



TheParliamentarian

67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference

3 to 8 November 2024 | New South Wales

Conference reports, news and images



Engage, Empower, Sustain: Charting the Course for Resilient Democracy



67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference



3-8 November 2024 | Sydney, Australia

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COMMITMENTS TO PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY AT 67th COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

The Vice-Patron of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC, Governor of New South Wales, urged Commonwealth Parliamentarians to work together to uphold the values of the Commonwealth as she opened the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (67th CPC) for over 700 delegates in Sydney, Australia.

A message to conference delegates from HM King Charles, Head of the Commonwealth and Patron of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association was also read by the CPA Vice-Patron.

One of the largest gatherings of Commonwealth Parliamentarians, the 67th CPC was hosted by the Parliament of New South Wales and the CPA New South Wales Branch. The main conference theme for the 67th CPC was: *‘Engage, Empower, Sustain: Charting the Course for Resilient Democracy’*.

Delegates to the 67th CPC were welcomed by the CPA President (2023-2024), Hon. Ben Franklin, MLC, President of the Legislative Council of New South Wales who said at the opening ceremony: *“As we mark the bicentenary of the New South Wales Legislative Council this year, one of our biggest celebrations will, of course, be the 67th*

“The conference will enable us all to imagine the future of democracy and ensure its resilience in the face of current and future threats.” says CPA President, Hon. Ben Franklin.

Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) and CPA General Assembly, which the CPA New South Wales Branch is honoured to host. The conference will enable us all to imagine the future of democracy and ensure its resilience in the face of current and future threats.”

The 67th CPC is the first time that the CPA New South Wales Branch has hosted the event and is also the first time that an Australian State or Territory has hosted the CPA annual conference. The CPA Australia Region has hosted the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference four times previously (6th CPC in 1959; 16th CPC in 1970; 34th CPC in 1988; and 47th CPC in 2001).

Delegates were also welcomed by the Speaker of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly, Hon. Greg Piper, MP and the Premier of New South Wales, Hon. Chris Minns, MP.

The CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg said: *“On behalf of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, it is my great pleasure to welcome delegates to the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in New South Wales and to thank the Parliament of New South Wales for their generosity in hosting this year’s conference as they mark the bicentenary of the New South Wales Legislative Council. This conference offers an invaluable opportunity to come together and share best practice in addressing common issues and strengthening Commonwealth values.*

As we come together, it provides us with an opportunity to review progress of the Commonwealth and its values and principles. Commitments to democracy, human rights and good governance are cornerstones of the



Images credit: Parliament of New South Wales and CPA Secretariat



CPA's work and we will have the opportunity to discuss these commitments as we meet this week."

On behalf of the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Professor Luis Franceschi, Assistant Secretary-General said: *"In the Commonwealth family, our governments committed to the political values and principles enshrined in our 2013 Commonwealth Charter. These values reinforce democracy and preclude our 2.7 billion people from anarchy. We are a club of nations bound together by common values and aspiration, among which dignity, freedom, and inclusive vibrant democracies stand out. Parliamentarians have a crucial role in deepening the Commonwealth Charter's values in their jurisdictions. They are guarantors of accountability, and loudspeakers for the voice of the people. Their work should go beyond party loyalty, be rooted in integrity, allowing them to stand for what is right, just and fair for the people in our Commonwealth."*

The Vote of Thanks was given by Hon. Penny Sharpe MLC, Leader of the Government in the New South Wales Legislative Council and the opening ceremony was

conducted by Hon. Courtney Houssos, MLC, New South Wales Minister for Finance and Natural Resources.

A 'Welcome to Country' and digeridoo performance was given by Matthew Doyle and subsequent performances were given by the Sydney Children's Choirs, the Sydney Conservatorium, the Bangarra Dance Company and musician James Johnston.

MPs and parliamentary staff benefitted from professional development, supportive learning and the sharing of best practice with colleagues from across the Commonwealth together with the participation of leading international organisations. The conference also explored a wide range of workshop topics from the use of Artificial Intelligence and technology; the security of MPs; ending human trafficking; combatting discrimination legislation; supporting LGBT+ and people with disabilities to participate in Parliaments; to engaging with indigenous peoples.

Below: At the opening of the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, Women Speakers and Presiding Officers from Belize, Quebec, St Lucia, Bermuda, Grenada, Trinidad and Tobago, Tasmania, Australia Federal, Victoria, British Virgin Islands, Malawi and Anguilla were pictured together.





AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTER ADDRESSES DELEGATES AT 67th COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE

The Prime Minister of Australia, Hon. Anthony Albanese, MP, spoke to delegates at Sydney Town Hall on 7 November 2024 and said:

I am delighted that Australia is hosting this year's Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference, so soon after a very warm and productive Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Samoa. It was a uniquely Pacific CHOGM – the first to be convened by a Pacific island country. Our discussions focused on the threat that climate change poses to all our nations: to our environment and economy, our fishing and farming, our future security and prosperity. This is not a challenge any one of us can meet or solve alone - it demands the co-operation and commitment of us all. It requires, as King Charles said at the Australian Parliament recently: *"Both ancient and new thinking"*.

The ancient respect for land and waters, paired with new breakthroughs in science and technology. All of it driven by the organising and mobilising power of democracy. Looking out on this extraordinary crowd, I see proof of the enduring strength of your Association. I also see evidence of a shared determination, to learn from each other and work together, in the service and spirit of the oldest meaning of Commonwealth – the common good.

Where we are tonight, Sydney Town Hall, holds a special place in my heart. For members of the New South Wales Labor Party like myself, this is almost-sacred ground. The home of our State Conference: theatre, arena and colosseum all in one. For me, the cradle of my political life. This is where I learned about putting arguments, demanding better for working people than the status quo – and respecting the outcome of democratic processes. This is where my engagement in democracy and politics began - so I'm delighted to be part of your discussions on engaging and empowering citizens to sustain democracy around the world.

That's a challenge we all face, it's a responsibility we all share – and it can be an opportunity we all seize. A chance to show that Parliament, politics and democracy are not part of the problems facing our world, they are central to the solution.

A few hours ago, I was in Canberra for the final Question Time of the sitting week. In our Chamber, the two despatch boxes from which questions are asked and answered were a gift to Australia from King George V. They were presented by his son, HRH The Duke of York, when he opened what we now call Old Parliament House in Canberra, in 1927, and those boxes are such faithful copies of the ones that sat in the UK House of Commons that they even bear the pattern of nicks and scratches supposedly caused by the signet ring Prime Minister



Gladstone used to wear, which would bite into the timber when he pounded the lid with his fist during speeches.

The King's gift was the second Westminster replica presented to Australia's Parliament. The first was the Speaker's Chair. An elaborate oak masterpiece packed into crates and shipped to Australia by the forerunner of this group, then called the Empire Parliamentary Association. That chair included timber taken from the beams of Westminster Hall, the scene of the trial of Charles I, and Nelson's famous flagship at the battle of Trafalgar, HMS Victory. Virtually every nation and Parliament represented here, can point to a similar gift and tell a similar story.

Across the tremendous diversity of the Commonwealth we can trace this shared network of symbols and traditions, ritual and practice. Of course, what truly binds and unites us is not the architecture of our Chambers or the language of our proceedings. It is the Parliaments in which we serve and the democratic systems that serve our nations and in different ways over the years, all of us have done much more than diligently preserve the foundation stone. We haven't kept our democracy under glass, or treated it like a museum piece. We've helped it grow and watched it evolve. We've shaped our systems to the unique needs of our own nations, the values of our people, the history and culture of our lands. We've expanded the right to vote and reformed the way we vote – strengthening our democracies by broadening their foundations - and we've learned from each other – and helped each other.

In May 1941, a German bomb landed on the UK House of Commons. It started a fire which reduced the Chamber to nothing but a smoking shell and in the years after the war, when the time came to rebuild, it was the Parliaments and peoples of the Commonwealth that made it possible. From New Zealand, new despatch boxes, using



Australia's as the template. Australia reproduced the Speaker's Chair, replacing English oak with Queensland timber. From the people of Zambia, the bronze brackets to hold the mace. Jamaica, the bronze bar beyond which visitors to the chamber cannot pass. Pakistan, a new door for the South Entrance. Uganda furnished the lobby for the Noes. Nigeria, the Ayes. And from the people of Sri Lanka, the chair for the Serjeant at Arms. The list goes on. All of it adding up to more than a mere reconstruction of what had been. Instead, something stronger, better, drawn from a wider world. Given shape by the aspirations of every nation that drew inspiration from that mother of Parliaments. That's the unifying spirit of this Association. A mutual respect, a shared willingness to listen and learn. A common resolve to tackle the environmental challenge of climate change – and seize the economic opportunities of clean energy.

There is powerful diversity in the Commonwealth story and there is also a shared understanding that every nation's history contains complexity, trauma and sorrow. No nation's democracy is beyond improvement. Recognising that while tradition can bind us, teach us and inspire us – it is not enough to sustain us - because no system that derives its authority from the people will ever be the definite article, a complete and finished artefact.

We should never put ourselves in the position of saying that democracy peaked sometime in past. The value, power and relevance of Parliament is not something we can merely assert, it's something we have to demonstrate, by rising to meet the challenges of the future.

We live in a time when trust in institutions is low and the media landscape is fragmented. When people are confronted online with more and more opinions and fewer and fewer verified facts. When the challenges of climate change, technology and population are complex and sometimes controversial. We cannot simply trust to the weight of tradition. Instead, just as the UK House of Commons built on its history with new materials drawn from all over the world. All of us must be willing to draw on new ideas for engaging our citizens and new initiatives for strengthening our democracies.

A great place to start is making our Parliaments look more like the nations and populations we serve. In my time in politics, one of the most significant changes in culture and representations can be traced to a decision the Labor Party took at our 1994 National Conference. I was proud to be among the delegates who voted for our party to adopt Affirmative Action with the aim of equal representation for women in our ranks. Today, I am even more proud to lead the first Government in Australian history with a majority of women.

Over those three decades, I've seen firsthand that such change doesn't just mean better representation, it also



drives a better culture and better decisions, informed by a broader range of views.

The final point I want to make is that making Parliament and democracy better is not about reducing disagreement or dialling-back the contest of ideas. We serve in adversarial systems – that's a feature, not a flaw. Parliament should be a proving ground for ideas and policies, a place where we apply the sternest possible test to the strength and rigour of propositions. A fierce contest can be a good thing, as long as it's a contest about substance, about things that matter to people and issues that affect the country. Sometimes this means things can be loud or unpredictable, sometimes the arguments are more sledgehammer than scalpel. When the stakes are high, passions run high, but these are not warning signs, they are vital signs. Proof of life and cause for hope because only dictatorships pretend to be perfect. Democracy is proud to be human. It is, in every sense, a work in progress. That's why I've always believed that the strongest antidote to the corrosive forces of cynicism and division. The most compelling argument in favour of democracy, is not an abstract, theoretical or historical one. It's about demonstrating the capacity of government to make a positive difference. Delivering for people. Proving worthy of their trust. Living up to our shared values and taking on the big challenges – even if the causes are complex and the solutions unknown. In all of this, we must make people our partners in this task. Showing the humility to listen and explain and advocate, not just assert. The courage and capacity to push back against cynicism and extremism, division and disinformation. In many ways, this has never been more difficult. But in every way that matters, it's never been more important. Thank you all for visiting Australia. Thank you for the contribution you make to life and strength of Parliaments around the world.



2024 CPA GENERAL ASSEMBLY: KEY DECISIONS TAKEN IN NEW SOUTH WALES

During the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) in New South Wales, Commonwealth Parliamentarians attended the 2024 CPA General Assembly on 7 November 2024. The CPA General Assembly was presided over by the CPA President (2023-2024), Hon. Ben Franklin, MLC, President of the Legislative Council of New South Wales and was attended by Members from 128 CPA Branches. The CPA General Assembly, the Association's supreme authority, is constituted by delegates to the annual Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

The CPA General Assembly also included a topical debate on the role of Parliament in strengthening democratic resilience in an age of fake news and synthetic media with presenters from CPA Branches including Australia Federal, Punjab (Pakistan), The Maldives, Wales, Canada Federal, New Zealand, Trinidad and Tobago, and Northern Ireland.

Some of the key decisions and outcomes from the 2024 CPA General Assembly were:

- Delegates welcomed the work undertaken to enable the CPA to create a new non-charitable organisation and the passage of the CPA Status Bill in the UK Parliament to legislate to recognise the CPA as akin to an international, interparliamentary organisation.



- Delegates approved the 2023 CPA Annual Report (including the audited Financial Statements), the CPA Membership Report, the CPA Budgets and Financial Management Reports.
- Delegates endorsed reports from the three CPA networks - the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP), the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) and the CPA Small Branches.

Delegates also looked ahead to the next Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference – the 68th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) to be hosted by the CPA Barbados Branch and Parliament of Barbados in October 2025.

NEW CPA CHAIRPERSON FROM ZAMBIA ELECTED AT 2024 CPA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

During the 2024 CPA General Assembly at the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in New South Wales, Members of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) elected Hon. Dr Christopher Kalila, MP (Zambia) as the new Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee for a new three-year term. The newly elected CPA Chairperson pledged that the CPA would have a strengthened and renewed focus to promote Parliaments and Legislatures. In his acceptance remarks, he said that his election marked a time to move forward with the Association and that he wanted all CPA Branches - large and small - across the nine CPA Regions to work together. He thanked the Speaker of the Zambia National Assembly, Rt Hon. Nelly Mutti, and the CPA Zambia Branch for their support in his candidacy.

He also expressed his gratitude to the Members of the CPA, who have shown great trust in electing him as their Chairperson.

The CPA Chairperson is elected for three years by the CPA General Assembly and works with the CPA Secretary-General and the CPA Headquarters Secretariat to lead the Association and to chair the CPA Executive Committee. Under CPA election rules only delegates attending the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference could take part in the vote to elect a new CPA Chairperson. There were three candidates for the position - Hon. Dr Zainab Gimba, MP (Nigeria), Hon. Arthur E. Holder, MP, SC, Speaker of the House of Assembly of Barbados and Hon. Dr Christopher Kalila, MP (Zambia). Hon. Dr Christopher Kalila is the fifth CPA Chairperson from the CPA Africa Region and the second from Zambia (following Hon. Lavu Mulimba, MCC, MP from 1987 to 90) since the role of CPA Chairperson was created in 1967. The previous CPA Chairperson was Hon. Ian Liddell-Grainger, MP (United Kingdom) who held the position from 2022 to 2024 (Acting Chairperson from 2021-2022).





CPA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE ADDRESS KEY GOVERNANCE ISSUES FOR THE COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION

The Executive Committee of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) met ahead of the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) in Sydney, New South Wales. The CPA Executive Committee represents the nine regions of the CPA - Africa; Asia; Australia; British Islands and Mediterranean; Canada; Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic; India; Pacific; South East Asia.

The CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg said: *“The CPA provides a unique platform for inter-parliamentary dialogue to take place. Our membership comprises the national, state, provincial and territorial Parliaments of the Commonwealth. The diverse nature of the membership provides the CPA with a unique position within the parliamentary community to offer a comprehensive perspective on how to strengthen parliamentary democracy across the Commonwealth and to discuss new and innovative approaches on how to do so. The 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference is the most prominent event in the CPA’s calendar, as it offers a unique opportunity for the representatives of the Association’s 180 Member Parliaments and Legislatures to network with colleagues from other jurisdictions and discuss common issues of concern which affect Commonwealth Parliaments.”*



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RECOGNITION FOR 67th CPC HOST BRANCH AND OUTGOING CPA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS



At the conclusion of the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, the CPA President (2023-2024), Hon. Ben Franklin, MLC, President of the Legislative Council of New South Wales was presented with a commemorative silver salver to thank the CPA New South Wales Branch for their hosting of the conference. In addition, outgoing CPA Executive Committee Members were presented with commemorative plaques, traditionally donated by the CPA Malaysia Branch, to thank them for their service to the CPA.



CPA VICE-CHAIRPERSON ELECTED AT 67th CPC IN NEW SOUTH WALES

The 2024 CPA General Assembly was followed by a meeting of the new CPA Executive Committee during which Hon. Carmel Sepuloni, MP, Member of the Parliament of New Zealand and Regional Representative for the CPA Pacific Region was elected to the position of Vice-Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee. The position of Vice-Chairperson is for a term of one year and the holder is also a Member of the CPA Co-ordinating Committee.





MPs FROM PAKISTAN, JERSEY, GUYANA AND NEW SOUTH WALES RECOGNISED AT COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARIAN OF THE YEAR 2024 AWARDS

The Commonwealth Parliamentarian of the Year 2024 Awards have been announced at the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in New South Wales. Hon. Khurram Ijaz Chattha, MPA, a Member of the Provincial Assembly of Punjab in Pakistan has been announced as the recipient of the 2024 Commonwealth Parliamentarian of the Year Award in recognition of his parliamentary service and promoting good governance.

Hon. Gail Teixeira, MP from the Parliament of Guyana was awarded the 2024 Parliamentarian Life-time Achievement Award after 32 years of parliamentary service and Deputy Raluca Kovacs from the States Assembly in Jersey was awarded the 2024 New Parliamentarian Award in recognition of her contribution to promoting parliamentary democracy after only being elected two years ago. Hon. Alex Greenwich, MP from the Parliament of New South Wales was awarded the 2024 Parliamentary Equality and Diversity Award in recognition of his commitment to LGBT+ Rights, reproductive rights and marriage equality in Australia.

The CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg said: “*The Commonwealth Parliamentarian of the Year Awards aligns with our strategic objective of promoting the Commonwealth values of parliamentary democracy and sustainable development to a wide audience. Through these annual awards, the CPA recognises and highlights the invaluable contributions that Parliamentarians are making to their local communities within the Commonwealth.*”

As part of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association’s mission to strengthen parliamentary democracy through the promotion of good governance and sharing best practice, the awards were launched in 2022 to recognise and highlight inspirational and active Parliamentarians for excelling in their field.

