorises the maintenance of US nuclear submarines in Australia, which is a critical part of the Optimal Pathway and of establishing Submarine Rotational Force – West.*’

The Member for Goldstein, **Ms Zoe Daniel, MP** (Independent) said that she did not begin the speech with ‘*an ideological mindset against AUKUS*’, but observed that ‘*for a project with the eye-watering price tag of \$368 billion, we are asked to accept an awful lot about AUKUS as an act of faith, including that:*

- *Pillar II of AUKUS, the subject of this legislation, in effect, will provide the benefits to Australian research and industry predicted by the Government.*
- *the US can reboot its industrial base sufficiently to build the submarines promised to Australia.*
- *the US Congress will agree to the sale of two or three of its own subs to Australia as the US struggles to build new subs at a rate to match its own strategic priorities.*
- *Australia has not implicitly undermined national sovereignty in signing up for AUKUS.*
- *the US Congress will agree to sell Australia the first two or three subs without an express commitment to join Washington in conflict with China over Taiwan.*
- *Australia can develop the workforce with the expertise required to develop a nuclear submarine from scratch in the short time frame required.*
- *a small force of nuclear submarines could do what a larger and cheaper force of conventional submarines could not.*

• *that a handful of expensive nuclear subs will prove to be a deterrent, protecting Australia’s vital shipping lanes.*’

Ms Daniel also expressed concerns about ‘*being asked to vote on legislation drafted before a parliamentary inquiry - the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee - is complete.*’

The first and second Bills were read a second time on 19 March and 20 March 2024.

During consideration in detail of the first Bill, the Deputy Prime Minister moved one Government amendment, which he explained would make amendments to the Criminal Code Act 1995 with the effect that a person exempt from offences in the first Bill would also be exempt from section 83.3 of the Criminal Code for the same conduct. The amendment was agreed to, the Bill as amended was agreed to, and it was read a third time.

During consideration in detail of the second Bill, the Deputy Prime Minister moved 36 Government amendments. He explained that these ‘*respond to the recommendations of the Senate Committee and to feedback from stakeholders identified through the consultation process.*’ The proposed amendments included a new exemption from offences related to ‘*fundamental research*’, and to authorise the Minister to add countries that are not members of the four multilateral regimes to the Foreign Country List, where such additions are in the interest of Australia’s national security, economic prosperity or international relations. The amendments were agreed to, the Bill as amended was agreed to, and it was read a third time.

Both Bills were introduced in the Australian Senate on 21 March 2024, and a cognate Second Reading debate took place that day. **Senator Mehreen Faruqi** (Australian Greens) said that the Greens ‘*oppose these Bills*’ and that ‘*in pursuing AUKUS, the Government has ended even the pretence of an independent foreign policy.*’ Her Greens colleague, **Senator David Shoebridge**, focussing on the second Bill, said it was ‘*an act of collective destruction, particularly against Australia’s scientific community, and it’s designed to wall off the Australian scientific and research community from the great bulk of global science and research. To see it being proposed by the Labor Party*

and then aggressively supported by the Coalition simply because it’s got the word ‘AUKUS’ in it is quite an extraordinary prospect.’ Senator Shoebridge said that it was ‘*part of a suite of AUKUS-related legislation that the Government says is designed to keep Australians safer, but [it] will actually make Australia less smart and, ultimately, less safe.*’ He said that the Bill had been ‘*rushed through, despite significant concerns from business and academia*’, adding that ‘*the evidence we heard in the Senate inquiry paints a disturbing picture of a national research brain drain that would weaken Australia’s national security if this Bill proceeds...it fails to address the very real issues that exist already within the Australian defence export regime, and it will have devastating impacts on the research and technology sector if it’s passed without radical changes.*’

Senator Jaqui Lambie (Jacqui Lambie Network), focussing on the first Bill, told the Senate that ‘*at the very least the definition of “foreign work restricted individuals” should be extended to include all former members of the National Security Committee of Cabinet and all MPs and Senators who have served on the Parliament Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security - and that should be the minimum. It’s worth noting that not one of those former or current Ministers, MPs and Senators got a security check.*’

Senator Hon. Simon Birmingham (Liberal Party of Australia), reiterating the Opposition’s support for both Bills, noted that ‘*legislation passed by the US Congress requires a certification from the US President to be satisfied of Australia’s progress in implementing security and export frameworks as contemplated by these Bills and that should be done at 120-day intervals following the enactment of the legislation by the US Congress. The first certification date occurs between this week and the next sitting of our Parliament, and 20 April 2024 is the first deadline for that indication to be given by the US President. We don’t wish to see any delay.*’

Both Bills were read a second time on 25 March and had their third readings on 27 March 2024. The Bills both received Royal Assent on 8 April 2024.



Third Reading Report by Mary Heeg, Legislative Assembly of British Columbia.

Bill 13, Land Title and Property Law Amendment Act, 2024

On 2 April 2024, *Bill 13, Land Title and Property Law Amendment Act, 2024*, was introduced in the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia. The Bill amends the *Property Law Act* and the *Land Title Act* to enable all First Nations in British Columbia to hold land in the name of their First Nation. During the First Reading of the Bill, several Indigenous leaders were in attendance in the gallery.

During a Second Reading debate, **Hon. Murray Rankin, MLA**, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, explained that since the late 1800s, most First Nations governments in British Columbia were prevented from holding land in the name of their First Nation. Instead, they had to hold land through proxies such as corporations, societies and trusts. The Minister indicated that First Nations have been calling on the Government to change this. With respect to jurisdiction, Minister Rankin stated that property and civil rights, as well as the management of the land title system, are the responsibility of the Provinces, as per Canada's *Constitution Act, 1867*. He emphasised that this Bill supports the alignment of Provincial laws with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as the Provincial Government's commitment to reconciliation and ensuring no one faces barriers to land ownership. He stated that the amendments are small but vitally important steps to acknowledge British Columbia's history and colonial past.

Michael Lee, MLA, Official Opposition Shadow Minister for Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, agreed that the Bill is an important step and noted that it has been recognised by many Indigenous leaders. Lee acknowledged that some

First Nations, and other governing bodies, have experienced challenges related to the administrative and technical work required to set up a corporation to own land. He recognised that the Bill supports economic growth for First Nations but added that it is important for First Nations, or any organisation, to have a good governance framework in place to deal with assets and property. Lee expressed a desire for more information about certain aspects of the Bill, including the analysis used to determine that this topic falls within Provincial jurisdiction and the statement by Grand Chief Stewart Phillip that the Bill falls short of British Columbia's obligations under the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*. Lee noted that the Bill uses the definition of 'First Nation' as determined by the federal *Indian Act*, and discussed how specific First Nations fit within this framework.

Third Party House Leader, **Adam Olsen, MLA**, expressed his support for the Bill and indicated that it is a sign that the Government and the Legislative Assembly are listening to Indigenous peoples. He emphasised that while the proposed changes are minor in some ways, they are significant for many First Nations. Olsen indicated that the treatment of land in British Columbia is an important topic, as demonstrated by the many court cases between First Nations and the Provincial Government. He noted that many Indigenous people have a different perspective on and relationship with the land and he supported increasing the number of Indigenous voices in the legislative debate. Olsen stated that the fact this amendment is only being implemented now shows that the pace of change is slow while also acknowledging that reconciliation and the implementation of the *Declaration*

on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act is going to take time.

The *Land Title and Property Law Amendment Act* passed its Third Reading on 4 April 2024.

Bill 15, Budget Measures Implementation (Residential Property (Short-Term Holding) Profit Tax) Act, 2024

Bill 15, Budget Measures Implementation (Residential Property (Short-Term Holding) Profit Tax) Act, 2024, was introduced on 3 April 2024. The Bill creates a residential property short-term holding profit tax, colloquially known as a 'flipping tax'. The tax applies to net profits on eligible properties that are sold within two years of purchase. The tax rate is 20% on net profits if the home is sold within one year of purchase and declines to zero over the course of the next year. Net taxable income is equal to the proceeds of disposition of the property minus the cost of acquiring the property and certain improvement costs. Individuals can be exempt from the tax due to life circumstances (including death, divorce, family growth, job relocation and job loss), selling the property to a family member or if the sale is adding to the housing supply. Individuals selling their primary residence after owning it for more than one year but less than two are allowed to deduct CA\$20,000 from their calculation of taxable income from the sale.

During a Second Reading debate, **Hon. Katrine Conroy, MLA**, Minister of Finance, stated that housing should be used as homes for people rather than as a source of profit for speculators. She indicated that this tax requires speculators to pay their fair share. The Minister also noted that government will use the tax revenues to make investments in affordable housing.