CPA Awards are open to nominees who are current Parliamentarians* across the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association’s unique membership includes almost 180 national, state, provincial and territorial Legislatures. The next awards will be open for nominees in 2025.

* Nominees should be sitting Members of Parliament in a Commonwealth Legislature or have been a sitting Member of Parliament in a Commonwealth Legislature in the award period. The award can be made posthumously. Please check the CPA website for full nomination criteria.

PARLIAMENTARY CLERKS SHARE INNOVATIONS IN PARLIAMENTS AT 58th MEETING OF THE SOCIETY-OF-CLERKS-AT-THE-TABLE (SOCATT) IN NEW SOUTH WALES

The 58th Meeting of the Society-of-Clerks-at-the-Table (SoCATT) took place in the margins of the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) in New South Wales. The meeting brought together Parliamentary Clerks and parliamentary staff from Commonwealth Parliaments to discuss the latest legislative practices and to share best practice. The meeting was jointly chaired by Mr David Blunt, Clerk of the Parliaments of New South Wales and Honorary Secretary / Treasurer of the CPA New South Wales Branch and Ms Helen Minnican, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales.

Presentations were made during the two-day meeting by a number of different Parliamentary Clerks on a wide range of subjects including: citizen participation in Parliament; Parliamentary oversight of Executive undertakings; Parliamentary reform; Parliamentary privilege; initiatives to promote transparency; digital democracy; the impact of legislators in managing natural disasters; reconciliation with indigenous peoples and Legislative Assemblies; the development of relations between Parliaments and the CPA’s



work on Standards for Codes of Conduct in the Parliamentary workplace.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Society’s accounts for 2023 and proposals for the agenda for the 59th SoCATT General Meeting to be held in Barbados in 2025 were agreed.

For further information about SoCATT please visit www.societyofclerks.org



2024 CPA AWARD WINNERS

2024 Commonwealth Parliamentarian of the Year Award

In the nomination, it was noted that Hon. Khurram Ijaz Chattha, MPA from the Punjab Provincial Assembly in Pakistan has been a dedicated proponent of good governance, placing strong emphasis on the rule of law, transparency and accountability throughout his political career. His proactive approach in Assembly debates has contributed to the creation of laws that prioritize the public interest and his leadership in the development of public policies has also focused on improving governance systems that protect the rights of citizens and promote social equity. His leadership goes beyond the walls of the Assembly, and he spearheaded several projects in his constituency, such as the establishment of a rescue service, the construction of a college for both boys and girls and a special educational needs school, demonstrating his belief in community service and empowering future generations.



Image credit: Provincial Assembly of Punjab (Pakistan).

2024 Parliamentary Equality and Diversity Award

Hon. Alex Greenwich, MP from the Parliament of New South Wales was recognised for his commitment to LGBT+ Rights, reproductive rights and marriage equality in Australia. He is recognised for his role as a co-sponsor for the 2019 Bill which decriminalised abortion in New South Wales and in 2021, he co-sponsored the Bill which allowed eligible persons to access voluntary assisted dying services. He was the co-chair of the successful YES campaign that delivered marriage equality in Australia in 2017 and has campaigned for LGBT+ communities in New South Wales by amending 20 Parliamentary Acts.



Image credit: Alex Greenwich MP NSW.

2024 Parliamentarian Life-time Achievement Award

Hon. Gail Teixeira MP from the Parliament of Guyana was recognised for her 32 years of parliamentary service and her commitment to the Legislature. Over these years, she has sat on Parliamentary Committees and held many Parliamentary and Ministerial roles, dealing with issues that range from constitutional reform to legislation addressing anti-money laundering and the countering of financing of terrorism. She began her political career aged 19 in Toronto, Canada, when she became an active participant in the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa and the struggles for African liberation and the return of democracy in Chile, Nicaragua and her own native, Guyana. In 1977, she joined the women's rights movement and has remained a strong advocate for women's rights and participation at all levels of society.



Image credit: Parliament of Guyana.

2024 New Parliamentarian Award

Deputy Raluca Kovacs from the States Assembly in Jersey was recognised for her contribution to promoting parliamentary democracy. Elected only two years ago, she has advanced the principles of good governance through her work with multiple Committees and steering groups, and she led the review of the 2023 Annual Report as a member of the Public Accounts Committee, holding the government to account. She has shared her expertise on a number of international forums and platforms advocating for gender equality and promoting globally Jersey's findings of the Review commissioned by the Government on Violence Against Women and Girls. She has actively engaged with community groups and schools to promote engagement and an awareness of democracy amongst young people.



Image credit: Jersey States Assembly.



2025 Commonwealth Parliamentarian of the Year Awards

Submit a nomination to recognise inspirational Parliamentarians for excelling in their field

Full award criteria, categories and nomination forms online

Email hq.sec@cpahq.org | www.cpahq.org



SECOND LIFAKA LECTURE HIGHLIGHTS ROLE FOR MPs IN PROMOTING AND PROTECTING HUMAN RIGHTS

The second CPA Emilia Monjowa Lifaka Lecture has highlighted the key role of Commonwealth Parliamentarians in protecting and promoting human rights. The 2nd Lifaka Lecture took place in the margins of the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in New South Wales and was attended by delegates and the diplomatic community in Sydney.

This year's keynote address was given by renowned guest speaker, Hon. Michael Kirby, AC CMG. An international jurist, educator and former judge from Australia, Michael Kirby has undertaken many international activities for the United Nations, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Global Fund Against AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. He was also a member of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group who examined the future of the organisation in 2011/12.



The topic for this year's Lifaka Lecture was the complex relationship between human rights and governance within the Commonwealth, emphasising the critical role of Parliamentarians in upholding, promoting and protecting these rights. The Lecture examined the key human rights issues affecting Commonwealth jurisdictions such as freedom of speech and expression; gender equality and women's rights; the rights of marginalised groups such as indigenous populations and LGBT+ communities; and access to justice and the rule of law.

The reply to this year's Lifaka Lecture was given by Hon. Nontembeko Boyce, MPL, the Speaker of the KwaZulu-Natal Legislature and the Q&A was chaired by Hon. John Ajaka, a former President of the New South Wales Legislative Council and former CPA Vice-Chairperson. The CPA

Lifaka Lecture was established in 2023 in memory of Hon. Emilia Monjowa Lifaka, the late Chairperson of the CPA International Executive Committee and Deputy Speaker of Cameroon. Hon. Emilia Monjowa Lifaka was a passionate champion of the CPA and served as CPA Chairperson from November 2017 until her untimely death in April 2021. The CPA Lifaka Lecture is intended to provide a fitting tribute to her work.

INTERIM BOARD MEETING

The 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference began with a series of CPA governance meetings including a meeting of the CPA Interim Board, which took place in historic Jubilee Room at New South Wales Parliament with MPs from Trinidad & Tobago, Pakistan, Uganda, Malaysia, India, Saskatchewan and Scotland



CPA REGIONAL SECRETARIES MEET AT 67th CPC TO DISCUSS FUTURE CPA ACTIVITIES

Ahead of the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in New South Wales, the Regional Secretaries of the nine Regions of the CPA met to discuss CPA activities and the year ahead, joined by CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg and CPA Deputy Secretary-General, Jarvis Matiya. The nine regions of the CPA are: Africa; Asia; Australia; British Isles and the Mediterranean; Canada; Caribbean, Americas and the Atlantic; India; Pacific; and South-East Asia.



PARLIAMENTARIANS WITH DISABILITIES HIGHLIGHT INNOVATIVE REHAB CENTRE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

The Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) network, led by the CPwD Chairperson, Hon. Laura Kanushu, MP (Uganda), highlighted the work of a local rehabilitation centre working with persons living with disabilities during the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in New South Wales. The CPwD Regional Champions went to the Royal Rehab Ryde, a rehabilitation hospital, in Sydney to see their work. During the visit, they toured the Brain and Spine Injury Units and the Royal Rehab Lifeworks Unit. Other facilities such as the Outdoor Recreation and Sports Courts were also viewed by the visiting CPwD Regional Champions and Members participated in an interactive demonstration on Wheelchair Basketball and Tennis.

The Chairperson of the CPwD network, Hon. Laura Kanushu, MP said: *“Rehabilitation centres and*

associated organisations are of vital importance to empowering people with disabilities globally. Any Parliamentarian, with or without a disability, must engage with such entities to develop their understanding of how they can represent the disability community within their own jurisdictions. This activity provided an excellent opportunity for the CPwD’s Regional Champions to learn more about how rehabilitation therapies facilitate persons living with disabilities in Australia and we will take back what we have learnt for our work as Parliamentarians across the Commonwealth.”

The outreach visit was organised through Hon. Liesl Tesch, MP (New South Wales Legislative Assembly) who is the CPwD Regional Champion for the CPA Australia Region.

The CPwD network was established by the CPA to support Parliamentarians living with disabilities to be more effective in their roles and to help improve awareness of disability issues amongst all Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff. The network also seeks to address inequalities facing persons with disabilities and helps to raise awareness within the parliamentary context.

The Regional Champions of the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) network also met for their annual governance meeting during the 67th CPC. The CPwD Regional Champions represent each of the CPA’s nine Regions and promote the rights of Commonwealth Parliamentarians with disabilities in their respective Regions and represent disability interests within the CPA. During the meeting, the CPwD Regional Champions set the agenda of the network for the year ahead and the CPA Headquarters reported recent CPwD activities including the Capital Investment Fund supporting Commonwealth Parliaments to become more accessible.

Delegates at the 67th CPC also joined a workshop on creating inclusive elections for Persons with Disabilities (PwD) which examined practical examples of inclusion during election campaigns and processes.

VIDEO: Hon. Liesl Tesch speaks about the importance of inclusion for people with disabilities and the outreach event. Visit <https://youtu.be/apfxct-H2AA> on the CPA's *YouTube* channel to watch.





ENGAGE, EMPOWER, SUSTAIN: CHARTING THE COURSE FOR RESILIENT DEMOCRACY

67th CPC PHOTO GALLERY

67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference

3-8 November 2024 | Sydney, Australia



Images credit: Parliament of New South Wales and CPA Secretariat



For images of 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference please visit CPA Flickr page (www.flickr.com/photos/cpa_hq/albums), CPA website www.cpahq.org or social media - Twitter @CPA_Secretariat | Facebook.com/CPAHQ | LinkedIn | Instagram @cpa_secretariat

Images credit: Parliament of New South Wales and CPA Secretariat



CPC WORKSHOP A: BUILDING BRIDGES: PARLIAMENTARY FRAMEWORKS FOR MEANINGFULLY ENGAGING WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

CPA HOST BRANCH NEW SOUTH WALES TOPIC

Panel Chair: Senator Hon. Sue Lines, President of the Australian Senate

Discussion Leaders:

- **Professor Megan Davis, Pro Vice Chancellor Society, University of New South Wales** (via videoconference)
- **Mr Eddie Synot, Lecturer, Griffith Law School** (via videoconference)
- **Hon. Willie Jackson, MP (New Zealand)**
- **Ms Jennifer Kalpokas Doan, Executive Director, Balance of Power**

Facilitator: Mr Marshall Tisdale, Programmes Officer, CPA Secretariat

Rapporteur: Ms Helen Hong (Parliament of New South Wales)

This workshop focused on how Parliamentarians and society can establish and implement frameworks which allow for meaningful engagement with indigenous people. Panellists from Australia, New Zealand and Vanuatu shared their lived experiences and professional expertise in establishing such frameworks. These included discussions about 'The Voice' referendum in Australia, the focus on indigenous women in Vanuatu and the New Zealand example of entrenching Māori rights in the Constitution and wider society.

Professor Megan Davis (University of New South Wales) started the discussion by marking key moments in Australian history of engagement with First Nations people.

Professor Megan Davis explained that the two parts of the 1901 Constitution that referred to First Nations people gave the states power to make 'special laws' for Aboriginal people and that 'aboriginal natives shall not be counted'. She explained that this wording created a racist power dynamic which expressly excluded First Nations people.

She highlighted the 1967 referendum as a key turning point in meaningful engagement. With the highest 'yes' vote in a referendum, the Australian Federal Government took leadership of Indigenous policy and set up successive consultative bodies, such as the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee and the National

Aboriginal Conference, to engage with Indigenous communities and better understand how to make the best, or right, laws for them.

Professor Megan Davis explained that as early as the 1900s, there have been calls to establish a 'Voice' in Parliament to inform Indigenous policy or treaty, rather than just symbolic recognition.

A major milestone in conducting meaningful and thoughtful engagement with First Nations people was the Uluru Statement from the Heart. Professor Megan Davis explained that there had been a year of intense planning to roll out a series of dialogue processes with First Nations people across 12 sites nationwide with the aim of consulting and educating. The culmination of the dialogues was to convey those issues that the regions had reached consensus on. One of these was the establishment of a Voice to Parliament.

Mr Eddie Synot (Griffith Law School) suggested that despite the referendum on 'The Voice' not passing, a Voice was still needed for Parliament to recognise the rights of First Nations peoples and to address social and economic disadvantage.

'The Voice', he said, was the result of a truly consultative process to achieve better outcomes for First Nations people and to ensure accountability of government decision-making. He explained that 'The Voice' had been designed with community support, along with input from the legal profession, to ensure that it worked with current systems, including Parliament (which would remain sovereign). Under 'The Voice' model the community, from the grassroots up, would be given the right to have their say, while the bureaucracy and the Executive Government would continue to be involved in decision-making and governing the programmes that affect people's lives.

Ms Jennifer Kalpokas Doan (Balance of Power) focused on the Vanuatu experience and provided her unique perspective as an indigenous woman. She explained that despite most, or all, of the Members of the Vanuatu Parliament being indigenous, it did not mean that everyone had equal access to Parliament and its processes, particularly not indigenous women. She said that, currently, there is only one female Member of Parliament and only six female Members in total have been elected to the Vanuatu Parliament.

Jennifer Kalpokas Doan highlighted that there are a number of cultural and societal barriers to increasing female indigenous representation in Parliament. These include the prohibitive costs of running for office. She explained that many women do not have access to the necessary financial resources to contest an election. Another barrier is the common perception that Parliamentarians should be men. This is reinforced by community expectations about traditional responsibilities for men and women, those being

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Images credit: CPA Secretariat

Left: Workshop panellists (left to right): Hon. Willie Jackson, MP (New Zealand); Senator Hon. Sue Lines (Australia Federal); and Jennifer Kalpokas (Balance of Power).

focusing on specific initiatives, such as addressing poor health or wellbeing, were insufficient for communities to achieve substantive change.

Eddie Synot also reflected that, in his experience, 'The Voice' was about ensuring the recognition of the voices of all First Nations people, including women, people who live in urban environments, and those who live in more traditional settings. He stated that without structural empowerment or legislation, necessary changes cannot be made.

Hon. Willie Jackson further stated that courts should entrench necessary protections because 'you can't trust politicians', and that there was a need for a foundational document that cannot be dismantled.

Hon. Khalid Sayed, MPP (Western Cape, South Africa)

asked how, within the context of a meaningful framework, can indigenous people be recognised while also recognising their tribal customs and laws?

Eddie Synot reflected that different types of rights do not have to be an 'either/or' situation.

Jennifer Kalpokas Doan suggested that meaningful engagement looks different in every country and that, while there will be some level of disconnect or chaos, it breeds a need for better governance.

Hon. John Paul Mwirigi, MP (Kenya) noted that Members of Parliament represent certain communities, and asked that if a constitution focuses on everyone, how can certain community groups ensure that their voices are heard?

Jennifer Kalpokas Doan acknowledged that in Vanuatu, there have been issues with naturalised citizens becoming Members of Parliament and not being perceived to adequately represent constituents and their needs.

Hon. Willie Jackson advised that one must 'make leadership uncomfortable' and continually fight and advocate for indigenous rights. He stated that indigenous rights have been recognised by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and therefore it is an issue of justice.

Professor Megan Davis emphasised the importance of a country being equal and upholding the rule of law. She suggested that a process for institutional reform could be run in consultation with community groups, as it is those groups that know best.

Eddie Synot explained that was important to be as representative of minorities as possible, as there were very different and varied indigenous experiences. He acknowledged that the Uluru Statement had not represented the views of all Indigenous people, and that some people are better placed than others to access political processes and have their voices heard.

At the end of the workshop discussion the following recommendation was **endorsed** as follows:

- **Parliamentarians across the Commonwealth have a responsibility to establish and implement parliamentary frameworks which enable active and meaningful engagement with Indigenous Peoples.**

that men should work and women should do housework and raise children.

Despite this, Jennifer Kalpokas Doan explained that women are bypassing these barriers by demonstrating their leadership in other areas, such as in the community, church or government bodies. Slowly, women are being acknowledged and recognised as leaders, and this is leading to more inclusive dialogue and better representation of women in institutions and the community.

Hon. Willie Jackson, MP (New Zealand) shared his experiences of how New Zealand had legislated for positive changes for its indigenous people, perhaps more than anywhere else in the world. While in power, his party introduced a national Māori public holiday, established a Māori health authority recognising that Māori people died six to seven years before the rest of the population, and legislated for specific Māori local government seats, as indigenous people were not being elected by the popular vote. In addition, the amount of targeted government funding to certain community organisations and tribes was increased.

While the Government's 'unprecedented' actions were relatively well-received by the general population, he also acknowledged that some labelled the allocation as 'racist' funding.

Hon. Willie Jackson partly attributed New Zealand's unique position to the Treaty of Waitangi, which was signed by the Indigenous people and the Crown in 1840. The courts also recognised and upheld the Treaty in 1987, describing it as "akin to a partnership" which changed the face of New Zealand. The Treaty Principles were subsequently developed over the next 50 years in support of Māori, however, Willie Jackson noted that a Bill would shortly be introduced into the New Zealand Parliament which may seek to redefine or remove the principles.

He advised that the proposed legislation was leading to widespread protests in the country as it posed serious challenges to the partnership between the Government and Māori.

Hon. K Sudhakar, MP (India) asked how the involvement of tribal or indigenous people could be ensured without express recognition of them in a constitution.

Professor Megan Davis responded that tribal people would benefit from constitutional recognition, which, in turn, would enable legislation to be introduced and enacted. She suggested that



CPC WORKSHOP B: THE USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN PARLIAMENTARY PROCESSES AND PRACTICES – OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Panel Chair: Hon. Hany Hui Bin Soh, MP (Singapore)

Discussion Leaders:

- **Lord Syed Kamall (United Kingdom House of Lords)**
- **Senator Hon. Rosemary Moodie (Senate of Canada)**
- **Ms Patricia Almeida, Deputy Chief Information Officer, Brazilian Chamber of Deputies**

Facilitator: Mr Jack Hardcastle, Deputy Head of Programmes, CPA Secretariat

Rapporteur: Mr David Rodwell (Parliament of New South Wales)

This workshop focused on how Parliaments are implementing Artificial Intelligence (AI) into their processes and practices, and the opportunities and challenges this presents. While many jurisdictions have begun to introduce AI into various aspects of their processes, such as transcribing parliamentary debates and simplifying administrative tasks to improve efficiency, this is in the early stages.

Panellists agreed that AI can undoubtedly bring great opportunities and potential benefits to Parliaments, but cautioned that safeguards must be developed against dangerous or unintended consequences, such as the inclusion of bias and 'fake news' in AI-produced analysis, leaks of private and sensitive information, and the risk of hacking of AI systems by 'bad actors'.

Panellists agreed that Parliaments and jurisdictions need to develop the capabilities to take advantage of the benefits that AI can offer while mitigating the potential risks, noting that it is a complex issue and that different responses will be needed based on the individual context of each jurisdiction. Panellists suggested that scrutiny by Parliamentary Committees was an important means to scrutinise developments in AI.

The workshop also featured a presentation on AI initiatives in the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies, including AI-powered analysis of citizens' opinions on Bills, as well as AI summaries of Bills and parliamentary speeches.

Workshop participants supported a suggestion made by a participant that the CPA create a Steering Committee on the use of Artificial Intelligence in Parliaments.

Workshop Chair, **Hon. Hany Hui Bin Soh, MP (Singapore)** opened the session by highlighting that the emergence of AI presents both exciting opportunities and challenges. AI has the potential to increase the efficiency of legislative work, including identifying constituents' views on political issues, freeing up Members' time to focus on parliamentary debates and serving their constituents.

She said that Singapore has used AI to search past Hansard reports and create summaries, and is exploring using AI for administrative tasks such as processing questions for MPs and determining whether they are within the Parliament's Standing Orders.

However, she also cautioned that the emergence of AI carries with it concerns about the privacy of data, bias and the potential for AI systems to be hacked or manipulated. The Parliament of Singapore had passed laws to better safeguard against these potential risks and ensure that the integrity of parliamentary processes is preserved.

Lord Syed Kamall (UK House of Lords) noted that as AI is in its infancy, it is 'not truly intelligent' yet and that it is 'debatable' how far away we are from 'truly intelligent AI'. Lord Kamall shared his experience on the House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee, which has been looking at how the UK Government can take advantage of the opportunities presented by AI.

Lord Kamall is concerned that discussions about the use of AI focus on the 'precautionary principle' related to AI safety and risk, rather than the 'innovation principle'. He suggested that countries such as the United Kingdom need to strike a balance between both principles and take advantage of the opportunities presented by AI. Jurisdictions must guard against the regulatory capture of organisations lobbying Parliamentarians in favour of laws that benefit them, while making it harder to guard against dangerous AI capabilities. There is a risk of giving too much power to large companies in the development of AI laws, noting a nuanced approach to AI is needed.

Lord Kamall suggested that jurisdictions should exercise caution in relation to certain AI processes such as automated decision-making. While the UK Parliament is using AI for some administrative tasks, such as transcribing debates, Lord Kamall pointed out that an incorrect AI transcription may have legal consequences. Lord Kamall concluded that there is no perfect balance between the precautionary and innovation principles, and that AI should be embraced with vigilance.



Above: Workshop panellists (left to right): Hon. Hany Hui Bin Soh, MP (Singapore); Lord Syed Kamall (UK); and Senator Hon. Rosemary Moodie (Canada)



Images credit: CPA Secretariat

Senator Hon. Rosemary Moodie (Canada) said that AI was being used in the Canadian Senate to classify documents, transcribe proceedings, review and organise amendments to legislation, monitor political discourse, conduct parliamentary research and to power a chatbot to speak to members of the public.

Senator Moodie discussed the benefits of AI, such as increasing efficiency, increasing access to Parliament, and supporting democratic participation (such as through plain language summaries). Senator Moodie cautioned that Parliamentarians have a responsibility to ensure parliamentary AI systems do not promote misinformation which pose a threat to freedom. Additionally, Senator Moodie said consideration needs to be given to how the AI system is 'trained', and its source of knowledge. She stated that AI can fabricate information about political systems, Legislatures, elected officials and emerging political issues, which has the risk of creating doubt about the authenticity of information and challenging people's trust in Parliament. Senator Moodie also noted that while much of Parliamentarians' work is carried out in public, their work also gives them access to sensitive and personally identifiable information that must not be fed into AI systems.

Senator Moodie noted that the Canadian Government is considering AI legislation to target the private sector and a code of practice on AI use. According to her, Canada was the first country to launch a national AI strategy.

Senator Moodie said that Parliaments need to ensure their staff have appropriate training in AI processes before incorporating them, and access to best practice expertise from other Parliaments. She stated that ethics in AI is also an important consideration, and referred to the 11 policy areas identified by UNESCO where action is required by jurisdictions introducing AI.

Senator Moodie concluded that AI is here to stay, but charging along at a fast pace, and that there is a need to increase guardrails to ensure AI safety by emphasising transparency and responsibility while ensuring Parliaments do not miss out on the benefits.

Ms Patricia Almeida (Brazilian Chamber of Deputies) shared the experience of the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies' journey towards 'AI governance'. She said the Chamber's AI journey started in 2013, when it adapted its systems to enable Parliamentarians with disabilities to participate in plenary sessions and Committee meetings.

Patricia Almeida then presented on how the Chamber introduced its AI system, known as the 'Ulysses Suite' across various parliamentary processes to date. In 2018, Ulysses 2 was introduced which is now conducting analysis and research on legislation and comparison of texts. Later, Ulysses 4 was introduced which allows for the collation of amendments to legislation categorised by topic. The AI system also allows 'Smart Analysis' via e-polls on legislation, collating information on arguments in favour of a Bill compared to arguments against, from both Parliamentarians and citizens. The technology also has a lawmaking component which summarises Bills, a stenograph unit which summarises parliamentary speeches, and a communication unit which summarises public meetings.

Patricia Almeida said the Chamber's use of AI is guided by the following ethical principles: privacy, transparency, accountability, fairness and non-discrimination, robustness and safety, human autonomy and intellectual property. She noted that the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) would launch guidelines for AI in Parliaments in December 2024.

After the presentations concluded, several participants asked questions and provided input about the issues discussed, with some of these outlined below.

Deputy Tom Coles (Jersey) asked how Parliaments can be expected to manage conflicts with AI, when it is already being used across government, defence and industry. Senator Moodie responded that jurisdictions should pay attention to a UN report on AI, which called for a global framework to ensure the responsible and ethical development of AI, but that governments would need to manage their own internal conflicts.



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Hon. Claire Christian, MHK (Isle of Man) asked whether Legislatures will emerge as leaders on ethics in AI and if so, whether they will be disadvantaged compared to jurisdictions that do not prioritise ethics in their use of AI. Lord Kamall responded that international coordination, potentially sharing resources via the CPA, is needed to ensure leadership on AI ethics. Lord Kamall also noted it is unclear how much jurisdictions such as China consider ethics in their use of AI but that we need to bring such jurisdictions to the table in a sensitive way.

Shri A N Shamseer, Speaker of the Kerala Legislative Assembly (Kerala, India) asked whether managing AI in a positive way required a proactive or reactive approach. Lord Kamall said both proactive and reactive approaches are required to take advantage of the opportunities of AI and also to respond to any unintended consequences.

Hon. Abdul Khader Ali Fareed Ulla Thota, Speaker of the Karnataka Legislative Assembly (Karnataka, India) asked if a revolution is needed for AI in Parliaments and whether regulation is needed against bias in AI. Senator Moodie said regulation is needed to protect privacy and ensure accountability. Lord Kamall added that Parliaments needed to think about their populations, what biases there might be and incorporate any necessary protections without 'overcompensating' the data and 'creating bias' while trying to address it.

Hon. Refilwe Mtsheweni-Tsipane, MP, Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces (South Africa) asked what regulatory measures may be needed to prevent the undermining of humility in AI processes. Senator Moodie said there are different ways

jurisdictions can identify the correct guardrails needed. She said jurisdictions should reflect internally on what those may be and to customise legislation for each jurisdiction. However, AI in defence and healthcare likely affect the global community and will require a more complex response. Lord Kamall noted it was important for jurisdictions to consult world experts in AI.

Deputy Inna Gardiner (Jersey) asked what jurisdictions need to do to prepare their systems to be ready for automatic decision-making. Panellists said a mixture of measures would be needed but that automatic decision-making was not suitable in some areas such as health-care decision-making.

Hon. Corine N. George-Massicote, MP, Speaker of the House of Assembly of the British Virgin Islands, suggested that a Steering Committee be established via the CPA for advancing AI among Parliaments.

Hon. Kate Doust, MLC (Western Australia) asked panellists what the best models and practices are that they had come across for parliamentary oversight of AI use. Lord Kamall and Senator Moodie agreed that Parliamentary Inquiries and Committee work is where Parliaments should start and that most jurisdictions are in the early stages of their work in this area.

The recommendations at the workshop were *endorsed* as follows:

- Parliaments should encourage the sharing of best practice and lessons learned from integrating AI into parliamentary processes and practices, and consider the creation of a CPA Steering Committee on the use of Artificial Intelligence in Parliaments.

CPA COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION

Parliamentary Handbook on Disinformation, AI and Synthetic Media

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CPC WORKSHOP C: VIOLENCE AND ABUSE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS – CASE STUDIES FROM THE COMMONWEALTH

Panel Chair: Hon. Bilal Azhar Kayani, MNA (Pakistan)

Discussion Leaders:

- **Rt Hon. Dr Moses Wetang'ula, EGH, MP, Speaker of the National Assembly of Kenya**
- **Mrs Sharon Hodgson, MP (United Kingdom)**
- **Ms Jennifer Nadel, Co-Director, Compassion in Politics; Director, Compassionate Politics; Board Member, Global Compassion Coalition**
- **Mr Rogier Huizenga, Manager, IPU Human Rights Programme; Secretary, Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians (via video presentation)**

Facilitator: Ms Charlotte Corby, Programmes Officer, CPA Secretariat

Rapporteur: Yajun Ma (Parliament of New South Wales)

Parliamentarians carry out a crucial role in democracy. Threats to their safety impact not only their physical and mental wellbeing but also their ability to speak openly and freely in the democratic systems they work in. This workshop considered issues of violence towards and the abuse of Parliamentarians, the changing trends in such behaviour, the impacts on individual welfare and wider society, and which cohorts are more vulnerable.

The discussion highlighted both the presence of combative political climates and the rise of online platforms and social media as factors contributing to modern abusive behaviour towards Parliamentarians. Social media, 'fake news', Artificial Intelligence and cyberbullying are some examples of threats in the online space. These can impact the mental health of those targeted and can also cross over into threats to physical safety. Moreover, they may foster a wider climate of distrust and fear of speaking out in public and in democratic institutions.

The workshop discussed those cohorts who are vulnerable to abuse, especially women and other marginalised communities. One panellist noted that any conversation about threats against Members of Parliament is also a conversation about gendered violence. Women, historically a silenced cohort, may find themselves again unwilling to speak out of fear for their safety when elected to public office.

Panellists named social media regulation, legislation around truth-telling in politics, less combative debate environments in

Parliament and policies targeting misogyny as potential solutions to the issue of abuse.

Hon. Bilal Azhar Kayani, MNA (Pakistan) introduced the session by noting that political polarisation and online exposure have exacerbated instances of violence, abuse and intimidation towards public figures. The security and health of elected representatives and their staff are integral to the strength of democratic institutions. He noted that Parliaments of the Commonwealth must be committed to providing robust security measures that respond to changing political landscapes, alongside adequate and accessible medical, physical and mental support.

Mr Rogier Huizenga (Inter-Parliamentary Union IPU) introduced, in a pre-recorded contribution, the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians. He outlined its establishment, work and processes, which include the handling of cases of complaints regarding human rights abuses against Parliamentarians. These cases have increased sharply in recent years, with more than 700 now pending. He emphasised the need for parliamentary solidarity, asking Members present to use their roles as Parliamentarians and as visitors to other jurisdictions to raise issues of human rights abuses against Parliamentarians.

Rt Hon. Dr Moses Wetang'ula, EGH, MP, Speaker of the National Assembly of Kenya said that women, especially younger women, are the 'first class' of victims in the current environment of abuse and threats against Parliamentarians in Kenya. Female Members of Parliament are regularly bullied, online and offline, and often resist unwanted sexual advances from male counterparts. With the advent of Artificial Intelligence, they have become victims of what the Speaker referred to as 'engineered fake nude caricatures', which can cause irreparable damage to their reputations even when denied. This type of bullying is the single biggest threat to the empowerment of women and their advancement into leadership positions.

The Speaker also named other threats to Members' security in Kenya, including hostile campaign environments in which



Images credit: CPA Secretariat

Right: Workshop panellists (left to right): Hon. Bilal Azhar Kayani, MNA (Pakistan); Jennifer Nadel (Compassion in Politics); Sharon Hodgson, MP (United Kingdom); Rt Hon. Dr Moses Wetang'ula, MP (Kenya).



Images credit: CPA Secretariat



candidates are compelled to hire ‘thugs’ in order to drown out their opponents, and Members from small parties being beholden to the owners of those parties. He noted that in some countries the state revokes security for Members who speak freely, yet access to security should be a right. He spoke of situations, during his time as a Member of Parliament, in which other Members have been found dead, and emphasised that the state must provide constant protection.

He concluded by noting legislation is needed to regulate social media and online platforms and that Commonwealth Parliamentarians should share experiences of combating cyberbullying against MPs in this emerging space.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson, MP (United Kingdom) said that the rise of social media, Artificial Intelligence and malign actors has altered

the nature of threats against MPs in the United Kingdom. Women MPs are more likely to receive threats. That is compounded if they are women of colour or possess other intersectional identities. For instance, a 2017 Amnesty International study found that Rt Hon. Diane Abbott, MP, from the UK House of Commons, received almost half of all the abusive tweets directed at the over 200 female Members of Parliament at the time. In such an environment, women become silenced out of fear for their safety, and young girls may also be discouraged from pursuing public office.

Sharon Hodgson also noted the increasing amount of violence against MPs, highlighting the murders of UK MPs, Jo Cox in 2016 and Sir David Amess in 2021. After those deaths, the police set up a specialist unit investigating crimes against MPs. It registered 678 crimes from 2016 to 2020. She stated that all UK MPs now carry

“The discussion highlighted both the presence of combative political climates and the rise of online platforms and social media as factors contributing to modern abusive behaviour towards Parliamentarians. Social media, ‘fake news’, Artificial Intelligence and cyberbullying are some examples of threats in the online space. These can impact the mental health of those targeted and can also cross over into threats to physical safety. Moreover, they may foster a wider climate of distrust and fear of speaking out in public and in democratic institutions.”



personal alarms. All their homes and offices have security, CCTV and panic buttons. That was not the case 20 years ago.

Sharon Hodgson also mentioned the uniquely problematic circumstances of elections, during which the level of abuse and threats against Parliamentarians and candidates rise. During elections, abuse can be labelled as holding MPs 'accountable'. Meanwhile, while campaigning MPs do not have access to security.

Ms Jennifer Nadel (Compassion in Politics) outlined a 'threefold crisis' of abuse and threats against Parliamentarians in contemporary politics. These are: a rise in violence, a growing mental health crisis amongst Parliamentarians, and democratic backsliding and loss of public trust. Using research from the United Kingdom, Jennifer Nadel noted, for example, that an exit survey of Parliamentarians conducted by civil society organisations found that 70% of those leaving politics had their mental health negatively impacted by their time in office. Moreover, one-third cited fear of violence and abuse as a reason for standing down. Constituent pressure is also great, especially as the public often has misconceptions about the extent of individual Members' powers, and this is particularly acute for backbenchers. Often those who are the most empathetic are driven out, yet democracy needs them. It cannot be that merely those who are 'robust enough' remain.

Meanwhile trust in politicians is at an all-time low. Recent Ipsos polling showed that only 9% of people trusted politicians to tell the truth. That becomes 2% for those aged 25 to 34. However, Parliaments can help reinstate trust through legislation. The Welsh Parliament, for instance, is planning to introduce laws that would disqualify any politician who deliberately misrepresents the truth. Misogyny should be made a hate crime. Threats to women MPs are trying to erase women from public spaces. Finally, jurisdictions should implement tough social media measures.

Ms Savia Orphanidou, MP (Cyprus) asked the panel about the balance between protecting freedom of expression and tackling abusive/offensive speech.

Sharon Hodgson responded that better political education is needed. Parents also have a responsibility to educate their children, especially their sons, so that they do not replicate sexist behaviours.

Jennifer Nadel responded by speaking about the no-harm principle. It is not about freedom of speech; it is about allowing people to abuse. She stated that preserving freedom of speech is akin to the abuse of public space.

Rt Hon. Dr Moses Wetang'ula responded by noting that, although freedom of expression and media is granted in many constitutions, common law systems provide a check on that through libel or slander. That is the case in various jurisdictions.

Hon. Dr Lawrence Xu-Nan, MP (New Zealand) asked about the role that male or more senior politicians ought to play when MPs who are younger or from more vulnerable communities are being targeted. He also asked about how mental health support or policies for Parliamentarians can address microaggressions, which build up over time.