Official Opposition Shadow Minister for Finance, **Peter Milobar, MLA**, stated that he supports the principle of the Bill and believes it may be valuable long-term, even though there are not as many bidding wars in British Columbia now as there have been in recent years. Milobar stated that he has questions about the supporting figures presented by the Government, and suggested that these figures imply that the tax is targeted at people who may not actually be speculators. He also expressed concern about possible unintended consequences, such as individuals





CANADIAN PARLIAMENTARY REPORTS

Parliamentary Report by Gabrielle de Billy Brown, Parliament of Canada.

choosing to hold properties for longer and slowing down potential redevelopment. He noted that a housing economics expert, who is often cited by the Government, stated that the Bill will not create affordable housing. Additionally, Milobar indicated that while it is important to have exemptions, they limit the scope of the tax. At the Committee stage, he moved an amendment to fully exempt primary residences that have been held for one year. The amendment was negated on division.

Also during the Second Reading debate, the Leader of the Third Party, **Sonia Furstenuau, MLA**, stated that she supports the Bill, as well as the Provincial Government's work to address speculation and profiteering in the housing market. She noted that while there may not be a lot of speculation occurring right now, the Bill could help in the future. She added that the estimated number of affected properties is small, but the symbolic message of the legislation is important - that housing is a human right, not an investment. Furstenuau indicated that she would also like to see efforts to constrain real estate investment trusts and investor ownership of housing, as well as increased investment in non-market housing. She added that she hopes it will not be challenging for individuals who qualify for an exemption to prove their eligibility, as many of the exemptions are related to challenging personal circumstances. Finally, Furstenuau suggested that the Provincial Government could consider a capital gains tax on all sales of development sites on a much longer timeline than two years.

The *Budget Measures Implementation (Residential Property (Short-Term Holding) Profit Tax) Act, 2024* passed its Third Reading on 24 April 2024.

CHANGES IN THE SENATE OF CANADA

On 11 February 2024, **Hon. Pierre-Hughes Boisvenu** retired from the Senate of Canada, having represented the senatorial division of La Salle, in the Province of Québec, since 2010. At the time of his retirement, he was a member of the Conservative Party of Canada.

His successor was appointed on 13 February 2024, **Hon. Manuelle Oudar** now represents the senatorial division of La Salle. As a lawyer, she spent most of her career as a public servant in the Province of Québec, notably as President and Chief Executive Officer of the Province's labour standards board. She joined the Independent Senators Group on 2 May 2024.

On 10 April 2024, **Hon. Marnie McBean** joined the Independent Senators Group. She had been sitting as unaffiliated since her appointment in December 2023.

On 13 April 2024, **Hon. Percy Mockler** retired from the Senate after representing the Province of New Brunswick since 2009. For the duration of his appointment, he had been a member of the Conservative Party of Canada.

On 18 April 2024, **Hon. Toni Varone** joined the Independent Senators Group, after having sat as unaffiliated since his appointment to the Senate in December 2023.

As of 20 May 2024, the standings in the Senate were: Independent Senators Group 42, Canadian Senators Group 17, Progressive Senate Group 14, Conservative Party of Canada 13, and non affiliated 10. Nine seats were vacant.

CHANGES IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS OF CANADA

A by-election was held on 4 March 2024 in the constituency of Durham, in the Province of Ontario. The seat had been vacant since 1 August 2023. **Jamil Jivani, MP** was elected. A member of the Conservative Party of Canada, he has previously worked in the media, and as an advisor to the Premier of Ontario as the Advocate for Community Opportunities.

On 31 March 2024, **Daniel Blaikie, MP**, stepped down from his role. He had been representing the constituency of Elmwood–Transcona, in the Province of Manitoba, since 2015. A member of the New Democratic Party, he was his party's critic for Democratic Reform.

The standings in the House of Commons as of 20 May 2024 were: Liberal Party of Canada 156, Conservative Party of Canada

118, Bloc Québécois 32, New Democratic Party 24, Independent 3 and Green Party of Canada 2. Three seats are vacant.

IN MEMORIAM: FORMER CANADIAN PRIME MINISTER

On 29 February 2024, **Rt Hon. Martin Brian Mulroney**, former MP, passed away. He was Prime Minister of Canada for over eight years, between 1984 and 1993, and was a Member of Parliament for ten years. His most recognised accomplishments as Prime Minister include the free trade negotiations with the United States of America and Mexico, championing environmental protection and opposing the apartheid regime in South Africa. Following his career in electoral politics, he was active as a businessman and a lawyer, and he received many awards for his work, including the Order of Canada. A state funeral was organised in Montréal on 23 March 2024 in recognition of his contribution to Canada: a lying-in-state was also organised in Ottawa to allow the public to offer their condolences to the family.

FOREIGN INTERFERENCE IN CANADIAN DEMOCRACY

Following allegations and news articles that indicated attempts by foreign states and non-state actors to influence Canadian democratic institutions, the Federal Government launched the *Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference in Federal Electoral Processes and Democratic Institutions*. Led by Commissioner Justice Marie-Josée Hogue, it is tasked with investigating these claims and reporting its findings.



Image credit: Shutterstock_3225018/Parliament of Canada.



The Commissioner released her initial report, which covers the first phase of the work of the Public Inquiry, on 3 May 2024. In her preliminary findings, she reports that there is conclusive evidence of foreign interference in the 2019 and 2021 federal general elections, though it did not affect the overall results regarding which party was allowed to form government at the time. However, the Commissioner regrets that foreign influence has had a detrimental effect on Canadians' trust in their democracy and has affected the broader electoral system.

Regarding foreign interference, the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs, **Hon. Dominic Leblanc, MP** tabled *Bill C-70, An Act respecting countering foreign interference* on 6 May 2024. This Bill proposes a series of amendments to the *Security of Information Act*, the *Canadian Security Intelligence Service Act*, the *Canada Evidence Act* and the *Criminal Code* to better prevent, detect and counter threats against Canadians and Canadian institutions. Bill C-70 also introduces the *Foreign Influence Transparency and Accountability Act* which would create a registry of individuals and entities who advocate on behalf of or collaborate with a foreign state or non-state actor to exercise influence over Canadian institutions.

LEGISLATION

On 19 March 2024, *Bill C-35, An Act respecting early learning and childcare in Canada*, received Royal Assent. The Bill establishes funding to create a Canada-wide early learning and childcare system which will be “*accessible, affordable, inclusive and of high quality*”. Funding for this system will be provided through agreements with the Provinces and Indigenous governing bodies, as the Federal Government does not administer childcare services.

RECONCILIATION WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

On 2 May 2024, the Prime Minister of Canada, **Rt Hon. Justin Trudeau, MP**, alongside Ministers and Indigenous leaders, announced the creation of a new position: the Commissioner for Modern Treaty Implementation. This position would be an Agent of Parliament responsible for holding the Federal Government accountable before Parliament on its Modern Treaty obligations. The Commissioner would also be able to conduct oversight of activities related to the implementation of these obligations by the Federal Government. At the time of writing, a legislative proposal to create the position has not yet been tabled in Parliament.

OFFICIAL SUMMONING AND REPRIMAND OF AN INDIVIDUAL TO THE BAR OF THE HOUSE

On 17 April 2024, the Canadian House of Commons exercised its right to summon an individual before the bar of the House to be admonished by the Speaker of the House of Commons, **Hon. Greg Fergus, MP**. Kristian Firth was found in contempt of Parliament in a motion adopted unanimously on 8 April 2024 for his refusal to provide answers to questions and for his prevarication in his answers to other questions in his appearances before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates. As a contractor, he had been involved in the development of *ArriveCan*, the application created during the COVID-19 pandemic to facilitate international border crossings into Canada.

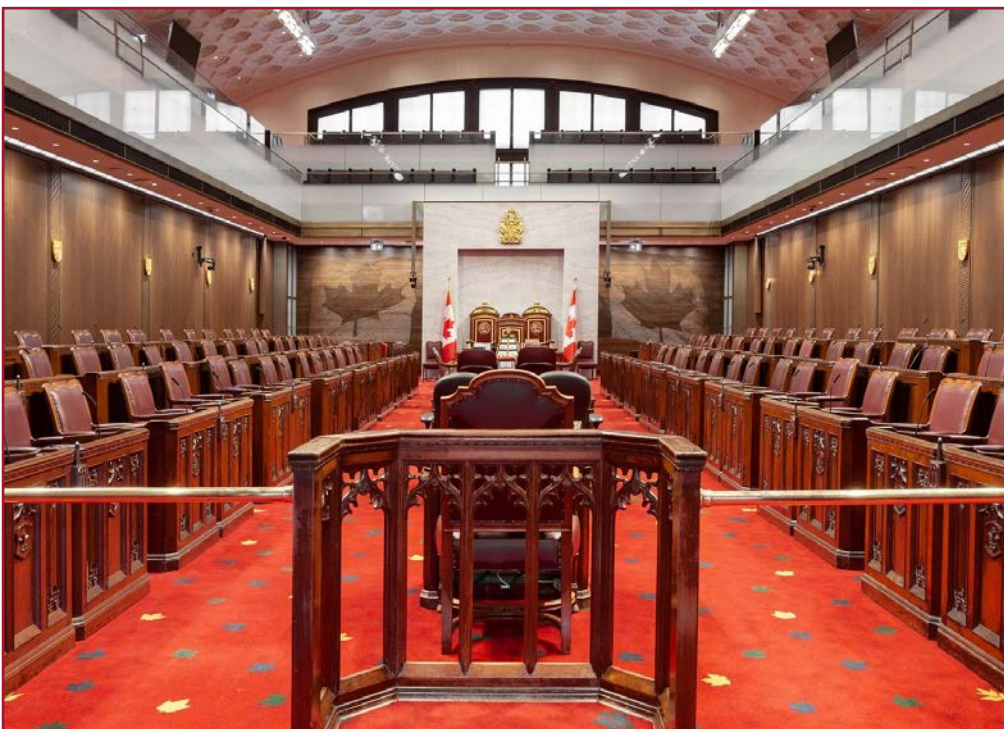
NOMINATIONS: COMMISSIONER AND CLERK OF THE SENATE

On 29 February 2024, the Prime Minister of Canada, **Rt Hon. Justin Trudeau, MP**, announced the appointment of Hon. Konrad von Finckenstein as Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. This nomination received unanimous approval from the House of Commons. Mr von Finckenstein had been occupying the role on an interim basis since 31 August 2023. The Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner is responsible for providing

advice on matters relating to conflicts of interests, conduct investigations and provide direction to Members and public office holders regarding their legal obligations under the *Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons* and the *Conflict of Interest Act*.

In consultation with the Senate of Canada, the Prime Minister of Canada, **Rt Hon. Justin Trudeau, MP** confirmed that the Governor in Council had appointed **Shaila Anwar** as the new Clerk of the Senate and Clerk of the Parliaments. Ms Anwar has been working at the Senate of Canada in various roles since 2007, most recently as Clerk Assistant of the Senate Committees Directorate. Her new role includes the managing of the Senate's operations as well as stewardship of all original Acts.

Image credit: Parliament of Canada.





UK PARLIAMENTARY REPORTS IN THE RUN-UP TO THE GENERAL ELECTION

Parliamentary Report by Thomas Brown, Parliament of the United Kingdom.

This report was written before the UK General Election was called on 22 May 2024.

UK PARLIAMENT WELCOMES NEW PARLIAMENTARIANS

The UK Parliament welcomed a number of new Parliamentarians in the first half of 2024.

In the UK House of Commons, four by-elections have taken place since the start of the year: three in February and one in May. (Two were held on 15 February, one on 29 February and one on 2 May).

- The first, in the Kingswood constituency in south-west England, was triggered by the resignation of the sitting Conservative **Rt Hon. Chris Skidmore, MP**. Mr Skidmore, a former Minister who was first elected in 2010 and had retained the seat at the most recent 2019 general election with a majority of 11,220, resigned as an MP over the UK Government's plans to proceed with a Bill announced in the November 2023 King's Speech to mandate annual offshore oil and gas licensing rounds. The opposition Labour Party's **Hon. Damien Egan, MP**, won the seat with a majority of 2,501 over his Conservative opponent.
- The second, in the Wellingborough constituency in the East Midlands region of England, was triggered by a successful recall petition in late 2023 against incumbent **Hon. Peter Bone, MP**. Mr Bone, who was first elected as a Conservative MP in 2005 and had

retained the seat at the most recent 2019 general election with a majority of 18,540, had been found by an investigation under the UK Parliament's Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS) to have committed bullying and sexual misconduct against a member of his staff. This finding was upheld by the Independent Expert Panel, which determines appeals and sanctions on behalf of the House of Commons in cases brought under the ICGS. The Panel recommended that Mr Bone be suspended for six weeks. The Conservative Party withdrew the whip from Mr Bone, MPs agreed the proposed sanction and his suspension automatically triggered a recall petition. Labour's **Hon. Gen Kitchen, MP**, won the resulting by-election, held on the same day as the Kingswood contest, securing a majority of 6,436 on the second-largest swing (or change in voter support from one election to the next) from the Conservatives to Labour since the Second World War.

- The third, in the Rochdale constituency in north-west England, was called following the death in service of the sitting Labour MP, the late **Hon. Sir Tony Lloyd, MP**. Sir Tony served as an MP between 1983 and 2012 and again from 2017 until his death in January 2024. Between 2012 and 2017, Sir Tony

had served as the Police and Crime Commissioner for Greater Manchester. **Hon. George Galloway, MP**, won the resulting by-election for the Workers Party of Britain, securing a majority of 5,697 over the second-placed independent candidate. Rochdale is the fifth constituency to be represented by Mr Galloway in the House of Commons.

- The fourth, in the Blackpool South constituency in north-west England, followed the resignation of **Hon. Scott Benton, MP**. First elected as a Conservative MP at the 2019 general election, Mr Benton sat as an independent between April 2023 and his resignation in March 2024 following allegations that he had broken lobbying rules. An investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards found that Mr Benton's conduct had caused "*significant damage to the reputation and integrity of the House of Commons as a whole and its Members generally*" and recommended he be suspended for 35 days. The Independent Expert Panel dismissed an appeal by Mr Benton, MPs agreed the sanction and a recall petition was automatically triggered. However, Mr Benton resigned before the petition period closed. In a contest held on the same date as local and mayoral elections in England and Police and Crime Commissioner elections in England and Wales in early May, Labour's **Hon. Chris Webb, MP**, was elected as the constituency's new representative with a majority of 7,607.

In other membership changes in the UK House of Commons, two formerly Conservative MPs, **Hon. Dr Dan Poulter, MP**, and **Hon. Natalie Elphicke, MP**, crossed the floor to join the opposition Labour Party in late April and early May, respectively.

Meanwhile the UK House of Lords also welcomed new Members since the beginning of January, including three named in a Resignation Peerages List issued in late December 2023 on the advice of former Prime Minister, **Rt Hon. Elizabeth Truss, MP**; 13 included on a Political Peerages List issued by the Prime Minister, **Rt Hon. Rishi Sunak, MP**, in



Image credit: UK Parliament.



February; one arising from a Ministerial appointment made on the same day; and two following non-party-political peerage recommendations from the independent House of Lords Appointments Commission. **Baroness Smith of Llanfaes**, a Member nominated by Plaid Cymru as part of the February Political Peerages List, became the House of Lords' youngest Member when she received her peerage title aged 27. The House's average age is 71.

SCRUTINY OF THE UK FOREIGN SECRETARY

Following **Rt Hon. Lord Cameron of Chipping Norton**'s appointment as Foreign Secretary in late 2023, serving from the House of Lords, the House of Commons Procedure Committee recommended in late January 2024 that Cabinet Ministers in the House of Lords should be able to appear at the bar of the House of Commons for departmental question time, statements and urgent questions (see previous report for details). In a response published on 17 April 2024, the Government rejected these proposed scrutiny arrangements. This was on a number of grounds, including that the "use of the Bar of the House for routine scrutiny of non-Members [was] entirely untested", that moving ahead with the suggestion, "even if on a time limited basis, could undermine the principle of comity between the two Houses, namely that the Houses are constitutionally separate and each responsible for regulating their own affairs", and that the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) already received "more scrutiny than other Government departments".

Instead, the Government observed that the specific standalone question time for the Foreign Secretary in the House of Lords every sitting month had seen Lord Cameron answer approximately 30 oral questions at each monthly session, and that he had participated in a range of other parliamentary business, including Committee evidence sessions. The previous week, the Government also announced that **Rt Hon. Andrew Mitchell, MP**, Lord Cameron's deputy in the elected chamber, had been given the "honourific title of Deputy Foreign Secretary".

Responding on behalf of the House of Commons Procedure Committee, **Rt Hon. Karen Bradley, MP**, Chair of the Committee, said: 'While we note the appointment of **Rt Hon. Andrew Mitchell, MP**, as Deputy

Foreign Secretary, it is disappointing that the Government has rejected our core proposals. In recent weeks, Lord Cameron has had several important engagements on Ukraine, the Middle East and Gibraltar, yet MPs as the elected representatives in Parliament are left without an avenue to ask questions of him directly as the head of the FCDO.

The Government's response points to Lord Cameron's appearances before Select Committees. Whilst Select Committees play an important scrutiny role, the fact remains that they only allow for some MPs to ask questions of him. All Members of the House of Commons should be afforded the opportunity to raise issues on behalf of their constituents.'

PROVISIONS ON THE TEMPORARY EXCLUSION OF MEMBERS

Both the House of Commons and House of Lords have in recent months approved arrangements to temporarily exclude Members in certain circumstances.