Jennifer Nadel responded to the question about microaggressions by stating that we need to reform the way that we do politics so that it is more professional and modern. Often debates in the House, especially question time debates, give the public a misleading view of Parliamentarians. The public is not often

shown the collaborative approaches of Committees, for example. The current system is patriarchal and has been reformed on a piecemeal basis. Rt Hon. Dr Moses Wetang'ula agreed that senior MPs have a duty to younger colleagues to counsel and mentor them and noted his experience in Kenya.

Hon. Dr Nomafrench Mbombo, MPP (Western Cape) noted that the panellists spoke about social media; however, mainstream media also plays a role, especially when it comes to women candidates or Parliamentarians. She said that mainstream media should also take responsibility for creating violence.

Hon. Zandile Majozi, MP (South Africa) noted how Parliamentarians behave to each other in Parliament. The chaos in Parliament creates space for the public to say similar things. How can politicians control others when they cannot control themselves?

Rt Hon. Dr Moses Wetang'ula responded that society should have a value system, in which people understand that telling the truth is sacrosanct. There should be self-regulation.

Sharon Hodgson agreed that Parliamentarians have a responsibility to behave appropriately or else bring themselves into disrepute. She used the Brexit debate in the United Kingdom as an example.

Mr Rob Callister, MHK (Isle of Man) stated that the Isle of Man introduced mental health first aid training in its Parliament. He also asked for tips on work-life balance.

Jennifer Nadel mentioned developing capacity for mental health, which can be taught. There is also compassion training designed to help politicians protect themselves.

Sharon Hodgson said she ensures that she and her staff have two weeks off every year at the same time. She also does not read comments. It is worth remembering that often the people who are attacking you are generally unwell themselves.

Mr Ganesh Mahipaul, MP (Guyana) asked the Speaker of Kenya about the relationship between the Opposition and the Government in Kenya. He asked how Opposition and Government members should behave towards each other.

Rt Hon. Dr Moses Wetang'ula said that the Opposition and Government are combative during election campaigns but are more cooperative once sworn in.

Hon. Daggubati Purandeswari, MP (India Union) noted that in India, many women from rural areas are only newly exposed to technology, yet many of the threats towards women Parliamentarians are linked to social media or Artificial Intelligence. She also asked about entering into agreements for cross-border exchange of best practices.

Rt Hon. Dr Moses Wetang'ula responded by saying that there is a serious need for international conventions. He noted the Brazilian ban of X (Twitter).

Senator Hon. Datuk Wira Dr Mohd Hatta bin Md Ramli (Malaysia) proposed an amendment to the original wording of the recommendation to insert the words "and legal" before the word "support". The amendment was agreed to.

The recommendation at the workshop was *endorsed* as follows:

- **Parliaments of the Commonwealth should commit to providing robust security measures for Members and their staff, adaptable to changing political landscapes, and supplemented by adequate and accessible medical, physical, mental health and legal support.**

CPC WORKSHOP D: HOW CAN LEGISLATURES BEST SUPPORT AND PROMOTE LGBT+ PARTICIPATION?

Panel Chair: Hon. Valerie Woods, MNA, Speaker of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of Belize

Discussion Leaders:

- **Hon. Michael Galea, MP (Victoria)**
- **Hon. Tina Pupuke Browne, MP (Cook Islands)**
- **Ms Kathryn Johnson, Policy Specialist, HIV and Health Group, UNDP**

Facilitator: Mr Matthew Salik, Head of Programmes CPA Secretariat

Rapporteur: Ms Amanda Assoum (Parliament of New South Wales)

The workshop focused on how Legislatures can promote and encourage a positive environment for the political engagement of LGBT+ voices in the democratic process. Panellists discussed the importance of a diverse range of voices and experiences in both the membership of Legislatures and in the views presented to them through political engagement.

Panellists agreed that inclusive and equal political systems are fundamental to sustainable legislative development, noting the value of meaningful engagement, open dialogue and participation between parliamentary and LGBT+ communities. While there was recognition that some jurisdictions had made significant progress in this space, there was a general consensus that most jurisdictions could do more to support and promote LGBT+ participation.

The workshop highlighted the challenges some jurisdictions face in supporting and promoting LGBT+ participation. Workshop participants spoke about certain societal, cultural and religious norms being 'less welcoming' of LGBT+ participation, making it politically and legally challenging for some Legislatures to support the LGBT+ community.

Hon. Valerie Woods, MNA, Speaker of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of Belize noted that at the previous CPA annual conference in Ghana in 2023, a workshop entitled: *'The Commonwealth Charter: A Charter for all Human Rights, or just some?'* considered, amongst other things, the importance of equality and the protection of LGBT+ rights, with Members encouraged to promote human rights legislation and policies in their respective jurisdictions.

Hon. Michael Galea, MP (Victoria) acknowledged the different perspectives on LGBT+ participation across the Commonwealth. He submitted that LGBT+ rights in the Commonwealth is about participation and amplifying voices. The more LGBT+ people are represented, the more Legislatures 'can truly be representative democracies'.

After sharing his personal story, Hon. Michael Galea discussed two LGBT+ colleagues in the Victorian Parliament. One colleague is open about his sexuality and feels it is important to show others that you can talk or look differently and still be an effective MP. The second colleague is passionate about issues that are outside LGBT+ politics and sees his sexuality as something that should be considered as 'nothing more than an unremarkable attribute'. These stories illustrate that no singular perspective is correct.

He noted that change needs to come from culture, not from legislation, and expressed support for setting up an informal network to help advance this conversation and deliver meaningful action within the Commonwealth.

Hon. Tina Pupuke Browne, MP (Cook Islands) focused on the unique challenges and promising strategies developing in the Cook Islands and across the Pacific to build inclusive LGBT+ communities, while considering best practices and advancements from across the Commonwealth.

She discussed the importance of promoting and supporting LGBT+ representation to ensure that policies and laws reflect social diversity and ensuring there is representational space for everyone. She commented that when all communities see themselves represented in government, it strengthens democratic integrity and fosters trust and engagement. Legislators can promote dialogue and use public platforms to raise awareness of LGBT+ topics and signal to the community that LGBT+ concerns are valued in the legislative process.

Some jurisdictions, such as New Zealand and Canada, have seen significant strides in LGBT+ participation and provide strong examples of inclusion in governance. Other regions, such as the Pacific, face cultural and societal values that create tension with efforts to promote LGBT+ participation. In many Pacific jurisdictions, laws still discriminate against LGBT+ persons, and the lack of legal protection discourages participation in public life. This not only limits individuals but also sends a message that LGBT+ voices are unwelcome in legislative spaces. In the Cook Islands, there has been early but promising steps, with the recent passing of legislation



Above: Workshop panellists (left to right): Hon. Tina Pupuke Browne, MP (Cook Islands); Hon. Michael Galea, MP (Victoria); Hon. Valerie Woods, MNA (Belize); Kathryn Johnson (UNDP)



decriminalising homosexuality. This is a significant development, considering the cultural landscape, and would not be possible without the work of advocacy groups.

Hon. Tina Browne concluded by commenting on the collective responsibility to foster inclusivity in Legislatures.

Ms Kathryn Johnson (UNDP) spoke about the UNDP's commitment to ensuring 'no one is left behind'. She highlighted the UNDP's focus on inclusivity, equality, meaningful democratic participation and the engagement of groups facing marginalisation, particularly LGBT+ individuals. The strategies underpinning the UNDP's work on LGBT+ inclusion are:

- Supporting champions within government and state structures, including parliaments and the judiciary.
- Strengthening LGBT+ organisations to influence public policy.
- Leveraging UNDP's ability to safely facilitate and convene across government, civil society and the private sector.

She identified six pathways to LGBT+ inclusion – social, legal, public-sector services, democracy and governance, movement and leadership, and knowledge.

Kathryn Johnson highlighted entry points for reform, namely health. She spoke about how some nations such as Mozambique and Zimbabwe have utilised health to lead discussions on decriminalising same sex activity and promoting interaction between MPs and the LGBT+ community. She also discussed how laws that criminalise consensual same sex activity and gender expression can foster widespread social exclusion, discrimination and act as barriers to services. By contrast, a right based response helps ensure that services are accessible to those most at risk and enables LGBT+ participation which can reduce inequalities while respecting and protecting human rights. She spoke about legislative recommendations, such as decriminalisation of consensual same sex activity and anti-discrimination legislation and commented on the importance of meaningful engagement and participation of advocacy groups. She concluded by speaking about the value of intersectionality. LGBT+ individuals do not exist in isolation and face multiple forms of discrimination.

At the conclusion of the presentations, several participants asked questions and shared insights from their respective jurisdictions about LGBT+ participation.

Hon. Dr Lawrence Xu-Nan, MP (New Zealand) spoke about how, by virtue of intersectionality, parts of the community have never seen their gender identity and ethnicity represented at the same time, noting a perceived conflict of rights in some cases. He asked how politicians can be held accountable for misinformation and spreading hate and violence against the LGBT+ community and how to ensure one set of rights is not pitted against another.

In response, Hon. Michael Galea commented on the need for patient conversations, whilst standing by and supporting the LGBT+ community. Colleagues and citizens should be free to live as they choose, with the same courtesy extended to the LGBT+ community.

Hon. Nontembeko N Boyce, MPL, Speaker of the KwaZulu-Natal Legislature noted the importance of creating a safe environment to allow Parliamentarians to live their lives openly. She highlighted the issues of discrimination and lack of spaces for the



LGBT+ community and noted the need for continued parliamentary dialogue.

Hon. Tina Browne commented on starting with the politicians and having them advocate for LGBT+ acceptance to create a space for open dialogue in Parliament. Hon. Valerie Woods spoke about the importance of educating Parliamentarians, noting the religious challenges faced in Belize.

Shri Abdul Khader Ali Fareed Ullah Thota, MLA, Speaker of the Karnataka Legislative Assembly asked about economic considerations from any reforms taken to uplift LGBT+ participation.

Hon. Michael Galea responded that breaking down barriers will ensure economic opportunities are the same for LGBT+ persons as they are for anyone else.

Kathryn Johnson highlighted 'equal rights, not special rights' and stressed the importance of using data to assess the cost of excluding and including groups in the community, including LGBT+ individuals.

Mr Rhun ap Iorwerth, MS (Wales) spoke about looking at new ways for participation and inclusion. He asked how the CPA can play a part in supporting new initiatives, noting the CPA British Islands and Mediterranean Region are looking at establishing an LGBT+ group. He suggested establishing a dedicated CPA network to support LGBT+ participation allowing Parliaments to share learnings and good practices and asked the panel for their views on the merits of such an initiative.

Hon. Michael Galea supported the establishment of a network within the CPA, however he noted that it's important this comes from the CPA Branches.

Hon. Osei Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu, MP (Ghana) spoke about the passing of the anti-LGBT Bill in Ghana and the need to address the cultural and religious issues that affect LGBT+ participation in some jurisdictions.



Images credit: CPA Secretariat



Mrs Sharon Hodgson, MP (United Kingdom) suggested that whilst the discussion is focused on LGBT+ participation the focus should be on decriminalisation. Without addressing decriminalisation, she asked how LGBT+ individuals can stand for election or participate in Parliament if they are penalised for being their true selves.

Kathryn Johnson agreed that decriminalisation is critical to achieving LGBT+ participation and meaningful engagement.

Hon. Tjorn Dirk Sibma, MLC (Western Australia) echoed the suggestion to establish a dedicated CPA group or network to support LGBT+ participation. He asked to what degree do Parliamentarians lead and how can Legislatures strike a balance between advancement and cultural and societal pre-conditions. If they introduce sustainable progress how likely is this to remain embedded and not be overturned by future political change.

Hon. Arthur Holder, SC MP, Speaker of the House of Assembly of Barbados spoke about the issues from a Caribbean perspective. He commented on the 'high level hypocrisy' in some regions where constitutions embody the freedom of fundamental human rights, yet politicians will not speak out for fear of losing elections.

Hon. Tina Browne spoke about the need for increased cultural and religious engagement to better support and promote LGBT+ participation. However, she noted there is no 'one-off answer' and suggested all possible alternatives should be considered.

Hon. Michael Galea commented that the point of decriminalisation is to let people decide by allowing them to live as they are in all cultures, it is not about imposing any particular way of living.

The recommendation at the workshop was *endorsed* as follows:

- Political actors across the Commonwealth have a responsibility to listen to the voices of LGBT+ citizens and support their meaningful participation in the democratic process.

“Panellists agreed that inclusive and equal political systems are fundamental to sustainable legislative development, noting the value of meaningful engagement, open dialogue and participation between parliamentary and LGBT+ communities. While there was recognition that some jurisdictions had made significant progress in this space, there was a general consensus that most jurisdictions could do more to support and promote LGBT+ participation.”



WORKSHOP E: HUMAN TRAFFICKING, REFUGEES AND IMMIGRATION ACROSS THE COMMONWEALTH: OPEN DOORS OR BUILDING WALLS?

Panel Chair: Hon. Donna Skelly, MPP, Deputy Speaker (Ontario)

Discussion Leaders:

- **Dr Gabriel Lubale, Kenya Institute of Migration Studies**
- **Hon. Tessa Eria Lambourne, MP (Kirabati)**
- **Hon. Ruth Cross Kwansing, MP (Kirabati)**
- **Professor Gillian Triggs, former High Commissioner for Protection UNHCR and former President of the Australian Human Rights Commission**

Facilitator: Ms Charlotte Corby, Programmes Officer CPA Secretariat

Rapporteur: Talina Drabsch (Parliament of New South Wales)

This workshop focused on the complex opportunities and challenges presented by immigration, displacement and the movement of people throughout the world, including the particular issues associated with human trafficking as well as the unprecedented number of refugees. Panellists highlighted how different countries have responded to these challenges in unique ways, and the critical role to be played by Parliamentarians in implementing change at the local level.

As Workshop Chair, **Hon. Donna Skelly, MPP (Ontario)** led with a video presentation that provided information on human trafficking as one of the fastest growing crimes in the world. It described the role of technology in aiding its growth, the launch of public education campaigns in Ontario and the use of community services to support victims, and the potential role of the hotel industry in identifying victims.

Hon. Donna Skelly, MPP described how Ontario has responded to the challenges presented by human trafficking, and various preventative as well as reactive strategies that have been implemented. The particular difficulties presented by forced debt and fraudulent debt were highlighted, with reference to legislative measures adopted in Ontario to wipe debt accumulated through trafficking. She further outlined the work with financial institutions to forgive such debt, as well as highlighting their ability to find a trafficked person in a much shorter time frame than authorities due to the information they hold.

Hon. Ruth Cross Kwansing, MP (Kirabati) provided an overview of Kirabati and its vulnerability to climate change due to it being a nation comprised of tiny coral atolls. She spoke of the outward and

inward migration pressures it has experienced, as Kirabati is forced to adapt to a crisis they did not create.

While Kirabati is generally free from trafficking, there is a potential 'spillover effect' from the pressures associated with migration. There have been some cases involving fishing boats, but the Member noted that there are more issues of exploitation in relation to local men. She raised a number of questions around the limitations of the definition of 'refugee' in relation to climate change. The growing difficulties regarding food and water security, and coastal erosion, that are faced by those on outer islands were highlighted. This places pressure on the capital as a result, leading people to seek employment opportunities abroad.

Hon. Tessa Eria Lambourne, MP (Kirabati) also spoke of the vulnerability of low-lying island states to climate change. She spoke of the challenges particular to Kirabati as people cannot move away from the coast as the strips of land are so narrow. Saltwater is intruding on usual sources of water. She voiced that there appears to be a lack of international appreciation of the challenges faced by Kirabati, highlighting that the UN Convention does not recognise climate/environmental refugees.

Kirabati has adopted a policy of 'migration with dignity', which involves the upskilling of its people to meet international standards, enabling them to fill labour gaps in other countries. Labour mobility programmes have been established with the Australian and New Zealand governments. She concluded by stressing that climate change is a violation of the right of Kirabati people to live in their own country as they are being forced to leave.

Dr Gabriel Lubale, OGW Coordinator at Kenya Institute of Migration Studies, provided an overview of trends in the African region, with its emphasis on free movement protocols and the promotion of harmonised labour migration. He noted that migration

Below: Workshop panellists (left to right): Professor Gillian Triggs; Hon. Tessa Eria Lambourne, MP (Kirabati); Hon. Ruth Cross Kwansing, MP (Kirabati); Hon. Donna Skelly, MPP, Deputy Speaker (Ontario).



Images credit: CPA Secretariat



Images credit: CPA Secretariat

in Africa happens primarily within the region, with low numbers ending up elsewhere.

He discussed how migration is ideally a cycle that incorporates preparation to move and transition to seeking employment or asylum. The problems of radicalisation and terrorism were highlighted. The various approaches of different countries to refugees were also outlined.

Professor Gillian Triggs, former Assistant High Commissioner for Protection UNHCR and former President of the Australian Human Rights Commission, spoke of her experience with the United Nations. She described the human rights crisis resulting from an unprecedented number of refugees and asylum seekers. As governments and local communities struggle to respond to this crisis, there has been a decline in adherence to the rule of law and international treaty obligations.

Professor Gillian Triggs outlined the origins of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1951 Refugee Convention, noting the importance of the language used in relation to refugees. She highlighted the importance of political asylum to countries at the time these treaties were written and first agreed.

In addition to the escalating number of people on the move throughout the world, primarily as a result of conflict, there were also 35 million people displaced in 2022 because of climate change.

Professor Gillian Triggs noted that there is a view that the Refugee Convention is no longer fit for purpose. There has also been a shifting of responsibility for asylum seekers to poor and developing nations.

The legally binding obligations of nations in relation to a person being granted refugee status was contrasted with how migration remains a decision of sovereign nations.

She stressed that the response to the global movement of people is the responsibility of everyone, not just governments. Political will is necessary to act collaboratively to address these issues.

Hon. Dr Numal Momin, Deputy Speaker (Assam) asked whether some of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's budget should be allocated for the rehabilitation of victims of human trafficking?

Hon. Donna Skelly, MPP responded by speaking about a Bill introduced in the Canadian Senate. People are currently

not prosecuted if they receive an organ that was trafficked. She suggested that it should be made a criminal act to knowingly receive an organ that was not willingly donated.