In late February 2024, the House of Lords approved a motion for a new Standing Order providing for the temporary exclusion of Members charged with serious violent or sexual offences. Under the new rules, the trigger for temporary exclusion is the point of charge and excluded Members will be prevented from physically accessing the parliamentary estate, except to take the oath of allegiance or make the solemn affirmation. Exclusion will apply regardless of when and where charges are brought, but if this is overseas there is a mechanism for an exclusion to be waived if a Member is charged with an offence that is not regarded as a crime in the UK. Exclusion will otherwise continue until either the charges are dropped, the Member is acquitted, or the Member is convicted and sentenced.

Over the course of 2023, the House of Commons had developed similar, but not identical, proposals. These were that a risk assessment should take place if the police provided information about an MP who was subject to serious allegations relating to a violent or sexual offence. In practice this would occur following an MP's arrest and affected MPs could be excluded from the parliamentary estate following an assessment by a panel. Excluded MPs would be offered a proxy vote for seven months in the first instance. A motion

providing for such risk-based exclusion was published in late January 2024. However, a debate on the motion did not take place before a revised motion was published in late March 2024 which increased the threshold from an MP's arrest to an MP having been charged with a relevant offence. During a debate on the revised proposals on 13 May 2024, the House backed an amendment for the threshold for risk-based exclusion to be "when a Member has been charged with a relevant offence", as envisaged by the earlier proposals. This was approved by 170 votes to 169 before the new rules were adopted.

NEW FIRST MINISTERS IN SCOTLAND, WALES AND NORTHERN IRELAND

Outside of Westminster, the first half of 2024 has seen new First Ministers appointed in the UK's devolved nations.

February 2024 saw the return of devolved government in Northern Ireland, with **Michelle O'Neill, MLA**, from the Irish republican party Sinn Féin, becoming Northern Ireland's first nationalist First Minister. The Democratic Unionist Party's **Emma Little-Pengelly** became Deputy First Minister at the same time in Northern Ireland's power-sharing executive. Ms O'Neill was first elected to the Northern Ireland Assembly in 2007. Ms Little-Pengelly first became a Member of the Assembly in 2015 and later served as an MP in the UK House of Commons.

In Wales, **Rt Hon. Vaughan Gething, MS**, was appointed First Minister in March 2024 following the resignation of his predecessor **Rt Hon. Mark Drakeford, MS**. Mr Gething, who was born in Zambia, was first elected to the Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament) in 2011 for the Labour Party.

Meanwhile in Scotland, **John Swinney, MSP**, was appointed First Minister in May 2024 following the resignation of his predecessor **Rt Hon. Humza Yousaf, MSP**. A Member of the House of Commons between 1997 and 2001, Mr Swinney was first elected to the Scottish Parliament in 1999 following its re-establishment and previously served as Leader of the Scottish National Party between 2000 and 2004.



Third Reading Report by Mohammed Katamba, Parliament of Uganda.

Uganda Government seeks to improve workplace health and safety

The Uganda Government has introduced the Occupational Safety and Health (Amendment) Bill, 2023, in Parliament seeking to expand, improve and enlarge the scope of health and safety in the workplace. The new Bill seeks to amend the original Act, which was enacted in 2006.

Since its enactment, the Government says “*there has been a significant change in the workplace dynamics*” including teleworking, virtual jobs, outsourcing and subcontracting of labour.

“*The law does not effectively address the rapidly evolving sectors such as telecommunications and extractive industries,*” reads the preamble of the Bill.

The Bill proposes that an employer shall establish a safety committee for a workplace in accordance with regulations made under the Act. It also compels the occupier or owner of a workplace to put in place measures to prevent exposure of persons to noise, dust, vibration and other hazards that can be a nuisance, irritant or could lead to health impairment. The employer is also required to monitor the noise, dust, vibration levels and other hazards as recommended by the risk assessment in the workplace.

The Occupational Safety and Health (Amendment) Bill, 2023 was referred to the House Committee on Gender, Labour and Social Development for consideration, and to report back to the plenary.

Government to establish Uganda National Kiswahili Council

The Uganda Government has tabled the Uganda National Kiswahili Council Bill, 2023 that seeks to establish the Uganda National Kiswahili Council, that will be charged with promoting the usage of the Kiswahili language in the country. The Bill seeks to operationalise Article 6(2) of the Constitution and the Protocol on the Establishment of the East African Kiswahili Commission. The Commission works through National Kiswahili Councils to promote the usage of the language in the East African Community.

The Uganda National Kiswahili Council will be charged with promoting the usage

of Kiswahili in the administrative, judicial and legislative processes and as a medium of communication and instruction in the educational institutions in Uganda, and by local governments and the public, at all levels of society.

The Bill also provides that a district council shall with the guidance of the Council, promote and advocate for the usage of Kiswahili as a medium of communication in the administrative processes of all the local governments in the district and submit reports to the Council on the status of the usage of the language in the respective district.

The Uganda National Kiswahili Council Bill, 2023 was referred to the House Committee on Gender, Labour and Social Development for consideration, and to report back to the plenary.

The Contract Farming Bill, 2023

The Bill seeks to create a legal framework to govern the execution of block farming agreements between owners of parcels of land and aquaculture establishments; the execution of transactions relating to the sale of future agricultural produce at mutually agreed prices and the supply of farm services between a farmer and a buyer of agricultural produce; to prescribe the form of a block farming agreement and a farming agreement; to regulate the sale, payment, delivery rejection and pricing of the agricultural produce arising from a farming agreement; to govern the enforcement of obligations arising from a farm agreement and block farming agreements; and for any other related matter.

The Contract Farming Bill, 2023, which was privately moved, was referred to the Committee on Agriculture for consideration and to report back to the plenary.

The Human Assisted Reproductive Technology Bill, 2023

The Uganda Parliament is considering the Human Assisted Reproductive Technology Bill, 2023, which seeks to regulate human assisted reproductive

technology in Uganda and provide for the designation of health units as fertility centres for the purpose.

The Human Assisted Reproductive Technology Bill was moved through a Private Member’s Bill proposed by **Hon. Sarah Opendi Achieng**, who is also a former Minister of State for Health. She also chairs the Association of Women Parliamentarians in Uganda. The Bill, now being considered by the House Committee on Health, which is conducting public hearings and receiving submissions from the public, seeks to provide for the establishment of sperm, oocyte and embryo banks within fertility centres, and the rights and duties of persons involved in human assisted reproductive technology and the donation and storage of gametes and embryos. The Bill further seeks to protect the rights of a child born through human assisted reproductive technology.

The MP said that over time, there has been an increase in the number of people opting for human assisted reproductive technology through various fertility solutions.

“*The increasing demand for the use of human assisted reproductive technology has been necessitated by the growing cases of primary and secondary infertility, and other health related challenges among persons seeking to have children,*” she said in the preamble to the Bill.





LEGISLATIVE NEWS FROM TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO PARLIAMENT

Parliamentary Report by Paras Ramoutar, Freelance Journalist based at the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago.

TRINIDAD PARLIAMENT REJECTS SALARY REVIEW REPORT

The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago has rejected the 117th Salaries Review report that was presented to the House of Representatives in February 2024 by the Finance Minister, **Hon. Colm Imbert**. Over 300 top positions in the public sector are included in the review.

The Minister told the House of Representatives on 6 March 2024 that the report was ‘unacceptable’ because of the serious and inexplicable anomalies that have emerged in the report. *“Against that background, the Cabinet will send the report back to the Commission with a list of anomalies so that it can revisit, revise its recommendations and return a revised report to the Cabinet via the President for its consideration.”*

Critics noted some of the anomalies in the report were in relation to disparities in salary increases and those which were highlighted. For example, the salary for the Leader of the Opposition which had increased by 60% (from \$29,590 to \$47,500) was included in the report, but the report failed to mention the proposed increase in the Prime Minister’s monthly salary (from \$59,680 to \$80,000) which represented a 30% increase.

TRINIDAD GOVERNMENT QUIZZED ON BORROWING

Former journalist and Independent Senator, **Sunity Maharaj** has questioned the Trinidad and Tobago Government’s rationale in increasing its borrowing limit from \$65 billion to \$75 billion.

The Senator raised the point during a motion to increase the statutory limit of borrowing under the Development Loans Act and she referred to the fact that the Government was not being as transparent as it could be about why it wanted to increase the borrowing limit. She also acknowledged that the Government was working hard to develop the economy, but this approach might not always achieve this goal.

Opposition **Senator Wade Mark** also questioned who the Government will be using this additional \$10 billion to fund. *“It cannot be the people. You, the Government, are not doing anything to help the people.”*

TRINIDAD’S OPPOSITION LEADER CALLS FOR REPEAL OF PROPERTY TAX

The Leader of the Opposition, **Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, MP** has called on the Government to repeal the Property Tax during a debate on 19 March 2024, when she said that such issues in countries can erupt into revolt from citizens, leading to changes in governance.

The Member was critical of the speed in which the Trinidad and Tobago Government introduced the Property Tax Amendment Bill and its many errors, calling it a ‘property invasion’ as the Government is mobilising swiftly to implement the new taxes. In the same vein, she also criticised the Minister of Finance’s statement for ignoring those who are unable to pay such as pensioners, the elderly and those on social support.

The Member said that the Property Tax is a form of ‘open warfare’ at a time when the

country is experiencing so much hardship, high prices and inflation, calling for the Bill to be repealed.

The Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, **Hon. Dr Keith Rowley, MP** responded that nobody likes to pay taxes, but they are an essential part of the management of public business. *“People have million-dollar houses and they want all kind*

of services, they want the roads fixed, they want the mosquitoes killed, they want the drains cleaned, they want fire service, they want the police service, but they do not want to pay anything.”

Meanwhile, Opposition Member **Saddam Hosein, MP** called the Property Tax ‘a recipe for chaos’, saying that the Government wanted to collect money for ‘squander mania’. The Member called for a simple formula for the Property Tax, adding that the Government was avoiding accountability.

The Property Tax Amendment Bill was passed by a Government majority of 20 for the Bill, with 15 votes against.

INDEPENDENT SENATOR CALLS FOR RESTRICTION IN COSTS OF COMMISSIONS OF ENQUIRY

Independent **Senator Deeroop Teemal** has called for a review of the public enquiry process, as well as the *Commission of Enquiry (COE) Act*, citing that in four recent public enquires cost over \$600 million.

The Senator pointed out that these public enquiries were far too expensive and questioned what benefits are being made to the taxpayer. He noted that the cost of a public enquiry can escalate in light of salaries, staff support and expert witnesses. He felt that there should be mechanism to assist public enquiries to become more time-efficient and questioned their motives. *“Individuals may suffer reputational damage, even if not found guilty of any wrongdoing.”*

The Senator was speaking in Trinidad and Tobago’s Upper House on a motion brought about by Senator Anthony Vieira.

CONSTITUTION AMENDMENT BILL FAILS IN PARLIAMENT

Twenty-one Government MPs voted for the Constitution Amendment Bill in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago recently, but the Bill failed as 18 Opposition MPs voted against and such a motion requires a two-third majority to pass (therefore at least 29 MPs were needed to support it).

The Bill sought to amend the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago regarding the appointments of persons to act in the offices of Commissioner of Police and Deputy Commissioner of Police.

Image credit: Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago.





The Opposition Leader, **Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, MP** said that the amendments meant that the Government could choose whom they want for the role, including an officer who was involved in the abduction of a firearm dealer.

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO PREPARES FOR GENERAL ELECTION WITH BOUNDARY CHANGES

Following a report by the Elections and Boundaries Commission (EBC) regarding changing of the boundaries and names for electorates in Trinidad and Tobago, the House of Representatives approved the changes on 12 April 2024, ahead of the next general election expected between now and August 2025.

Five electoral boundaries have been renamed, although the existing 41 seats in Parliament will remain. The following constituencies will be renamed: Arouca/Maloney to Trincity/Maloney; D'Abadie/O'Meara becomes Malabar/Arouca, Lopinot/Bon Air West becomes Arouca/Lopinot, St Joseph becomes Aranguez/St. Joseph, and Pointe-a-Pierra becomes Claxton Bay.

The report reviewed the names of the constituencies *"to more properly reflect the geographical areas encompassed within a constituency. Building patterns were examined by the Government Information Service and analysed by algorithm for each constituency. These are coupled with community mappings to derive suitable names of constituencies, largely based on the geographic extent of settlements and the identification of representative communities."*

FINANCE MINISTER PREDICTS INCREASE IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO'S REVENUE STREAM

The Minister of Finance, **Hon. Colm Imbert** has told the House of Representatives that the Trinidad and Tobago Government's revenue stream will increase in 2026 and 2027 as a result of increased natural resources for the energy sector.

He pointed that out that there was a decrease in revenue, which contributed to a higher budget deficit for 2023-2024. This was also as a result of the global downturn. However, due to *"all the foreign policy initiatives and foreign co-operation, both at the corporate level and at the country level, we expect this situation will be reversed in or around 2026 to 2027, in terms of the volumes of natural gas that will become available in our processing plants."*

The Minister said that the Government was cognisant of the volatility of the country's revenue base because of the situation with oil and gas prices. He said that the Heritage Fund is now reaching close to US\$6 billion, more that it was in 2022, when many across the world suffered.

The Minister noted that questions had been raised regarding those hoarding US dollars overseas and many had called on the Government to devalue the dollar, however the Government was not going to do this, since it would cause hardship, pain and suffering to the poor in the country who have to buy food and other essentials.

OPPOSITION LEADER WARNS GOVERNMENT ON CUTTING SOCIAL PROGRAMMES

The Leader of the Opposition, **Hon. Kamla Persad Bissessar, MP** has warned the Government not to cut social programmes during a debate on the Finance Supplemental Appropriation 2024 Bill in the House of Representatives on 7 July 2024. The Member said that nine years under the Government had deteriorated schools, housing has not been built, roads are in chaos, there is high unemployment and many people are suffering.

The Opposition Leader pointed out that the Government's major concern was to spend, borrow and tax, adding that *'the country is bankrupt'*. She questioned the continuous borrowing and the level of Government debt that had risen by \$61 billion since 2015 when her Government was in office.

LEGISLATIVE REPORTS FROM INDIA

Parliamentary Report by **Utpal Kumar Singh, Secretary-General, Parliament of India.**

The Fourteenth Session of the Seventeenth Lok Sabha commenced on 4 December and concluded on 21 December 2023. During the session, the House held 14 sittings covering 61 hours 50 minutes attaining a productivity of about 74%. This session witnessed repeated disruptions and adjournments on numerous occasions which resulted in the loss of 27 hours and 36 minutes of parliamentary time.

The Speaker of Lok Sabha, **Hon. Shri Om Birla** made efforts to ensure the smooth conduct of the proceedings and repeatedly appealed to the Members to maintain decorum in the House. On 21 December 2023, the Speaker appealed to the Members and observed: *"... You all are our Hon. Members; the people have elected and sent you here. You have the right to speak, to discuss and to deliberate in the House. Everyone has the right in a democracy. You are requested to go to your respective seats. I am giving you all an opportunity to speak..."*

PARLIAMENTARY BUSINESS

During the Session, 12 Government Bills were introduced, and 18 Government Bills were passed.

Two Bills, namely, The Post Office Bill, 2023 and The Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Bill, 2023, as passed by Rajya Sabha, were laid on the table of the Lok Sabha. No Private Members' Bills were introduced.

In the Lok Sabha, out of the listed 267 Starred Questions, 55 were answered orally while 3,066 Unstarred Questions were admitted. In relation to Matters under Rule 377: 265 matters were taken up under Rule 377. Thirty-three Statements under Direction 73A and a total number of 34 Statements, including a Statement given by the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs, were made. More than 1,930 papers were laid on the Table of the House including thirty-five Reports of Parliamentary Standing Committees.

During the Session, the Speaker made references to the passing of eight former Members: Sarvashri Tarachand Shivaji Patel, Vijoy Kumar Yadav, Sartaj Singh Chhatwal, Prabhatsinh Pratapsinh Chauhan, D.B. Chandre Gowda, Basudeb Acharia, Babanrao Dhakane and Dharmana Mandayya Sadul.

RESIGNATIONS AND SUSPENSIONS

The Speaker informed the House of the receipt of resignation letters from 16 Members and their acceptance. Following the adoption of a Motion by the Lok Sabha on 8 December 2023, expelling Smt. Mahua Moitra, an elected Member from the Krishnanagar Parliamentary Constituency of West Bengal, she ceased to be a Member of Lok Sabha. Ninety-seven Members



were suspended from the service of the House for the remainder of the Session. The matter of causing grave disorder in the House was referred to the Privileges Committee with respect to three Members who were to remain suspended till the report of the said Committee.

REMEMBRANCE OF TERRORIST ATTACK

On 13 December 2023, the Speaker made a reference on the occasion of the twenty-second anniversary of the terrorist attack on the Parliament House and said: *“On this day, we salute the bravery of the armed security forces who thwarted this cowardly attack on the Parliament House, the symbol of our democracy. Today, we also remember the supreme sacrifice made by eight security personnel of Parliament Security Service, Delhi Police and Central Reserve Police Force, who sacrificed their lives while foiling this attack. One CPWD Personnel was also martyred in this terrorist attack. This House pays homage to those immortal martyrs. This House stands in solidarity with the families of those martyred in a spirit of sympathy. On this occasion, we reiterate our resolve to tackle terrorism resolutely and reaffirm our pledge to protect the unity, integrity and sovereignty of our nation”*. Thereafter, Members stood in silence for a while as a mark of respect.