Hon. Carrie Hiebert, MLA (Manitoba) referenced the United Nations 'Blue Dot' Programme and asked how countries can work together to prepare people for the country they are going to?

In her response, Professor Gillian Triggs highlighted the examples of Guatemala and Honduras with special mobile buses, that are placed along well-known routes as people come into Mexico. She described how people need information about opportunities. In particular, many of the young people fleeing countries need information about where they can get work. This information can be provided in these mobile units. This helps to make people less vulnerable to people smugglers and traffickers.

Hon. Akierra Missick, MHA (Turks and Caicos Islands) noted that the biggest challenges in her jurisdiction are the climate crisis, sexual trafficking of women and migrant trafficking from Haiti. She asked how to balance the various issues concerning refugee, migrant and Indigenous populations?

Professor Gillian Triggs spoke of the need to focus on the human rights of every person. However, she noted that the law gives special rights to refugees as opposed to migrants. While legal status is important, she stressed that there is a need to focus on protecting every human.

Rt Hon. Baroness Lindsay Northover (United Kingdom) noted that she is gaining an idea of the scale of the problem but not how to address it. She described how the European Union did try to share taking in refugees but experienced difficulties as a result of populist politics. She asked whether there were further ideas as to how to work globally against populism?

Professor Gillian Triggs provided examples of work by the World Bank in this area, and resettlement and labour mobility programs. While respect for the rule of law is declining, the Commonwealth is an influential body and could assist in countering this.

Rt Hon. Dr Moses Wetang'Ulla, EGH, MP, Speaker of the Parliament of Kenya commented on the unique problems associated with climate induced migration. He described how Africa is experiencing serious issues with forced migration and refugees,



with people from the African continent trying to escape conflict and poverty, while Europe is erecting barriers.

Mr Davison Munga'Ndu, MP (Zambia) asked what is being done as a Commonwealth to address the root cause of human trafficking?

Hon. Donna Skelly, MPP responded that there is a need to prosecute criminals and those willing to buy and sell people. She spoke of the need to make sure laws are enacted and that police enforce those laws.

The workshop discussions then focused on the working of the proposed recommendation.

A number of suggestions - including taking the discussions to the next Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Barbados,

undertaking a mid-year meeting to discuss the issues raised and inviting financial institutions like the World Bank to join the discussions - were also made which are to be taken to the CPA Secretary-General for further action.

The following recommendation at the workshop (as amended) was *noted* as follows:

- **All movements of people within the Commonwealth should be free from exploitation, within the framework of the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact on Migration, and align with the commitment to universal human rights in the Commonwealth Charter.**

To read an article on this topic by the Cyprus delegation at the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) turn to page 313.

CPC WORKSHOP F: BENCHMARKING, STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES: STRENGTHENING THE INSTITUTION OF PARLIAMENTS THROUGH THE ADOPTION OF BEST PRACTICE

Panel Chair: Mr Jack Hardcastle, Deputy Head of Programmes, CPA Secretariat

Discussion Leaders:

- **Dr K. Sudhakar MP, (India Union)**
- **Ms Nerusha Naidoo, Secretary to the Provincial Legislature (KwaZulu-Natal)**
- **Hon. Savitri Sonia Parag, MP, Minister of Local Government and Regional Development (Guyana)**
- **Dr Elizabeth Macharia, Acting Head of the Rule of Law Section, Commonwealth Secretariat**
- **Mr Andrew Young, Research Fellow, Deakin University**

Rapporteurs: Janelle Taouk and Ashley Kim (Parliament of New South Wales)

This workshop focused on how the Commonwealth could explore benchmarking tools, standards and guidelines to improve governance and strengthen parliamentary institutions. Panellists discussed the value of benchmarking and adopting complementary ethical standards, such as the CPA Code of Conduct, in building institutions that are resilient to the complexities of modern democracies. Delegates heard that the use of benchmarks can build public trust as they demonstrate a Legislature's commitment to greater transparency around parliamentary processes and, therefore, to democratic values.

Dr K. Sudhakar, MP (Lok Sabha, India Union) started the discussion by introducing the panellists and speaking briefly about the importance of benchmarking, guidelines and standards for Parliaments.

Ms Nerusha Naidoo, Secretary to the Provincial Legislature (KwaZulu-Natal) presented on the value of self-assessment

in legislative processes by drawing on her own experiences implementing the CPA Democratic Benchmarks for Legislatures in her jurisdiction.

Nerusha Naidoo explained that the KwaZulu-Natal Legislature had a positive experience when it conducted a self-assessment in 2020, in response to challenges from significant changes in its membership and outdated systems. She said that while it can be difficult for a Legislature to approach the CPA for this assessment, it is valuable because it can result in identifying strengths and areas for improvement in a 'realistic and truthful' manner. This self-reflective process enabled the KwaZulu-Natal Legislature to modernise, adapt to change and assess their current systems against authoritative guidance.

Nerusha Naidoo reported that the CPA Secretariat developed a report containing 18 recommendations across four assessment categories, which covered a range of relevant issues, including funding and support, the operation of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and the standards for amending House rules. She said that the CPA provides support for implementing these recommendations within the constraints of a Legislature's finances. She stressed that a Legislature does not have to agree with all of the recommendations, and that the KwaZulu-Natal Legislature made a conscious decision not to adopt certain recommendations, but nevertheless acknowledged their direction.

Nerusha Naidoo also spoke about her experience as a panel member facilitating the self-assessment of the Botswana Parliament, and the two-way benefit that this scrutiny process had for both the assessed Legislature and her own jurisdiction.

Nerusha Naidoo ended her presentation with a note that while standards and best practices provide a roadmap for strengthening Parliaments, each jurisdiction will need to develop tailored approaches to addressing challenges, such as political resistance, resource limitations and regional differences.

Mr Jack Hardcastle, Deputy Head of Programmes at the CPA Secretariat presented on how the benchmarking process works



Above: Workshop panellists (left to right): Jack Hardcastle (CPA Secretariat); Dr K. Sudhakar MP, (India Union); Nerusha Naidoo (KwaZulu-Natal); Hon. Savitri Sonia Parag, MP (Guyana); Dr Elizabeth Macharia (Commonwealth Secretariat); Andrew Young (Deakin University).

and what the CPA's role is in facilitating self-assessments. He emphasised the role of benchmarks as a practical guide for well-functioning Legislatures and setting standards of good governance.

His presentation included an overview of the 132 indicators that guide the assessment of Legislatures, as well as the timeline of their development since their establishment in 2006. He reported that 30 Legislatures have undertaken assessments since the CPA Benchmarks were updated in 2018.

Jack Hardcastle outlined how the assessment process works and distinguished the supported assessments (i.e. those facilitated by the CPA) from the unsupported (self-led) assessments. He said that, regardless of the chosen method, both the supported and unsupported self-assessments result in a report with recommendations that can be considered by key stakeholders in the participating Legislature.

He also went on to discuss case studies in Anguilla, The Gambia and Montserrat to illustrate how these Legislatures have benefitted from the self-assessment process. He spoke about examples of positive changes being made following the assessments, including updates to Standing Orders, the establishment of Codes of Conduct for Members, organisational reviews and the introduction of live-streaming of parliamentary proceedings.

He concluded by highlighting the CPA Benchmarks as tools for fostering continuous improvement and promoting good governance across diverse legislative contexts. He also echoed Nerusha Naidoo's comments about the flexibility offered by the CPA's processes and how they can be adopted by different Legislatures.

Hon. Savitri Sonia Parag, MP, Minister of Local Government and Regional Development (Guyana) discussed the importance of setting good standards and adopting benchmarks in building robust and accountable institutions. She spoke about the complexities and evolving challenges posed by modern governance, which require a Legislature's commitment to continuous improvement and revision of practices.

Savitri Sonia Parag emphasised that benchmarks constitute minimum standards for both emerging and established Parliaments, and that they promote transparency and accountability. She said that the relevance of benchmarks lies in their universality, as they are structured to support Legislatures irrespective of their differing characteristics.

Savitri Sonia Parag went on to say that adherence to benchmarks demonstrates a Legislature's commitment to democratic values, in that it models best practice. Delegates heard that this is particularly important as citizens are more informed and actively engaged with their Parliaments, and because they look to elected representatives for examples of good conduct. Savitri Sonia Parag gave the example of the Youth Parliament in her jurisdiction that helped foster important dialogue between the Parliament of Guyana and the young participants. She said that this participatory approach allowed young people to learn about legislative processes and encouraged deeper connections with democratic values.

Savitri Sonia Parag also spoke about the relevance of the CPA's '*Standards for Codes of Conduct for Members of Parliament and the Parliamentary Workplace*', which complement the CPA Benchmarks by outlining ethical standards and conduct for elected representatives. She said that codes of conduct establish clear expectations and sanctions and, therefore, set a high bar for accountability, helping to maintain the dignity of institutions and build public trust.

The presentation concluded with a discussion of how this is relevant and applicable to the digital space. Savitri Sonia Parag suggested that Members must demonstrate integrity and transparency in all digital interactions, and that it is important for Members to commit to responsible online behaviour as it sets a standard for the broader community. She said that ignoring guidelines for good online behaviour may send the signal that harmful behaviour is acceptable.

Mr Andrew Young, Research Fellow, Deakin University, presented on the principles that informed the CPA's Codes of Conduct and the context for the development of the Codes,



those being the Nolan Principles and the Commonwealth Latimer House Principles. An overarching theme of his presentation was the necessity of strong ethical frameworks within Legislatures to prevent misconduct and protect institutional integrity.

Andrew Young said there is a decline in public trust due to perceived failings in ethical conduct from elected representatives. He said it is important for all jurisdictions to set strong ethical frameworks to rebuild and maintain public trust, which will support democratic government and restore faith in the rule of law.

In sharing his learnings from a survey of 180 Legislatures around the world, Andrew Young said that while most institutions have established codes, there remains a large gap in updating these to include contemporary issues. He emphasised that as societal expectations evolve, so must standards within Legislatures, ensuring they adapt to emerging issues. This may include online behaviour and the application of equality standards.

Andrew Young spoke about the nine themes within the Code and how they are relevant to all delegates and their respective jurisdictions. During the discussion of the themes, he spoke about the explicit inclusion of 'sexual assault' as a standard of unacceptable behaviour, given the research on the negative effect that this has on parliamentary workplaces.

He also touched on social media as an extension of the workplace, and that inappropriate behaviour in the workplace is still inappropriate even if it occurs online. He spoke about minimum standards to prohibit inappropriate use of social media by Members towards other Members and others, for accountability in relation to a Member's use of third-party material, and the actions of their staff when they post on the Member's account.

Dr Elizabeth Macharia, Acting Head of the Rule of Law Section at the Commonwealth Secretariat provided an overview of the Commonwealth Latimer House Principles. She described the principles as providing critical guidance on the relationship between the three arms of government. She explained that these principles promote good governance and rule of law in different Commonwealth jurisdictions.

Elizabeth Macharia highlighted the Principles' flexibility to guide different legislative contexts. She described examples of the Barbados Latimer House Dialogues of April 2024 and the Lesotho Latimer House Dialogues of July 2023 to illustrate how the principles can be implemented into their respective legislative frameworks. She emphasised that strong institutions preserve democracy, and that we must collaborate to strengthen our institutions. She shared a Ghanaian proverb with the delegates, 'the ruin of a nation begins in the homes of its people'. She went on to say that there is no greater home than the great house that is the Parliament. The discussion concluded with the message that strong countries need stable Legislatures that respect the rule of law.

Shri A. N. Shamseer, MLA (Kerala) asked about what can be done about the use of social media to bully and harass MPs.

Savitri Sonia Parag responded that, although making harassment via social media a criminal action through legislation is a positive step, more needs to be done in relation to individual conduct and making social media a more positive forum.

Hon. Manzoor Nadir, MP, Speaker of the Parliament of Guyana asked about the practical implementation of solutions and benchmarking recommendations.

Jack Hardcastle answered that a self-assessment of a Parliament with the CPA is a collaborative experience. The Parliament can use the benchmarking recommendations to move forward, and the CPA can work with Legislatures on the implementation of the benchmarks, if requested.

Savitri Sonia Parag added that the CPA Secretariat is a facilitator and any recommendations from a self-assessment will need to be internally adopted by the assessed Parliament. She further added that a self-assessment requires time and resources and is not undertaken just to be shelved. Rather, a jurisdiction would review the recommendations that they can action with the resources they have.

Hon. Gervais Henrie, MNA (Seychelles) asked if there are similarities between the CPA Benchmarks and the Inter-Parliamentary Union's Indicators for Democratic Parliaments, and which would be the best option to align with.

Jack Hardcastle responded that the Inter-Parliamentary Union's Indicators are broader in scope and coverage. However, he did not endorse one over the other, but suggested that Parliaments review both to determine suitability.

Deputy Adrian Gabriel (Guernsey) asked about how a unicameral Parliament can hold itself to account.

Elizabeth Macharia responded that the Commonwealth Latimer House Principles are flexible and can be applied in different environments.

Ms Sarah Green, MP (United Kingdom) asked how benchmarks can assist in addressing change and the loss of institutional memory that comes with the election of new Members and incoming political staff. She noted that more than half of the elected Members in the United Kingdom were new following a recent election in her jurisdiction.

Nerusha Naidoo spoke about a similar experience in her jurisdiction, which resulted in 51 new Members and only 29 returning Members. She suggested that institutional memory must be embedded in the parliamentary staff and administration to bridge the gap. It is a continuous engagement and investment in business continuity and one that is not achieved over a few months. One measure to preserve institutional memory is to ensure that all relevant information is available online on the Parliament's website, so it is accessible.

Savitri Sonia Parag added that in her jurisdiction there is a Ministry dedicated to Parliamentary Affairs and suggested that a Ministry like this is useful as it is referred to for parliamentary procedure and governance.

The recommendation at the workshop was *endorsed* as follows:

- **Commonwealth Parliaments should commit to exploring relevant benchmarking tools, standards and guidelines, including but not limited to the CPA Benchmarks, that can be adapted and implemented within their respective Parliaments to strengthen their institutions and promote good governance.**

To read an article on this topic by the KwaZulu-Natal delegation at the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) turn to page 322.



CPC WORKSHOP G: COMBATTING DISCRIMINATORY LEGISLATION: 365 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER- BASED VIOLENCE

COMMONWEALTH WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS TOPIC

**Panel Chair: Ms Lynda Voltz, MP, CWP President and
Member of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly**

Discussion Leaders:

- **Hon. Carmel Sepuloni, MP, (New Zealand)**
- **Hon. Fathimath Sauda, MP, (People's Majlis of
Maldives)**
- **Ms Seodi White, Senior Gender and Law Expert
on Justice, Legal Reforms and Constitutions, UN
Women (via videoconference)**
- **Ms Jurgita Sereikaite, Programme Manager, Ending
Violence Against Women and Girls, UN Women
(Pacific Region)**

**Facilitator: Bénite Dibateza, CWP Coordinator, CPA
Secretariat**

**Rapporteur: Ms Julia Drake-Brockman (Parliament of
New South Wales)**

The workshop examined the role that Parliamentarians and Governments have in combatting discriminatory legislation, particularly that which negatively impacts women and girls, and the challenges that come with addressing persistent gender inequalities and enacting gender-responsive laws. Discussions focused on the unique ways that different countries have responded to those challenges, and addressed how the CPA membership and international organisations like UN Women could contribute to developing best practice.

Panellists from New Zealand, The Maldives, Australia and UN Women highlighted the current trends regarding the rights of women and girls in their jurisdictions. Each presented specific examples of initiatives that have been undertaken to address discriminatory laws on marriage and divorce, inheritance, welfare benefits, gender-based violence and the gender pay gap, such as the passing of Bills or resolutions, convening of subject matter Committees and unannounced visits to relevant agencies to assess work against human rights principles. All jurisdictions are experiencing similar issues, to a greater or lesser extent, and all panellists acknowledged that, despite the many successes, there is still much work to be done. Impediments to the swifter implementation of law reform include insufficient data collection due to weak reporting mechanisms, inadequate education of the public on the relevant issues and ineffective communication of legislative change, as well as the costs and difficulties typically associated with making change.

At the conclusion of the presentations and the Chair's comments, participants from India, Pakistan, South Africa and Canada shared

the progress their respective jurisdictions have made with respect to addressing discriminatory legislation.

Hon. Carmel Sepuloni, MP (New Zealand) noted that New Zealand is proud of its early advancements on women's rights. It was the first country where women were able to vote in 1893 and it ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1985. Hon. Carmel Sepuloni was a Government Minister when the representation of women in the New Zealand Parliament, and later in the Cabinet, reached 50%.

Despite those early advancements, affronts to women's rights continue. Policy change could be effected in four key areas: welfare, gender pay gap, gender-based violence and data collection. Women comprise 59% of welfare recipients, and children living in poverty are more likely to live in single mother households. Harsh welfare measures disproportionately impact women and children and exacerbate poverty. As a Welfare Minister, Hon. Carmel Sepuloni overturned a 1936 policy that discriminated against women based on relationship status. Any unpartnered, sole parent receiving both benefits and child support payments had the latter taken away to subsidise the former, while those that had re-partnered did not. Change was complicated and costly, at NZ\$350 million over four years, but it was achieved.

While 24% of women have experienced intimate partner violence and 38% sexual harassment, 92% of sexual assault offences are unreported. Of those reported, only 31% result in a charge and only 8% lead to a conviction. A new portfolio with a Minister focusing solely on family and sexual violence was created to combat the issue, leading to more money for prevention.

Insufficient data entrenches women's disadvantage. An analysis of claims made to the Accident Compensation Corporation [ACC] found that women are less likely to make claims, more likely to be declined when they do and given less compensation. The data collected created an evidence base upon which to make changes, one of which was to introduce coverage for women who had experienced birth injuries - probably the most significant shift for the ACC since it began.

Hon. Fathimath Sauda, MP (People's Majlis of Maldives) stated that The Maldives has similar problems regarding human rights and gender equality. Equal opportunity is enshrined in the Constitution, including access to education, and the right to vote and be elected, but women still face challenges. The Maldives has the highest divorce rate in the world and single parents experience many social issues, such as access to child support. Other major social issues include the high number of expatriate workers, both male and female, and the huge percentage of youth engaged in drugs and gang violence.