SECURITY BREACH

On 13 December 2023, two persons managed to evade Parliamentary security and jumped into the House from the visitors’ gallery and shouted slogans and sprayed yellow smoke. The Lok Sabha Secretariat has suspended eight security personnel for lapses in a major breach of security, hours after homage was paid to those killed in the terrorist attack on Parliament in 2001. The Speaker made an announcement in the House in this regard and also made the following observation: *“Hon. Members, the serious incident that has happened today is a matter of concern for all of us. I thank all of our Members of Parliament, security personnel, Marshals, Chamber staff and everyone for the promptness and intrepidity with which they apprehended the perpetrators of the incident, which I myself have witnessed. The House thanks all of them for the collective efforts they made once again to thwart a similar attack. We are conducting a high-level investigation into this incident as it is a matter of serious concern. We will ensure that action is also taken based on the*

findings of the investigation. The existing security arrangements inside Parliament will also be comprehensively reviewed.”

PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

On 18 December 2023, a parliamentary delegation from Sri Lanka led by the Speaker of the Parliament, **Hon. Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena** visited the Lok Sabha. Welcoming the distinguished guests, the Speaker extended the greetings from the Lok Sabha to the Parliament, the Government and to the friendly people of the Republic of Sri Lanka.

A Parliamentary Delegation led by the President of the National Assembly of Bulgaria, **Hon. Rosen Zhelyazkov** called on Lok Sabha Speaker, Parliament House Complex on 5 January 2024. **Shri Bhaanand** extended greetings on completion of 70 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMMES FOR MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT AND STATE LEGISLATURES

Three Briefing Sessions were organised on important Bills to be considered by the House. Briefing Sessions were also made available online through NIC Webcast. Legislative Notes were also prepared by the Reference Division and shared (both in English as well as in Hindi). The Parliamentary Research Service also continued to provide round-the-clock research and information support to Members of Parliament through a team of dedicated officers by email and *WhatsApp*.

95th ANNIVERSARY OF THE LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT

The Speaker of Lok Sabha, **Hon. Shri Om Birla** presided at an event organised to celebrate the 95th anniversary of the establishment of the Lok Sabha Secretariat in Parliament House on 10 January 2024. Speaking at the occasion, the Speaker commended the dedication and hard work of the Secretariat’s officers and staff. He exhorted officers and staff to attain higher efficiency in the future. The Speaker also congratulated officers and employees of the Secretariat for their all-round excellence not only in their field of work, but also in sports and cultural activities.



Image credit: Parliament of India.

SUPPORTING WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES

The Speaker of the Lok Sabha, **Hon. Shri Om Birla** inaugurated a programme ‘*Panchayat Se Parliament Tak*’ (From Panchayat to Parliament) for Women Representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies, organised by the Institute of Constitutional and Parliament Studies in collaboration with the National Commission for Women (NCW) in the Central Hall on 5 January 2024. The Speaker interacted with more than 500 women representatives from Panchayats and Urban Local Bodies from different States.

The Speaker observed that India is moving from women’s participation in development and women’s empowerment to women-led development and women’s leadership. He noted that the Parliament has recently passed the historic *Nari Shakti Vandan Act* in the very First Session of the new Parliament building. The purpose of this Act is to reserve one-third of the total seats in Lok Sabha and State Legislatures for women, which will be a game changer in bringing women to leadership roles in the decision-making process. He further added that several recent initiatives have provided equal opportunities to women to bring them into the mainstream in political, economic and social life.

The Fourteenth Session of the Seventeenth Lok Sabha was adjourned sine die on 21 December 2023 and the House was prorogued by the President of India on 29 December 2023.



Members pay tribute to Fa'anānā Efeso Collins

On 21 February 2024, the Speaker of the New Zealand House of Representatives, **Rt Hon. Gerry Brownlee, MP** formally informed the House of the death of sitting Green Party MP **Fa'anānā Efeso Collins**, who had passed away suddenly while taking part in a charity event earlier that day. This was the first death of a sitting MP in New Zealand since 2013. Before being elected to the New Zealand Parliament at the general election in October 2023, Collins was well known in Auckland and around the country as a local body politician, activist and advocate, especially for the Pasifika community.

Hon. James Shaw, MP (Greens) opened the tribute speeches, noting that *“Six days ago, standing right here in this House, Efeso Collins delivered his maiden speech. It must also now serve as his valedictory.”*

The Prime Minister of New Zealand, **Rt Hon. Christopher Luxon, MP** (National) agreed that *“He was just getting started in this place, in Parliament.”* **Hon. Carmel Sepuloni, MP** (Labour) said *“No one in this House expected that Efeso’s maiden speech would serve as his farewell speech to us all. Many of us have known Efeso for decades, not just years. Many of us studied with and/or worked with Efeso over the course of those decades.”* **Debbie Ngarewa-Packer, MP** (Te Pāti Māori) added to the condolences, saying *“His time here may have been short, but the impact of his legacy certainly was felt, and I want to hold on to that beautiful memory that he has shared with us.”* With Collins’ empty seat covered with a siapo or tapa cloth and a Tokelauan lei, Members sang waiata (songs), then stood for a moment’s silence, and the House adjourned for the week.

On 30 April 2024, Members held a longer debate to pay tribute to their colleague. Green Party Co-Leader, **Hon. Marama Davidson, MP** (Greens) spoke of Collins’ *“vision of an Aotearoa where everyone, including the square pegs, the misfits, the forgotten, the unloved and the invisible were cared for; an Aotearoa where our living systems, our natural wildlife, our whakapapa (lineage) and generations of mokopuna (grandchildren) are cared for - not just today but for the many, many generations to come.”*

Hon. Dr Shane Reti, MP (National) paid tribute to *“a remarkable man who dedicated his life to serving New Zealand with kindness, compassion, integrity and dedication. Fa'anānā Efeso was not just a politician of Samoan and Tokelauan descent; he was a proud son of the Pacific, a community leader, a father, a husband and a strong advocate for justice, fairness and equal opportunity.”*

Simon Court, MP (ACT) said that *“His life was a testament to the values of peace, love and service - he embraced that wholeheartedly every day... Fa'anānā Efeso Collins was a central pillar in his community. Born and raised in Ōtara, he had humble beginnings in a religious family - the youngest of six children. He viewed the world as fundamentally full of grace and compassion.”*

Hon. Erica Stanford, MP (National) remembered *“his smile. He always greeted you with a hug... he cared deeply about his community and he was the wonderful connector and such an incredible orator. I mean, he was born to be on stage. He was born, I think, with a microphone or a megaphone in his hand either at a protest or behind a lectern. But the thing is, when you met him you wouldn't know about that, because he was a listener.”*

Hon. Jenny Marcroft, MP (New Zealand First) recalled Collins’ time as an Auckland councillor, saying *“A lot of the councillors would come up to the Mayor’s office and they would say, ‘Well, actually, we knew Efeso and we loved him dearly.’ He was definitely missed from no longer being a councillor at Auckland.”*

Teanau Tuono, MP (Greens) gave the last speech in the debate and remembered Collins’ *“amazing sense of humour, being inclusive and engaging - something that is so important. He'd have a laugh, whether you agree with him or not, next thing you know you're having a kōrero (conversation) with him.”*

Road User Charges (Light Electric RUC Vehicles) Amendment Bill

The Road User Charges (Light Electric RUC Vehicles) Amendment Bill was read for a third time on 28 March 2024, following its First Reading under urgency and a shortened Select Committee process (9 days, instead of the default period of 6

months). The aim of the Bill was to ensure that all New Zealand vehicle owners pay for their share of the use of public roads. Since 2009, light electric vehicles (EVs) had been exempted from paying road user charges (RUCs) in order to encourage the uptake of electric vehicles. Since electric vehicles now make up 2% of vehicles on New Zealand roads, the Bill was introduced to amend the *Road User Charges Act 2012* and several regulations to introduce RUCs for light and plug-in hybrid electric vehicles.

The Minister of Transport, **Hon. Simeon Brown, MP** (National), reiterated the Bill’s purpose: *“I just want to start by outlining the purpose and intention of this legislation, which is to ensure that all users of our roading network - whether you drive an electric vehicle, a diesel vehicle, a petrol vehicle, a hybrid vehicle, a plug-in hybrid vehicle - pay your fair share of, and contribution towards, building and maintaining our roading infrastructure here in New Zealand.”*

Shanan Halbert, MP (Labour) expressed Labour’s support for the Bill: *“The incentives scheme that was put in place to allow electric vehicle drivers not to have to pay these particular fees was in fact that. It was an incentive to encourage people to change their mode of transport, to choose an electric option in order to reduce our emissions. We have, in many respects, achieved what we set out to do.”*

Speaking during the instruction to the Transport and Infrastructure Committee, **Arena Williams, MP** (Labour) supported the Bill while also opposing the shortened report-back time: *“The reason for our opposition to the 14 March report-back date is that this Bill contains a number of technical changes to the definitions which would apply to the vehicles in question. It also contains some ratings about weights, which the Committee should be hearing from experts in order to balance the policy decisions which are being set out by the Government.”*

Hon. Julie Anne Genter, MP (Greens), also criticised the truncated Select Committee progress: *“We have the entire vehicle industry saying to us at Select Committee - and over 500 New Zealanders who had less than 36 hours to submit on this Bill - they opposed the Bill. We had a joint submission from the industry - the Motor Industry Association, the AA, Drive Electric, the vehicle importers’ association,*



the Motor Trade Association, the Better NZ Trust - making a compelling case and showing the numbers on why the specific proposal for the rates on electric vehicles in this Bill penalises electric vehicles (EVs) relative to fossil fuel vehicles.”

Tākuta Ferris, MP (Te Pāti Māori) spoke against the Bill, saying “By introducing road-user charges, we make it less appealing and less realistic for people when faced with the choice between vehicles that run on unsustainable fuel sources and vehicles that run from a renewable energy source... So when we consider the amendment to this Bill in the context of climate change, which we must do - we must consider our climate and the impact we as a nation have on our whenua (land) - it is clear that previous efforts made to support the reduction in emissions, to create accessibility to clean technology, and create sustainable public and private transport, are not prioritised by the current Government.”

Andy Foster, MP (New Zealand First), defended the Bill by asserting that “We know that as petrol vehicles have become more efficient, as EVs start to become a greater proportion of the vehicle fleet, our transport system needs money. It needs money to be able to build, to maintain, to operate roads and public transport systems and so on, and so we are going to need a new way of funding our roading system.”

At the conclusion of the Third Reading on 28 March 2024, there were 102 votes in support of the Bill and 21 against it. The Bill received the Royal Assent on the same day.

Smokefree Environments and Regulated Products Amendment Bill

The Smokefree Environments and Regulated Products Amendment Bill removes restrictions, including a lower nicotine limit for tobacco products, a reduction in the number of retail shops that could sell tobacco products and a generational ban (which would have made purchasing tobacco illegal for anyone born after 1 January 2009). The Bill was part of the incoming Government’s action plan for its first 100 days and progressed through all stages under urgency. It was one of a number of Bills passed under urgency at the start of the 54th Parliament to repeal legislation passed by the previous Labour Government, including the Pae Ora (Disestablishment of Māori

Health Authority) Amendment Bill, the Fair Pay Agreements Act Repeal Bill, the Land Transport (Clean Vehicle Discount Scheme Repeal) Amendment Bill, the Resource Management (Natural and Built Environment and Spatial Planning Repeal and Interim Fast-track Consenting) Bill, the Water Services Acts Repeal Bill and the Employment Relations (Trial Periods) Amendment Bill.

At the Bill’s Third Reading, the Member in charge of the Bill, Associate Minister of Health, **Hon. Casey Costello, MP** (New Zealand First) spoke in favour of reducing smoking rates, but disagreed that the generational smoking ban was the way to achieve this. She said, “Smokers, their families, communities and our health system all benefit from a reduction in smoking. I want to see a reduction in smoking, this Government wants it and Members opposite want it. What we disagree about is how.” She also noted that the regulations being repealed were not set to start until 2025 or later, saying “We are not stopping anything that is currently helping to drive smoking rates down.”

Sam Uffindell, MP (National) agreed that smoking rates were already dropping with the regulations currently in place, saying that “We’ve seen it drop significantly over the past 12 years, from around 16% down to 8.6% last year, to 6.8% this year. On the way we’re going, we will reach our goal of having the average under 5% by 2025. This Government is committed to that goal.” One of the Government’s motivations for the repeal was preventing an illegal tobacco market. **Tim Costley, MP** (National) noted that “Customs said

the biggest issue they have on the black market is tobacco.”

Shanan Halbert, MP (Labour) spoke against the Bill and was also concerned about smoking rates for Māori, saying “Māori will not reach the 5% target for a smoke-free 2025. Modelling shows that unless we act with urgency, Māori will be left behind and not reach this goal till 2040... Low-income communities have four times more tobacco retailers situated in their communities, hooking more whānau (families) into addiction.” The Green Party were also concerned about the disparity in smoking rates for Māori, particularly Māori youth and those from low socio-economic areas. **Hūhana Lyndon, MP** (Greens) spoke to this issue saying, “As we open the floodgates for more tobacco in our communities, it is te Iwi Māori (Māori people) and those of low socio-economic backgrounds that will be most impacted.”

As the Bill was passed under urgency, there was no Select Committee stage. Opposition parties were concerned that this meant there was a lack of public consultation. Te Pāti Māori Co-Leader, **Debbie Ngarewa-Packer, MP** spent her contribution time reading public comments from a petition by Health Coalition Aotearoa which gained 53,000 signatures opposing the repeal: “I have decided to spend our five minutes ... amplifying the voices of those who would have had the opportunity to have been heard had there been a process that wasn’t so urgent.”

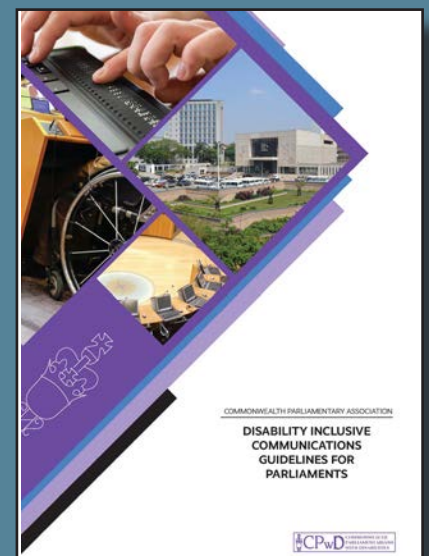
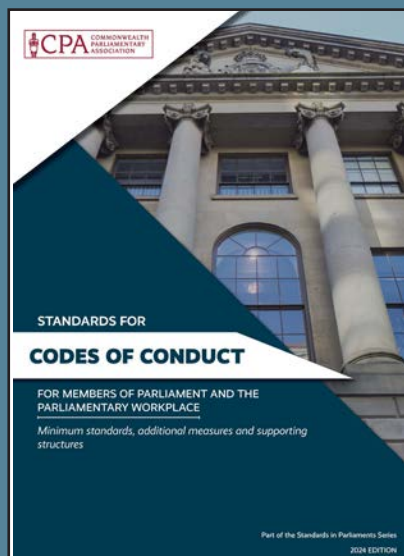
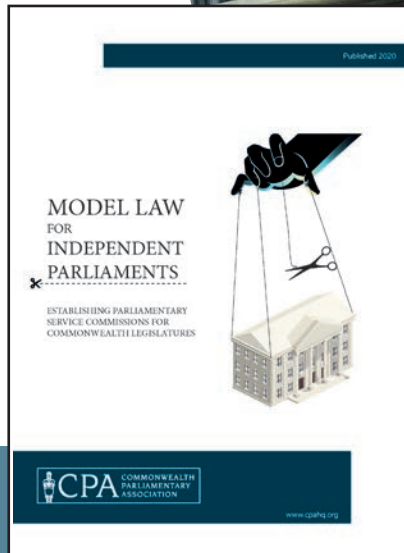
The Smokefree Environments and Regulated Products Amendment Bill was passed with 68 votes in favour and 54 votes opposed and it received Royal Assent on 5 March 2024.



Image credit: Parliament of New Zealand.

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CHAIRPERSON: (65th CPC to 68th CPC - 2022-2025): **Hon. Dr Zainab Gimba, MP** (Nigeria)

CPA SMALL BRANCHES
CHAIRPERSON: (65th CPC to 68th CPC - 2022-2025): **Joy Burch, MLA**, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Australian Capital Territory

COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARIANS WITH DISABILITIES (CPwD)
CHAIRPERSON: (65th CPC to 68th CPC - 2022-2025): **Hon. Laura Kanushu Opori, MP** (Uganda)

The CPA Coordinating Committee comprises the CPA Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Treasurer, CPA Small Branches Chairperson and the Chairpersons of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) and the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) networks.

Regional Representatives

CPA AFRICA REGION

Hon. Osei Kyei Mensah Bonsu, MP, Ghana (64th CPC to 67th CPC - 2019-2024)*

Hon. Segepoh Solomon Thomas, MP, Speaker, Sierra Leone (64th CPC to 67th CPC - 2019-2024)*
Completing term started by other Sierra Leone Members.

Hon. Solomon Lechesa Tsenoli, MP, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, South Africa (65th CPC to 68th CPC - 2022-2025)

Hon. Raymond Nkhata, MP, Malawi (65th CPC to 68th CPC - 2022-2025)

Vacant, Mauritius (66th CPC to 69th CPC - 2023-2026)

Vacant, Eswatini (66th CPC to 69th CPC - 2023-2026)

CPA ASIA REGION

Hon. Mahinda Yapa Abeywardana, MP, Speaker, Sri Lanka (64th CPC to 67th CPC - 2019-2024)*
Completing term started by another Sri Lanka Member.