On 3 June 2024, the Human Rights and Gender Committee of the 20th People's Majlis was established. It is mandated to review and provide recommendations on matters relating to human rights,



Images credit: CPA Secretariat



gender equality and juvenile justice and has evidence-gathering powers under Article 99 of the Constitution. It also oversees the work of several institutions and makes unannounced visits to assess operations against international human rights principles.

The Committee is currently working on its strategic work plan, which includes post-legislative scrutiny of the Child's Rights Protection Act, the Juvenile Justice Act and other oversight and accountability work. Current parliamentary inquiries include the impact of violence against women in politics, which aims to understand the social and legal context for representative political participation, forms of violence and its effect on women's political participation and develop recommendations to improve protections and support mechanisms for women in politics.

Ms Jurgita Sereikaite (UN Women) shared examples of work that UN Women is undertaking on eradicating laws that discriminate against over 3.7 billion women and girls around the world. In 2019, UN Women launched the 'Equality in Law for Women and Girls by 2030' strategy, which aims to fast track the repeal of discriminatory laws in 100 countries. It encompasses all aspects of the legal system and addresses the legal needs of over 50 million women and girls.

Firstly, UN Women is undertaking a comprehensive legal assessment of government and civil society organisations to form a roadmap of discriminatory laws that directly or indirectly impact women and girls. Secondly, a task team has been established to provide support to UN Women teams in individual countries to combat discriminatory laws. Finally, the Gender Justice Platform fosters global collaboration between UNDP and UN Women to bridge the gender justice gap, with work done particularly in Tanzania, Zanzibar and Uganda on violence against women. To date, 91 laws have been adopted, revised or repealed, and 63 countries have invested greater resources into policies and programmes that advance gender equality.

Turning to reforms in the Pacific, Jurgita Sereikaite spoke of how prevalence studies conducted between 2009 and 2013 revealed the extent and forms of violence against women. In response, in 2018, the governments of several Pacific nations established the Regional Working Group on the Implementation of Domestic Violence Legislation. Jurgita Sereikaite noted that one of the biggest challenges in the Pacific Region is climate change. Implementation timelines for gender reforms must be flexible enough to prepare and respond to the impact of climate change, such as the increasing number of natural disasters.

Ms Seodi White (UN Women) spoke about legal reforms achieved through the 'Equality in Law for Women and Girls by

2030' initiative, which is aligned to UN Sustainable Development Goal 5 on Gender Equality. Reforming laws and eliminating those which are discriminatory is critical to achieving gender equality.

Although a majority of Commonwealth countries have ratified CEDAW, analysis needs to be undertaken as to whether it is being truly observed. The treaty embodies a multi-dimensional concept of equality that includes not just formal equality (abolition of discriminatory laws) but also substantive equality (actual outcomes and women's experience of equality).

To date, practical progress has been made across the globe in implementing legal reforms to address women's inequality, although 28 of the target countries have not enacted reforms allowing women to be the head of a household (as at 2022).

There is still much to be done to address gender equality in the Commonwealth and the role of Members of Parliament is key. Most obviously, Parliaments can enact gender-responsive laws and they can also use the Parliamentary Committee structure to ensure that those laws achieve substantive equality. Parliaments can also partner with UN Women for support.

At the conclusion of the presentations, several participants shared the progress that their respective jurisdictions had made towards combatting discriminatory legislation.

Hon. Vasudev Devnani, MLA, Speaker of Rajasthan Legislative Assembly (India) said that India is committed to the elimination of all discrimination and violence against women. It has signed and ratified CEDAW, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces. Policies implemented by the Indian Parliament to safeguard women's rights include the Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls. At the state level, the Rajasthan State Women Policy 2021 seeks to protect the human rights of women and girls.

“Discussions focused on the unique ways that different countries have responded to those challenges, and addressed how the CPA membership and international organisations like UN Women could contribute to developing best practice.”



ENGAGE, EMPOWER, SUSTAIN: CHARTING THE COURSE FOR RESILIENT DEMOCRACY

Images credit: CPA Secretariat



Left: Workshop panellists (left to right): Hon. Fathimath Sauda, MP, (People's Majlis of Maldives); Hon. Carmel Sepuloni, MP, (New Zealand); Ms Lynda Voltz, MP, CWP President (New South Wales); Jurgita Sereikaite (UN Women Pacific); Bénite Dibateza (CWP Coordinator, CPA Secretariat); on screen: Seodi White (UN Women).

Hon. Zeb Jaffar, MNA (Pakistan) spoke of the steps that Pakistan has taken towards gender equality, such as the *Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act 2010*; the Pakistan Women's Parliamentary Caucus, a collective voice on relevant legislation; and amendments to the Election Act 2017 to increase women's political participation. When she started in politics, gender-based harassment on social media was not commonplace, but it has increased in recent years. In response, the Parliament of Pakistan introduced the *Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act* in 2016 to curb the harassment of women online.

Hon. Dr Nomafrench Mbombo, MP (Western Cape, South Africa) spoke about how perpetrators of gender-based violence are often known to their victims. Efforts to dismantle the patriarchal system are limited, especially in African and Asian countries. She spoke of the efforts made by Tanzania and Rwanda to increase female representation in their Parliaments, with Rwanda having the highest number of women MPs in the world. Women Parliamentarians are role models for girls and increased representation will help reduce gender-based violence.

Hon. Carmel Sepuloni, MP responded that an important part of lawmaking is communication and education. The population must be brought along. It cannot just be Parliamentarians talking about

gender-based violence, men need to educate the young men in their communities. Government campaigns such as 'It's not OK' and those run by non-profit organisations such as White Ribbon New Zealand's 'Boys will be Boys' campaign are helping to support that.

In response, Ms Jurgita Sereikaite (UN Women) highlighted progress in the Pacific Region. Last year, Fiji launched 'National Action to Prevent Violence Against All Women and Girls', which seeks to transform attitudes and behaviours of men and women in sectors such as faith, education, sports and media. Samoa recently launched a violence prevention framework. UN Women remains cautious because the more primary prevention work it does, the greater the demand for essential services in health, education and other sectors.

Hon. Fatimath Sauda, MP responded that she was moved by what the Member from Western Cape had shared about representation in Parliament. There are similar issues in The Maldives. As you go higher in the political sphere, the percentage of women decreases. Equal opportunity is not just about reporting mechanisms and pathways, we must implement preventative mechanisms to stop violence from happening in the first place.

CWP President, Ms Lynda Voltz, MP responded that school students in Australia are taught about what is and is not acceptable in respectful relationships. Most male-dominated sporting codes, many of which are popular across the Pacific Region, have automatic standdown policies for domestic violence charges, sending the message that that behaviour is unacceptable. Education is most the important preventative measure.

Hon. Carrie Hiebert, MLA (Manitoba, Canada) agreed that there is a dire need in every country for preventative education. Every six days, a woman is killed in Canada due to intimate partner violence. One response to that was C233, a bill that amended the Judges Act to expand judicial education about intimate partner violence so that judges can better understand what that violence looks like.

Hon. Sardar Kultar Singh, MLA (Punjab, India) said that India's position on the Gender Equality Index has improved in recent years. Several relevant Acts have been passed, including *The Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act*, which seeks to increase female representation in several Legislative Assemblies to 33%, however more needs to be done on implementation.

In response, Ms Seodi White (UN Women) said that laws that maintain forms of violence other than physical also need to be addressed, such as laws that deal with rights within marriage, rights to own property, the right to pass on nationality to children and the right to start a business and get a bank loan.

The recommendation at the workshop was **endorsed** as follows:

- **Legislatures across the Commonwealth should ensure that they have CEDAW-compliant policies and legislation in place to effectively tackle all forms of harassment, discrimination and abuse**



CPC WORKSHOP H: CREATING INCLUSIVE ELECTIONS FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (PWD)

DISABILITIES TOPIC

Panel Chair: Hon. Laura Kanushu, MP, Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) Chairperson (Uganda)

Discussion Leaders:

- **Senator Hon. Isaiah Jacob (Malaysia)**
- **Mr Jeremy Balfour, MSP (Scotland)**
- **Keara Castaldo (ODIHR - Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, OSCE - Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe) (via videoconference)**

Facilitator: Ms Avni Kondhia, CPwD Network Coordinator, CPA Secretariat

Rapporteurs: Jerson Balaton and Ilana Chaffey (Parliament of New South Wales)

This workshop focused on the need for inclusivity in the electoral process to allow full participation by people with disabilities (PwD). Panellists discussed actions, strategies and practices to make elections inclusive.

Panellists from Uganda, Malaysia and Scotland discussed their experiences as Members of Parliament with disabilities, and a representative of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) spoke about their work monitoring elections.

The first panellist, **Senator Hon. Isaiah Jacob (Malaysia)** spoke about how people with disability were perceived by political parties, in reference to his own experiences in Malaysia. He spoke about how not all political parties are accepting of PwD, and how PwD wanted equality rather than sympathy from people.

He then spoke about how PwD are represented in political parties, by recounting his background in politics. He had been involved in politics from a young age, and at that time learned that political parties did not allow participation from PwD. After the reformasi movement in 1998, he joined a political party, but it took him 16 years to set up a group for participation by PwD. Senator Isaiah Jacob stated that most PwD do not join political parties, because of the fear that their benefits and rights would be taken away if they are a member of an opposition party. PwD need to struggle and stand up regardless of whether they are in government or opposition.

Senator Isaiah Jacob spoke of the need to encourage PwD to stand and run, with confidence that they can do a good job. He stated his community were not 'beggars' and contributed to both the party and the Government.

Senator Isaiah Jacob then outlined work underway in Malaysia to support PwD. He was appointed as a Senator last year to represent the PwD community. The Malaysian Government will announce

a blueprint for PwD next year, focusing on actions for the next 25 years. He concluded with a call for political parties to make room for PwD, for PwD to have social equality rather than 'charity', and for workshop attendees to establish PwD departments in their own political parties.

The next panellist, **Mr Jeremy Balfour, MSP (Scotland)** discussed the need for Parliaments to be more representative of PwD. To proportionately represent the 20% of people in all countries that have some form of disability, Parliaments should have 20% of Members with disabilities as well.

He then discussed how more PwD could get elected, and how political parties could better support PwD. He discussed the physical and social barriers experienced by PwD when being selected as a candidate, when campaigning for election and on election day.

He spoke about how depending on someone's disability, some political activities may be difficult. Jeremy Balfour recounted how his party's office in Edinburgh had stairs up to the office, so someone with a mobility issue would struggle to get into the office, let alone campaign. He also raised the potential issue of 'indirect discrimination', where party selectors may presume PwD are not able to do certain things.

PwD in Scottish elections have the Access to Elected Office Fund, which funds assistance with certain tasks, for example hiring helpers to distribute leaflets for candidates with a mobility issue. While it was removed by the UK Government before the last election, it is still in place in the Scottish Parliament and Jeremy Balfour stated he had a Bill to make it a statutory requirement. He believed that it could help 'even the playing field' for candidates with disabilities.

The need for quotas or targets was also discussed, noting that some UK parties have all-women lists in certain seats. Jeremy Balfour was not personally convinced of this model but stated some system should be in place to increase the number of candidates with disability. He noted that in his experience, electorates did not care whether he had a disability, and there was a need to educate

Below: Workshop panellists (left to right): Hon. Laura Kanushu, MP, CPwD Chairperson (Uganda); Jeremy Balfour, MSP (Scotland); Senator Hon. Isaiah Jacob (Malaysia).





Images credit: CPA/Secretariat

political parties rather than the electorate. He hoped that things were changing and that one day we will have 20% of Members of Parliament being PwD.

The final panellist, **Keara Castaldo (Senior Advisor, ODIHR - Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE))** provided an overview of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)'s work monitoring elections, focusing on how the ODIHR assesses electoral participation by PwD.

ODIHR teams observe elections in member states, undertaking activities before, during and after an election. Teams specifically consider accessibility and participation by PwD as part of this process. A report is produced with recommendations for the state, aiming to bring all elections into line with international best practice.

The process includes examining legal frameworks, such as directives about the accessibility of public buildings. Teams meet with administrative bodies and civil society associations, including those representing PwD, and examine campaign materials and media. They consider the implementation of voting processes, including if polling stations allow autonomous entry by anyone regardless of ability, and if assistive tools are available to allow autonomous casting of ballots.

The adoption of inclusive practices, such as the accessibility of polling stations and ballots, and diversity of candidate lists,

encourages and supports PwD to participate in electoral processes. Inclusive practices must also be incorporated into political parties' internal practices, particularly around the selection of candidates. Keara Castaldo acknowledged Jeremy Balfour's comments about the Scottish Access to Elected Office Fund, noting the usefulness of mechanisms subsidising additional costs incurred by candidates with disabilities.

Legislation should be generally universal in the right to vote. There should be no individualised exceptions on the basis of any type of disability for participation in the election process.

The ODIHR observed a number of challenges to the inclusion of PwD in electoral processes. There is common public misperception of the capacity of PwD, and a lack of training and awareness to address this. Legal frameworks do not address barriers to PwD participation, such as setting information accessibility requirements. There is a reliance on assisted voting instead of allowing voters to cast autonomous votes. Decentralised systems also create differences in accessibility within states. There is significant underrepresentation of PwD, which is compounded by issues with disaggregated data collection by states.

Practices to promote inclusion were then discussed. States should start with the foundations of frameworks and legislation, and rules should be adopted following meaningful consultation. Election bodies have a role to play, to provide information, civic education

“Legislation should be generally universal in the right to vote. There should be no individualised exceptions on the basis of any type of disability for participation in the election process ... States should start with the foundations of frameworks and legislation, and rules should be adopted following meaningful consultation. Election bodies have a role to play, to provide information, civic education and training for political parties; they should also collect meaningful data. The media also has a role in outreach and increasing visibility and diversity in programming.”



and training for political parties; they should also collect meaningful data. The media also has a role in outreach and increasing visibility and diversity in programming.

The presentation concluded with a discussion of examples from OSCE member states, which currently use a range of assistive technologies, including ballot marking, sip and puff, and audio guides (United States), tactile templates, magnification, large grip pencils, and adapted candidate lists (Canada). Many states are innovating with use of technology in election processes, such as audio guide modules (Netherlands) and mobile applications providing assistance at polling stations (Lithuania).

However, sustained political and financial commitment to accessibility is vital. It was noted that Belgium discontinued the use of assistive technologies in its recent election for this reason. Decentralised election management, such as in the United States, also creates wide variation in the use of accessible technologies.

Participants then discussed the issues raised by workshop panellists.

Senator Dr Paul Richards (Trinidad and Tobago) noted the timing and location of the workshop in the 67th CPC schedule, and that this impacts attendance and the opportunity to advocate to the broader population of delegates. Panellists and other participants supported this comment.

He also noted that there is a mismatch between discussions that Parliamentarians are reluctant to identify as PwD due to concerns around marginalisation, and that PwD need to be encouraged to participate in politics.

Jeremy Balfour shared comments by colleagues in response to a disability survey, that they were 'not disabled enough' to take part, and worries that if they declared their disability, they might lose government roles. He reflected that he doesn't know what the answer is, but the issue exists in every jurisdiction, particularly for people with hidden disabilities. The impact of living with disability – for some, all their energy is used on basic daily tasks – can be very limiting on PwD's capacity to participate, which also should be taken into account.

Hon. Ram Niwas Goel, MLA (Speaker of the Delhi Legislative Assembly) commented that the Election Commission of India has improved inclusivity and accessibility in the election process, including issuing the Strategic Framework on Accessible Elections. This has improved voter turnout for India's nine million voters with disability.

Dr Lawrence Xu-Nan, MP (New Zealand) asked whether the OSCE had collected data indicating if early voting had increased overall voter turnout, particularly for people with hidden disabilities.

Keara Castaldo replied that the OSCE has seen an increase in policies permitting early voting but there is very limited data to connect this to disability, even though some jurisdictions require justification for early voting.

Dr Lawrence Xu-Nan then asked panellists whether they found their Parliaments accessible, and if their Parliaments provided support for neurodiverse Members.

Jeremy Balfour reflected that his experience as an MSP with disability has been very positive, and the hardest part was getting elected. Many Parliaments are historic buildings, so are not accessible, unlike the newer Scottish Parliament building. Accessibility needs to be addressed before a PwD is elected.

He also noted there is still stigma attached to hidden disabilities, so people are less willing to declare them. The 'hierarchy of disabilities' also means physical disabilities trump other disabilities in accessibility planning.

Senator Isaiah Jacob commented that Parliaments must set an example. He also noted the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD)'s Capital Investment Fund, which aims to make CPA member Parliaments more accessible.

Hon. Laura Kanushu reflected that all Members have an obligation due to their position, and need to work to make Parliaments accessible.

Keara Castaldo said a small number of OSCE countries have experimented with use of quotas to increase representation of PwD. There are concerns about tokenism and a need to prevent political parties taking advantage of state benefits without delivering for PwD.

Ms Liesl Tesch, MP (New South Wales) asked Senator Isaiah Jacob what changes allowed PwD party participation. The Senator commented that hard work 'opened the door'. He also discussed the public perception of PwD as unfit for political participation, partially because PwD receive a government allowance.

Hon. Laura Kanushu commented that Uganda has a similar issue with public perception. To address this, governments should work to engage PwD in valid employment and encourage PwD to be active participants in society.

Hon. Viam Pillay, MP (Fiji) said that although the Fijian parliamentary building is accessible, laws and policies need to improve to comply with ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Members must work together.

Hon. Joelle Ladislaus, MP (Gibraltar) asked panellists how Parliamentarians can support others with hidden disabilities to self-identify and speak up.

Jeremy Balfour reflected that, in his opinion, change will be driven by more elected politicians taking the 'brave step' and identifying publicly. All jurisdictions need positive role models to stand up and say '*I have X condition but I can still do my job as politician*'.

Hon. Laura Kanushu agreed that it is difficult to identify hidden disabilities, so it is important to create a space where people feel safe and empowered to speak and identify themselves. More education is needed, particularly to support community members and improve the understanding of hidden disabilities. Limited data collection means that planning and advocacy can be difficult.

Senator Isaiah Jacob agreed and commented that early education for school students is important.

Hon. Laura Kanushu also noted that there are discriminatory laws against people with psychosocial disabilities in many jurisdictions, so people are worried that disclosing their disability puts them at risk of losing their space and their voice. Frameworks such as the UN's CRPD are important guides for preventing, improving and repealing discriminatory legislation.

The recommendation at the workshop was *endorsed* as follows:

- **Commonwealth Parliaments should commit to integrating technological solutions and adjustments to allow for inclusive participation in electoral processes and practices for all persons living with disabilities.**



WORLD CAFÉ: SOLVING CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES IN THE COMMONWEALTH

Discussion Leaders:

- **Hon. Syed Naveed Qamar, MNA (Pakistan)**
- **Hon. Corine George-Massicote, MHA, Speaker of the House of Assembly of the British Virgin Islands**
- **Hon. Grace Kwelepeteta, MP (Malawi)**
- **Hon. Sashi Kiran, MP (Fiji)**
- **Deputy Tom Coles (Jersey)**

Facilitators: Mr Matthew Salik, Head of Programmes, and Mr Marshall Tisdale, Programmes Officer, CPA Secretariat

Rapporteur: Ms Kate McCorquodale (Parliament of New South Wales)

Introduction

The World Café at the 67th CPC was an opportunity for discussions about contemporary challenges faced in the Commonwealth. The discussions focused around five different topics: 'From Ukraine, Sudan to the Middle East, challenges to global stability'; 'Overcoming or addressing the colonial past'; 'Time is running out on the Sustainable Development Goals'; 'Corporate lobbying against climate change'; and 'Assisted Dying – the ultimate Human Right?'. Discussion leaders from Pakistan, British Virgin Islands, Malawi, Fiji and Jersey guided the individual group discussions to generate collective ideas to address these issues and share real world experiences from their jurisdictions.

From Ukraine, Sudan to the Middle East, challenges to global stability

The group led by **Hon. Syed Naveed Qamar, MNA (Pakistan)** explored the daunting task of discussing the impact that ongoing conflicts and political unrest have on global stability. The group considered conflicts beyond those in Ukraine, Sudan and the Middle East to discuss conflicts generally along with examining examples from Commonwealth jurisdictions.

When discussing potential solutions to these pressing issues, the group opined that there was one commonality with a number of ongoing conflicts which is that international institutions tasked with resolving conflict have all failed. The group then asked the difficult question 'who will be able to effectively get this thing done?'. An approach presented was the need to work as individual Parliamentarians to reach a common goal, bringing in the human factor of talking as individuals, and not talking state policy.

The group recognised that this method may not be effective in resolving conflict that is already raging, but there is the potential to resolve pending conflicts and disagreements that threaten our global stability. There would be a benefit to collectively working as humans for common goals and putting aside politics.

The group also discussed how the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) could be part of the response and gave the comparison of Parliamentarians coming to CPA conferences as individuals to share experiences and not talk state policy. There may be a need for individual Parliamentarians to slightly distance themselves from the states they represent to discuss issues, resolve conflicts or come to reach common goals.

Overcoming or addressing the colonial past

Hon. Corine George-Massicote, MHA, Speaker of the House of Assembly of the British Virgin Islands highlighted the importance of acknowledging that to some communities, colonialism is not in the periphery of their past but is instead an enduring and complicated reality that is being presently experienced. While some member nations may have 'moved on', others continue to feel and suffer from the effects of colonialism. It is therefore important to recognise the complex legacy of colonialism within Commonwealth jurisdictions and have honest and open conversations as a starting point, before considering any reparation or redress. This can help identify who should be responsible to help overcome the effects of colonialism and how it should be addressed.

Another key discussion was the role that education can play to bridge the disconnect between younger generations' understanding of colonialism and the historical context within which older generations have made decisions that have impacted their nations. Colonialism and its legacy should be entrenched in the educational curriculum across nations. Information about historic colonial violence and the continued negative impacts, however painful, should be taught in schools in an honest and legitimate manner.

The group also discussed how the legacy of colonialism is not one that can be fully overcome via reparation. However, they agreed that it can offer some assistance, especially if provided in a meaningful way that endeavours to 'make things right'. It is crucial that countries follow through with promises of reparations and colonised nations are provided with adequate resources to support their economic development and bridge the inequality gap.

The group agreed that the CPA can be a space that helps to confront the issue. The CPA can drive decolonial policy reform on a global scale and assist countries that have yet to break away from the oppression of colonialism.

Time is running out on the Sustainable Development Goals

The group, led by **Hon. Grace Kwelepeteta, MP (Malawi)**, explored seven of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by all United Nations Member states in 2015. The group reflected on the experiences in Malaysia, Uganda, Malawi, Lesotho and Scotland and discussed what has been accomplished and what is yet to be done to reach the goals by 2030.

SDG 1: No Poverty; SDG 2: Zero Hunger: It was reported that Malaysia has introduced a minimum wage (MYR1700). Malaysia has also subsidised fuel and food, and provides monthly grants to



households which are in the bottom 40% in terms of income in the country. Uganda has set up the 'Water for Production' Projects, promoting cost-effective and sustainable water supply and water management with a focus on poverty reduction. With the support of international organisations, the Ugandan Government hopes to accomplish more in achieving SDG 1 and SDG 2.

SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being: In Scotland, a proposal for a Member's Bill named, Wellbeing and Sustainable Development (Scotland) Bill was put forward in November 2023. The Bill, which is yet to be considered in Parliament, will introduce a duty for public bodies to promote the principles of sustainable development and wellbeing. In Uganda, the Government passed the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) Bill in 2021 in a move to meet SDG 3 by promoting universal health coverage for the wellbeing of all regardless of age. The NHIS Bill is yet to be assented to.

SDG 4: Quality Education: The Government in Malawi provides students with academic loans which allows them to pay back their debts when they obtain employment. The Lesotho Government provides payments to students and requires them to pay 50% of the loan back when they start working. Additionally, Lesotho provides food support in schools to students between the age of five and ten years old. As for Scotland, local residents are eligible to free education at all levels. Uganda is endeavouring to develop similar education schemes for primary, secondary and university students.

SDG 5: Gender Equality: In Uganda, there are 189 women MPs constituting 34% of their 11th Parliament. Despite the fairly high number of women in Parliament, gender-based violence is still a prevalent issue in the country. Women's representation in the Parliament of Lesotho is low (about 25% of the Parliament) despite the fact that women are more educated than men in the country.

SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation: Scotland has a water supply and treatment system that ensures clean water supply to all its citizens.

SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy: Most countries recognise that clean energy and achieving affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all is not an easily achievable goal. This is mainly due to the fact that it is an expensive task, and most governments lack adequate resources and funding.

The group agreed that more efforts and resources are needed to achieve the SDGs and keep on track for 2030. For instance, Hon. Grace Kwelepeta, MP suggested that government budgets should allocate specific funds to the health and education sectors to reach these goals as they directly impact the poverty rate and inequality.

Corporate lobbying against climate change

The group discussed how corporate lobbying works in different Commonwealth countries, particularly in relation to climate change policies. Participants highlighted the influence of big corporations in policy decisions and the impact this can have on goals of combatting climate change. The group also noted examples of corporations delaying or weakening climate action.



Images credit: CPA Secretariat

Above: Participants in the CPA World Cafe session.

The group asked themselves 'what role can Parliamentarians play in scrutinising corporate influence in climate policy, and how can they hold governments accountable to ensure they prioritise climate goals?' Rules and guidelines do exist, but unfortunately there has been little to no implementation. The group opined that an implementation gap may exist because of corporate lobbying. A number of jurisdictions provided examples of the implementation gap. In Uganda for example, The National Environment Act 2019 was enacted to provide the legal framework to address environmental issues, including climate change. However, since its operation there has been discord between policy around climate change and industrialisation.

Similarly, South Africa encouraged public participation through environmental assessments and suggested a Special Commissioner on the environment, which would provide some pressure on law makers. However, it was discussed that corporate lobbying pushed back on these hearings, so nothing was achieved in the grand scheme of the climate change initiatives. As a result of climate change policy, South Africa have both legislation and taxes in place relating to the environment but there has been little to no accountability.

Participants put forward a number of opinions on the best way that governments and Parliamentarians can address the influence of corporate lobbying to ensure effective climate action as well as realigning corporate priorities with climate goals. Some of these ideas involved the input of the CPA, including a benchmark for

“A common theme across most groups was the need for Parliamentarians to work across party lines to achieve global scale goals. Similarly, groups saw the potential for the CPA to act as a scrutiny tool or an accountability measure.”



best practice, teaching materials or climate change audits at the Executive level.

Assisted Dying – the ultimate Human Right?

A small group led by **Deputy Tom Coles (Jersey)** explored the complex and sensitive issue of assisted dying and whether it was considered 'the ultimate Human Right'. The participants from Jersey were able to share the example of their jurisdiction and recent legislation presented to their Parliament related to assisted dying.

The question posed by law makers in Jersey was whether assisted dying should exist, and if it should, in what form. Two options of potential participants were considered; those with a terminal illness with less than 12 months to live, and persons who were in a state of unbearable suffering. The inclusion of this second group of potential participants was defeated in the States Assembly.

The group shared that Jersey opened discussion and debate over a number of important issues, including the discussion of safeguards. Much of the debate revolved around the introduction of coercion and the need to identify what that may look like and how to safeguard against it. The moral and ethical dilemma faced by doctors was also discussed as a big issue. For example, doctors and physicians take the Hippocratic Oath and traditionally abide by

the ethical oath of 'do no harm'. When compared with the notion of respecting a person's autonomy, a difficult ethical question is presented. If assisted dying were considered to be the ultimate human right, the ethical, legal and social dimensions of the concept results in rigorous debate.

Overall, the example presented by Jersey highlighted the difficult practical aspects of legalising assisted dying and the discussions that law makers and Parliamentarians need to have to ensure that all ethical perspectives are heard, considered or debated.

Conclusion

A common theme across most groups was the need for Parliamentarians to work across party lines to achieve global scale goals. Similarly, groups saw the potential for the CPA to act as a scrutiny tool or an accountability measure. They generally expressed how the CPA could be a catalyst for change. The CPA may act as a sounding board to generate ideas and share successful initiatives. Parliamentarians can then be better equipped to canvas and influence innovative ways to resolve problems in their respective jurisdictions.

CPA GENERAL ASSEMBLY: TOPICAL DEBATE: 'VOTES VS LIKES: THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENT IN STRENGTHENING DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE IN AN AGE OF FAKE NEWS AND SYNTHETIC MEDIA'

In the digital age, Artificial Intelligence, misinformation and synthetic media — notably including deepfakes — are increasingly shaping public opinions, influencing behaviours and challenging democratic institutions in new and unprecedented ways. These tools, while innovative, carry risks to democratic norms and the integrity of public discourse. The rapid spread of fake news and AI-generated content creates obstacles for informed decision-making and can erode trust in decision-making bodies and traditional sources of authority, including Parliaments.

A topical debate on this topic took place during the 2024 CPA General Assembly providing a platform for Commonwealth Parliamentarians to address critical and contemporary issues. Delegates were able to share their insights and potential mitigation strategies and regulatory approaches and considered best practices for building resilience against these emerging threats.

The topical debate heard from presenters from a number of CPA Branches including Australia Federal, Punjab (Pakistan), The Maldives, Wales, Canada Federal, New Zealand, Trinidad and Tobago, and Northern Ireland.

Turn to [page 317](#) to read the contribution from the delegate from The Maldives.



Images credit: Wales Parliament



COMMONWEALTH WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS AIM TO ASSIST MORE WOMEN INTO LEADERSHIP ROLES IN PARLIAMENTS AT 8th CWP CONFERENCE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Women Parliamentarians from across the Commonwealth held their 8th Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Conference in Sydney, New South Wales to discuss women's representation in Parliaments, gender sensitisation and quotas amongst a wide range of topics. The main theme of the conference was: *'Engaging, Promoting and Retaining Women in Power'*.



Images credit: CPA Secretariat

The 8th CWP Conference brought together Members of Parliament to discuss equal representation in Parliaments through a series of workshops and governance meetings including four learning and development workshops for delegates. The CWP Conference was opened by the CWP Chairperson, Hon. Dr Zainab Gimba, MP, Member of the House of Representatives at the National Assembly of Nigeria who welcomed delegates. The CWP President (2024), Ms Lynda Voltz, MP (New South Wales) spoke to delegates about her experience as a legislator.



Over 100 Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians attended the conference from across the Commonwealth. The CWP conference saw leading figures in Commonwealth Parliaments addressing the conference and included four wide-ranging sessions for delegates on the following issues: *Promoting the Political Participation of Young Women and Girls; Future-Proofing Democracy: Innovations in Security and Support for Women Parliamentarians; The Retention of Women in Parliaments: How to Keep Women in Politics?; and a joint workshop with the CPA Small Branches network – Gender and National Climate Planning: moving from commitment to scalable action.*

Maldives, Trinidad and Tobago, United Kingdom and New Zealand as well as experts from UN Women, Compassion in Politics, and the Universities of New South Wales and Western Australia.

The CWP Business meeting updated on the CWP network's activities during the previous year and the plans for the year ahead. The CWP Chairperson also pledged to renew the effort to increase women's representation and political participation in Parliaments across the Commonwealth.

The CWP Conference was previously triennial (every three years) but in 2023, CWP Members agreed to hold an annual conference to held in the margins of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

The CWP Conference also heard from Members from the Parliaments of Canada, India, Australia, Pakistan,

CWP STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING

Ahead of the 8th CWP Conference, the CWP Steering Committee met in New South Wales representing the nine CPA Regions: Africa; Asia; Australia; British Islands and the Mediterranean; Canada; Caribbean, Americas and the Atlantic; India; Pacific; and South East Asia. CWP Steering Committee Members discussed activities for the year ahead as well as key themes for future conferences and meetings. The CWP Steering Committee elected Hon. Kate Doust, MLC from the Parliament of Western Australia as the CWP Vice-Chairperson for another one-year term.



CWP CONFERENCE OPENING AND WORKSHOP A: PROMOTING THE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG WOMEN AND GIRLS

Panel Chair: Hon. Dr Zainab Gimba, MP, CWP Chairperson and Member of the National Assembly of Nigeria

Discussion Leaders:

- **Hon. Ume Kalsoom, MP (Balochistan)**
- **Hon. Catherine Fife, MPP (Ontario)**
- **Hon. Ritu Khanduri Bhushan, MLA, Speaker of the Uttarakhand Legislative Assembly**
- **Professor Rosalind Dixon, Programme Director of Pathways to Politics New South Wales and Director of the Gilbert & Tobin Centre of Public Law, the University of New South Wales (UNSW)**

Facilitator: Bénite Dibateza, CWP Coordinator, CPA Secretariat

Rapporteur: Bethanie Patch (Parliament of New South Wales)

At the Opening Ceremony of the 8th CWP Conference, **Hon. Dr Zainab Gimba, MP, Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Chair and Member of the National Assembly of Nigeria**, reflected briefly on the origins of CWP and provided an overview of the key barriers to women's political participation. The **CWP President, Hon. Lynda Voltz, MP (New South Wales)** gave an Acknowledgement of Country.

The workshop sought to respond to the question 'why are there so few young women in political leadership?' by highlighting some of the current challenges that girls and young women face when trying to engage with and participate in politics. The workshop explored current initiatives and strategies from Commonwealth Parliaments and organisations to promote the participation of girls and young women in political leadership.

Hon. Ume Kalsoom, MP (Balochistan, Pakistan) started the discussion by highlighting some of the obstacles to political participation that women in Pakistan face, condemning negative state policies that limit the role of women in public life. She reflected that women are often not given the support or opportunity to be involved in decision-making or policy development.

She explained that she is an elected member of the National Party, a party which promotes collective decision-making and strives to involve women in the development of legislation. At the age of 26, Hon. Ume Kalsoom highlighted that she is the youngest Parliamentarian in Balochistan and in Pakistan. She credited leaders around her, including her father, for their support and encouragement to join politics.

Hon. Ume Kalsoom acknowledged that change in the socio-political landscape for women is slow. She stated that there is limited

access to education in Pakistan, and education is an important factor for women to get involved in politics.

Hon. Ume Kalsoom reflected that she looks forward to the day that women in Pakistan will be able to make decisions freely, and easily occupy leadership roles.

Hon. Catherine Fife, MPP (Ontario) explained that the reasons that women and girls may not run for politics are different depending on the jurisdiction. She recounted some of the Canadian Parliamentarians who inspired and supported her own political journey, including Alexa McDonough, a Canadian politician who became the first woman to run a major, recognised party of Nova Scotia in 1980. She also spoke of Elizabeth Wittmer, a former Deputy Premier of Ontario, as an exemplary role model – strong, calm and competent. Hon. Catherine Fife expressed that Ms Wittmer offered to be her mentor and suggested that she do the same to other women, noting that we need strong women to support strong women.

Hon. Catherine Fife emphasised the need for visible representation of women in Parliament to serve as role models for future generations. In sharing the experiences of women recently elected in Ontario, she also reflected on the importance of supporting women when they have attained office, noting that working at Parliament has unique challenges.

Hon. Ritu Khanduri Bhushan, MLA, Speaker of the Uttarakhand Legislative Assembly (India) explained the current representation of women in India's Federal Parliament and noted the importance of drafting government policies which reflect women's perspectives.

She stated that since 2014 the Indian Government has promoted a holistic approach to encourage and support girls and young women to pursue political leadership roles. This approach has involved reform in four key areas – education, health, self-help and finance. In regard to finance, Hon. Ritu Khanduri Bhushan explained the concept of 'self-help groups', a group of 10-12 women from similar socio-economic backgrounds, who form alliances to pool their financial resources to take up joint economic activities, or to lend money to members for various business endeavours.