Hon. Kazi Nabil Ahmed, MP, Bangladesh (65th CPC to 68th CPC - 2022-2025)

Vacant (66th CPC to 69th CPC - 2023-2026)

CPA AUSTRALIA REGION

Senator Hon. Sue Lines, President of the Senate, Australia Federal (64th CPC to 67th CPC - 2019-2024).
Completing term started by other Australia Federal Senators.

Hon. Mark Shelton, MP, Tasmania (65th CPC to 68th CPC - 2022-2025)

Hon. Curtis Pitt, MP, Speaker of Queensland (66th CPC to 69th CPC - 2023-2026)

CPA BRITISH ISLANDS AND MEDITERRANEAN REGION

Hon. Chris Elmore, MP, United Kingdom (64th CPC to 67th CPC - 2019-2024)* *Completing term started by other UK Members.*

Hon. Stuart McMillan, MSP, Scotland (65th CPC to 68th CPC - 2022-2025)

Deputy Mary Le Hegarat, Jersey (66th CPC to 69th CPC - 2023-2026)

CPA CANADA REGION

Hon. Terry Duguid, MP, Canada Federal (64th CPC to 67th CPC - 2019-2024)* *Completing term started by another Canadian Member.*

Hon. Donna Skelly, MPP, Deputy Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario (65th CPC to 68th CPC - 2022-2025) *Completing term started by another Ontario Member.*

Hon. Raj Chouhan, MLA, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia (66th CPC to 69th CPC - 2023-2026)

CPA CARIBBEAN, AMERICAS AND THE ATLANTIC REGION

Hon. Gordon J. Burton, MHA, Speaker, Turks & Caicos (64th CPC to 67th CPC - 2019-2024)*
Completing term started by another Turks & Caicos Member.



Image credit: Clarence House/Hugo Burnand.

Hon. Arthur Holder, MHA, Speaker, Barbados (65th CPC to 68th CPC - 2022-2025) - *Also CPA Vice-Chairperson.*

Senator Hon. Dr Dessima D. Williams, President of the Senate, Grenada (66th CPC to 69th CPC - 2023-2026)

CPA INDIA REGION

Vacant, Lok Sabha, India Union, (64th CPC to 67th CPC - 2019-2024)*
Completing term started by other India Members.

Smt. Ritu Khanduri Bhushan, MLA, Speaker of Uttarakhand Legislative Assembly (65th CPC to 68th CPC - 2022-2025)

Shri Biswajit Daimary, MLA, Speaker, Assam (66th CPC to 69th CPC - 2023-2026)

CPA PACIFIC REGION

Hon. Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu, Speaker, Fiji (64th CPC to 67th CPC - 2019-2024)*

Hon. Carmel Sepuloni, MP, New Zealand (65th CPC to 68th CPC - 2022-2025) *Completing term started by other New Zealand Members.*

Hon. Dulcie Tei, MP, Tonga (66th CPC to 69th CPC - 2023-2026)

CPA SOUTH-EAST ASIA REGION

Hon. Dr Dato' Noraini Ahmad, MP, Malaysia (64th CPC to 67th CPC - 2019-2024)* *Completing term started by another Malaysia Member*

Hon. Dato' Law Choo Kiang, MLA, Speaker, Penang (65th CPC to 68th CPC - 2022-2025)

Hon. Mohd Fahmi Aliman, MP, Singapore (66th CPC to 69th CPC - 2023-2026)

CPA Small Branches Steering Committee

CPA SMALL BRANCHES

CHAIRPERSON

Joy Burch, MLA, Speaker, Australian
Capital Territory (2022-2025)

CPA AFRICA REGION

Hon. Churchill Gill, MNA
Seychelles (2021-2024) - *CPA
Small Branches Vice-Chairperson*

CPA ASIA REGION

Hon. Ahmed Nazim, MP, Deputy
Speaker, The Maldives
(2022-2025)

CPA AUSTRALIA REGION

Hon. Michelle O'Byrne MP
Speaker, Tasmania
(2024-2027)

CPA BRITISH ISLANDS AND MEDITERRANEAN REGION

Deputy Adrian Gabriel
Guernsey (2023-2026)

CPA CANADA REGION

Vacant
(2022-2025)

CPA CARIBBEAN, AMERICAS AND THE ATLANTIC REGION

Hon. Charliena White
Speaker, Montserrat
(2024-2027)

CPA INDIA REGION

Shri Mingma Narbu Sherpa, MLA
Speaker, Sikkim (2022-2025)

CPA PACIFIC REGION

Hon. Lord Fakafanua
Speaker, Tonga (2022-2025)

CPA SOUTH-EAST ASIA REGION

YB Tuan Kerk Chee Yee, MLA
Deputy Speaker, Melaka
(2024-2027)

Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) Regional Champions

CPwD CHAIRPERSON

Hon. Laura Kanushu Opori, MP
Uganda (2022-2025)

CPA AFRICA REGION

Hon. Timothy Wanyonyi, MP
Kenya (2020-2023)

CPA ASIA REGION

Hon. Sudarshana Denipitiya, MP
Sri Lanka (2024-2027)

CPA AUSTRALIA REGION

Hon. Liesl Tesch, MP
New South Wales
(2020-2023)

CPA BRITISH ISLANDS AND MEDITERRANEAN REGION

Hon. Jeremy Balfour, MSP
Scotland (2024-2027)

CPA CANADA REGION

Hon. Shane Thompson, MLA
Northwest Territories (2024-2027)

CPA CARIBBEAN, AMERICAS AND THE ATLANTIC REGION

Senator Hon. Paul Richards
Trinidad and Tobago (2020-2023)
Also: CPwD Vice-Chairperson

CPA INDIA REGION

Smt. Supriya Sule, MP
India (2020-2023)

CPA PACIFIC REGION

Hon. Viam Pillay, MP
Assistant Minister for Agriculture,
Waterways and Environment, Fiji
(2020-2023)

CPA SOUTH-EAST ASIA REGION

Senator Hon. Isaiah Jacob
Malaysia (2020-2023)

Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Steering Committee

CWP PRESIDENT

Hon. Lynda Voltz, MP
New South Wales (2023-2024)

CWP CHAIRPERSON

Hon. Dr Zainab Gimba, MP
Nigeria (2022-2025)

CPA AFRICA REGION

Hon. Madina Ndingiza, MP,
Rwanda
(2022-2025)

CPA ASIA REGION

Hon. Aparajita Haque, MP
Bangladesh (2021-2024)

CPA AUSTRALIA REGION

Hon. Kate Doust, MLC
Western Australia (2022-2025)
*Also CWP Vice-Chairperson
(2023-2024)*

CPA BRITISH ISLANDS AND MEDITERRANEAN REGION

Rt Hon. Dame Maria Miller, MP
United Kingdom
(2021-2024)

CPA CANADA REGION

Hon. Susan Leblanc, MLA
Nova Scotia (2023-2026)

CPA CARIBBEAN, AMERICAS AND THE ATLANTIC REGION

Hon. Valerie Woods, MP
Speaker of the House of
Representatives, Belize
(2021-2024)

CPA INDIA REGION

Smt. Sunita Duggal, MP
Lok Sabha, India (2020-2023)

CPA PACIFIC REGION

Hon. Lenora Qereqeretabua, MP,
Deputy Speaker, Fiji
(2023-2026)

CPA SOUTH-EAST ASIA REGION

Hon. Rodiyah Binti Sapiee, MP
Malaysia (2022-2025)

CPA Regional Secretaries

CPA AFRICA REGION

Ms Nelwa Joyce Mwihambi,
Parliament of Tanzania

CPA ASIA REGION

Mrs Kushani Rohanadheera,
Parliament of Sri Lanka

CPA AUSTRALIA REGION

Ms Alex Cullum, Parliament of
Australia

CPA BRITISH ISLANDS AND MEDITERRANEAN REGION

Ms Sarah Dickson, OBE
Parliament of the United Kingdom

CPA CANADA REGION

Mr Jeremy LeBlanc, Parliament of
Canada

CPA CARIBBEAN, AMERICAS AND THE ATLANTIC REGION

Mr Sherlock Isaacs, Parliament of
Guyana

CPA INDIA REGION

Shri Utpal Kumar Singh, Parliament
of India

CPA PACIFIC REGION

Ms Amber Walters, Parliament of
New Zealand

CPA SOUTH-EAST ASIA REGION

Ms Nur Diyana Indah binti Khudri
Parliament of Malaysia

CPA Headquarters Secretariat

Stephen Twigg
CPA Secretary-General
Commonwealth Parliamentary
Association, CPA Headquarters
Secretariat, Richmond House,
Houses of Parliament, London
SW1A 0AA, United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0)20 7799 1460
Email: hq.sec@cpahq.org
www.cpahq.org
Twitter @CPA_Secretariat
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