Professor Rosalind Dixon from the University of New South Wales highlighted some of the important reasons why girls and



Images credit: CPA Secretariat



Images credit: Parliament of New South Wales

Above: Workshop panellists (left to right): Professor Rosalind Dixon (UNSW); Hon. Ritu Khanduri Bhushan, MLA (Uttarakhand); Hon. Catherine Fife, MPP (Ontario); Hon. Ume Kalsoom, MP (Balochistan); Hon. Dr Zainab Gimba, MP, CWP Chairperson (Nigeria); Bénite Dibateza, CWP Coordinator (CPA Secretariat).

young women should be involved in politics, including increasing public confidence in democracy. She suggested engaging girls early and highlighted the great success of 'Girls Take Over Parliament', a programme to help Australian young women and girls have a political voice.

Professor Rosalind Dixon also referenced training programs in New South Wales which assist women to build skills, confidence and networks, including the one-day programme 'Women for Election', and the more extensive 'Pathways to Politics for Women' programme. Professor Rosalind Dixon suggested that support should also include helping women to find the right place in the political system to which they can best contribute.

During the question-and-answer session and subsequent discussion, the following points were raised:

Hon. Sarah Green, MP (United Kingdom) questioned how to better prepare women and help them to gain resilience in order to have a successful political career. In particular, she asked about how to assist women to recharacterise 'failure' as a positive concept, noting that for elected officials there are always going to be challenges.

Hon. Makoma Makhurupetje, MPL, Speaker of the Limpopo Provincial Legislature (South Africa) agreed that there should be effective strategies to involve girls in politics at a young age, however, questioned which age is best to start encouraging girls to participate in and join Parliament.

Hon. Basetsana S.R Dantjie, MPL, Speaker of the North West Provincial Legislature (South Africa) prompted that we need to remember to empower the boychild, given that the challenges affecting the girlchild are often at the forefront of discussion.

Hon. Daggubati Purandeswari, MP (India) referenced the Department of Youth Affairs' programme in India which provides training to young people to get involved in politics.

Senator Beth Kalunda Syengo (Kenya) commented on recruiting women at university into Parliament and also questioned what actions are being taken to socialise the boychild.

Hon. Newrene Claudine Klaaste, MPL, Speaker of the Northern Cape Provincial Legislature (South Africa) asked how the CPA, as an oversight body, can ensure Commonwealth Parliaments are collaborating with civil society organisations in this space.

Hon. Mary Muyali Boya, MP, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Cameroon argued that the recommendation should specify what is meant by 'effective strategies'.

Hon. Tolulope Sadipe, MP (Nigeria) raised that if we want to get young people involved in politics, we need to consider educating parents too.

The recommendation at the workshop was *noted* as follows:

- Parliaments should have effective strategies in place to promote the political participation of girls and young women, including collaboration with civil society organisations.



Images credit: CPA Secretariat

Above: Women Presiding Officers and Members from the CPA Caribbean, Americas and the Atlantic Region pictured together at the 8th CWP Conference in New South Wales.

CWP WORKSHOP C: FUTURE-PROOFING DEMOCRACY: INNOVATIONS IN SECURITY AND SUPPORT FOR WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS

Panel Chair: Hon. Kate Doust, MLC, Member of the Legislative Council of Western Australia

Discussion Leaders:

- **Hon. Lynda Voltz, MP, CWP President and Member of the Parliament of New South Wales**
- **Baroness Ann Taylor, Member of the UK House of Lords**
- **Jennifer Nadel, CEO of Compassion in Politics**
- **Hon. Bridgid Anisette-George, Speaker of the House of Representatives, Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago**

Facilitator: Bénite Dibateza, CWP Coordinator, CPA Secretariat

Rapporteur: Madeleine Dowd (Parliament of New South Wales)

This workshop examined the increasing risks faced by women Parliamentarians in recent years, including risks to both physical and psychological safety. Panellists discussed the kinds of escalating threats that women Parliamentarians are experiencing and considered why this escalation is occurring and what potential impacts it could have. This workshop also considered potential options for innovation and reform that could be explored in order to address these complex issues.

The **CWP President, Hon. Lynda Voltz, MP (New South Wales)** discussed the impact, frequency and seriousness of online threats and viral misinformation campaigns on women Parliamentarians. She referred to research undertaken in this area in recent years, which has consistently shown that behaviour of this kind is increasing. For example, in one study, 46.9% of women Parliamentarians reported having received death threats or other threats of sexual and physical violence. It was also reported that female Members of Parliament under the age of 40 are most at risk, not just in terms of threats, but physical harm in the form of sexual attacks, violence and druggings. With regard to online violence, Hon. Lynda Voltz referred to data from the United Nations that estimates that 99% of online harassment is directed at women. She then made the point that legal protections against cyber harassment are generally quite limited around the world, with only 12% of global economies having established legal protections specifically addressing cyber sexual harassment.

In terms of what action can be taken to address this kind of behaviour, Hon. Lynda Voltz explained that steps can be taken by Parliamentarians and their teams to engage in fact checking exercises and utilise Artificial Intelligence to determine what may be misinformation online and to then report it as such. She also referenced the role of large social media companies in labelling

information as false but noted the risks of these companies not engaging meaningfully with government regulation. She also referred specifically to the New South Wales Parliament and recent efforts made to address the physical and psychological safety of women Parliamentarians. This has included security reviews of offices and homes, the establishment of an Independent Complaints Officer and the undertaking of an Independent Review into bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct at the Parliament of New South Wales.

Rt Hon. Baroness Ann Taylor (UK House of Lords) began by outlining that while in the United Kingdom, there has been significant growth in the number of women Parliamentarians over the past 30 years, this does not mean that all issues impacting women in the political environment have been addressed. Baroness Ann Taylor specifically drew attention to the difficult dynamic between prioritising the physical safety of women Parliamentarians with additional security protections, and ensuring that women are able to fulfil their duties to constituents and have meaningful engagement as Members of Parliament.

In explaining the severity of the safety risks for women Parliamentarians, Baroness Ann Taylor referred to the murder of Ms Jo Cox, a British Labour Party politician and Member of the UK Parliament for Batley and Spen, in June 2016. Baroness Ann Taylor explained that this had a significant impact on politics in the United Kingdom and characterised it as a 'wake up call'. She explained that since then, there has been a more serious focus on security for new Members of Parliament, while again noting that increased security can, for some Members, feel like something that limits their ability to meaningfully engage with the community.

Jennifer Nadel, CEO of Compassion in Politics explained that the unique challenges experienced by women Parliamentarians in terms of safety and online harassment has the impact of causing some women to avoid meaningfully engaging in politics. Jennifer Nadel referred to studies showing that safety concerns impacted a range of choices and decisions of women considering political

Below: Workshop panellists (left to right): Hon. Kate Doust, MLC (Western Australia); Hon. Lynda Voltz, MP, CWP President (New South Wales); Baroness Ann Taylor (UK); Hon. Bridgid Anisette-George, Speaker (Trinidad and Tobago); Jennifer Nadel (Compassion in Politics).



Images credit: CPA Secretariat



involvement, including their discussion of controversial issues or being comfortable campaigning alone. She also explained that this was experienced even more severely by women of colour, noting that black women reported 35% more abuse than white women.

Jennifer Nadel discussed the connection between the Westminster system and the existence of safety risks. She explained that the Westminster system is an inherently adversarial system and often relies on conflict and divisiveness. She explained that this system can encourage negative behaviour, which in turn, impacts wellbeing and psychological safety. She also made the case for a shift towards a 'new politics', which is collaborative, values-led and focuses on consensus. She concluded her contribution by discussing the role political parties have in protecting women and made an argument for more advocacy for support for women Parliamentarians and the classification of misogyny as a hate crime.

Hon. Bridgid Anisette-George, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago made the point that there is no democracy without gender equality and explained that democracy needs to be both inclusive and representative. She discussed the need to future proof democracy by ensuring the safety of women Parliamentarians and ensuring they feel supported to engage fully in politics. The Speaker of Trinidad and Tobago examined why women stay away from politics and how those underlying issues could be addressed. To adequately do this, she explained it was necessary to consider both psychological and physical security. She told the workshop about the parliamentary police unit in Trinidad and Tobago which routinely escorts Parliamentarians to their cars and gives advice on security protocols, both physically and online.

Hon. Bridgid Anisette-George also highlighted the existing mechanisms that can be leveraged in order to address the safety and security of women Parliamentarians, including using Standing Orders to set standards for appropriate language in Parliament. She also stressed the importance of supporting women Parliamentarians in a range of ways, including the establishment of breastfeeding and nursery facilities, the setting up of a female parliamentary caucus and the promotion of education and outreach for women Parliamentarians. All of these efforts are aimed at promoting the participation of women in Parliament and ensuring democracy can be adequately upheld by enabling engagement from the entire community.

Following these presentations, questions were asked of the panellists. **Hon. Mariama Bangura, MP (Sierra Leone)** asked about what social media platforms should be doing to protect women from harassment. Hon. Lynda Voltz, MP suggested that companies could be issuing takedown orders and certifying information as authentic or false. Jennifer Nadel stated that Artificial Intelligence could be used productively in this context, in that hate speech or



Images credit: CPA Secretariat

misinformation could be identified and blocked before it is even published.

Senator Beth Syengo (Kenya) asked about what happens when violence and threats against women are coming from media organisations or public figures. Hon. Lynda Voltz acknowledged this issue and characterised it as significant and difficult to address.

Senator Hon. Sue Lines, President of the Australian Senate, remarked that the journey towards a more compassionate and values-led political environment seems difficult, especially in the context of an adversarial Westminster system. She asked what steps could be taken to get to that 'new system of politics'. Jennifer Nadel stated that by making Parliament more professional and establishing behavioural standards and new rules, progress could be made to bring Parliament more into line with community expectations of modern workplaces. Baroness Ann Taylor remarked that there is also an issue with what the media cover, in that situations where politicians are being productive and collegial are not highlighted or focused on. Hon. Bridgid Anisette-George then stated that while debate should be robust, given the nature of politics, this does not mean that there should not be standards, especially in relation to offensive language. She noted that what is understood to be offensive can be fluid and evolve over time.

Hon Bernadette Wuyatta Songa, MP (Sierra Leone) asked panellists about how women Parliamentarians can better support each other and share resources, and stressed the need to work across parties to improve the safety of women in Parliament. Jennifer Nadel supported this sentiment and echoed the need to support other women as a priority.

The recommendation at the workshop was *endorsed* as follows:

- **Commonwealth Parliaments should, with the support of experts, put in place protective measures that address the multifaceted security challenges that women Parliamentarians face.**

CWP WORKSHOP D: THE RETENTION OF WOMEN IN PARLIAMENTS: HOW TO KEEP WOMEN IN POLITICS?

Panel Chair: Hon. Nelly Mutti, SC, MP, Speaker of the National Assembly (Zambia)

Discussion Leaders:

- Rt Hon. Elin Jones, MS, Llywydd of the Senedd (Wales)
- Hon. Nathalie Roy, MNA, Présidente de l'Assemblée Nationale (Québec)
- Ms Marilyn Bromberg, Associate Professor (University of Western

Facilitator: Bénite Dibateza, CWP Coordinator, CPA Secretariat

Rapporteur: Stephanie Mulvey (Parliament of New South Wales)

This workshop examined the challenges faced by women Parliamentarians and how these impact on whether women remain in politics. While the focus has often been on encouraging women to enter politics, proactively exploring efforts to retain women Parliamentarians is important if we are to reach near equal, or equitable, representation. Women may leave politics because of toxic and abusive cultures and a lack of support for caregiving roles. The increasing prevalence of deepfakes, cyberbullying and nonconsensual distribution of intimate images also impacted women Parliamentarians.

From hybrid participation to on-site childcare, a range of approaches to supporting women Parliamentarians were canvassed. Practical approaches to addressing online harm were also discussed, including the importance of referring instances of online abuse to the appropriate authorities. While politics is a competitive arena, workshop delegates agreed that women Parliamentarians should work together across party lines to support and celebrate each other, to address barriers that prevent women from staying in politics, and to work towards a common agenda.

Hon. Nelly Mutti, SC, MP, Speaker of the National Assembly of Zambia made some opening remarks in her capacity as Chair and introduced the panellists. She observed that at the current rate of progress gender parity in Parliaments globally will not be achieved until 2063. Encouraging women to enter Parliament tended to be the focus of conversations about equal representation, rather than supporting women to stay in politics. Women Parliamentarians left politics for a range of reasons, but they are more likely to leave due to a toxic and abusive culture and a lack of appropriate infrastructure and support. In contrast, male Parliamentarians were more likely to simply retire. We need to explore how we can better support women to remain in politics.

Rt Hon. Elin Jones, MS, Llywydd of the Senedd of Wales highlighted that the Welsh Parliament was the first in the world to

achieve equal representation in 2003. Near equal representation had been more or less maintained, and in 2006 women actually outnumbered men. However, she also spoke to the ongoing difficulties of persuading female candidates to enter politics, especially mothers of young children.

Women Parliamentarians are also much more likely to be abused on social media, which can hamper retention efforts and dissuade women from politics. She encouraged women to refer such abuse to the appropriate authorities as she had successfully done recently with a malicious communication, resulting in the perpetrator serving a short prison term.

Although technology presented challenges to attracting and retaining women Parliamentarians, it also represents an enormous opportunity. Enabling hybrid participation in parliamentary proceedings, as occurs in the Welsh Parliament, means that anyone with caring responsibilities for young children or elderly parents can participate from home as necessary. Video conferencing with constituents could also make it easier to balance home responsibilities with the demands of a large electorate.

Raising awareness of the unique health challenges that can affect women at different life stages, including menopause, was critical if we are to properly support women Parliamentarians. She shared her own experience of menopause-related 'brain freeze' during a live television interview and the detrimental impact it had on her confidence at the time, causing her to consider leaving politics.

Most importantly, women should work across party lines to find common solutions to challenges, create new norms and embrace modern ways of working. Improved retention of existing women Parliamentarians meant that there were more 'wise and experienced heads' who could support newer entrants. Although hailing from a different political party, she praised Ms Jane Hutt, MS as an incredible example of a long-serving woman in the Welsh Parliament, who had accumulated 25 years of Ministerial

Below: Workshop panellists (left to right): Bénite Dibateza, CWP Coordinator (CPA Secretariat); Hon. Nathalie Roy, MNA, Présidente (Québec); Hon. Nelly Mutti, SC, MP, Speaker (Zambia); Rt Hon. Elin Jones, MS, Llywydd (Wales).





Images credit: CPA Secretariat

experience. All Parliaments need women with this depth of expertise and experience.

Rt Hon. Elin Jones concluded by calling for all ‘to make Parliaments work for women, so women can work for Parliaments’.

Hon. Nathalie Roy, MNA, Présidente de l’Assemblée Nationale du Québec shared some of her Legislature’s recent initiatives to help keep women in politics. She is only the second female Presiding Officer in 230 years of Québec’s parliamentary history and dreams of the day when being presided over by a woman is no longer the exception. Although it had been attained in many jurisdictions, near equal representation is fundamentally insecure. In Québec near equal representation was also insecure as it had largely been achieved through public pressure and was not enshrined in law.

Being involved in politics means sacrificing elements of family life and this can weigh more heavily on women. Across the globe, some retention initiatives include quotas, parity lists of candidates, proxy votes for those with family commitments and financial penalties for parties without enough female candidates. To keep more women in politics, Parliaments need to be modern, healthy workplaces free of harassment. Since 2015, the National Assembly of Québec has had anti-harassment policies, awareness campaigns, complaints procedures and a Commissioner for Respect. She praised the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association’s *Anti-Harassment Policy Guidelines: A Toolkit for Commonwealth Parliaments*.

To support parents, the National Assembly of Québec has adjusted its sitting schedule so that night sittings are very rare. Other efforts to support women Parliamentarians include improved parental leave, breastfeeding rooms and unsupervised family rooms. A major initiative under her leadership has been the establishment of an on-site childcare centre for 10 children. This provides practical support but also sends an important message: women of young children belong in politics too. She underscored the pivotal role that female Presiding Officers play in driving measures which support the retention of women Parliamentarians. In conclusion, she announced that Québec would be hosting the

2nd Summit of Women Presiding Officers and their Allies from 22 to 23 May 2025.

Associate Professor Marilyn Bromberg, from the University of Western Australia, summarised her research on the increasing abuse of women online and shared some practical tools. Deepfakes, the non-consensual distribution of intimate images and cyberbullying is increasing and is usually targeted at women. Online abuse involving women Parliamentarians caused some to leave politics and discourages women from entering Parliament.

Research shows that deepfakes – which are often used to create sexual images or videos of women without their consent – can be hard to detect but shape perceptions of whether a woman candidate or Parliamentarian is credible.

Non-consensual distribution of intimate images could happen through hacking or by sharing legally obtained content after a break-up. There are examples of women Parliamentarians leaving office after such images are shared.

Evidence shows that cyberbullying of women Parliamentarians was more likely to be personalised while abuse of male Parliamentarians focused on policies. Alarming, UK research showed that cyberbullying of female Parliamentarians had increased from 10% to 90% from 2010 to 2018/19. Cyberbullying has detrimental psychological impacts, including depression, anxiety, lowered self-esteem, reduced job satisfaction and increased negativity.

Importantly there are practical steps women Parliamentarians can take to prevent and address harm. All Parliamentarians can push for change in social media content policies, which must address the issue of non-consensual distribution of intimate images and deepfakes. More social media moderators are needed. Women Parliamentarians should ensure they have strict privacy settings, strong passwords and the latest software. If you become a victim of online harm, take evidence, including screenshots, and refer it to the appropriate authorities, such as police or an e-safety commissioner. Research shows victims should not engage with the alleged perpetrator as this can exacerbate the problem. Devise

policies about who you interact with online and train your staff accordingly.

In the discussion that followed **Hon. Akierra Missick, MHA (Turks and Caicos Islands)** observed that the topic of retention of women in Parliaments needed to be part of the CPA General Assembly, because we need male allies in the room. She sought advice on how the assembled women Parliamentarians could best extend their hands to the next generation.

Rt Hon. Elin Jones advised that women should not doubt themselves, as fear and doubt can hold you back and strength is gained through experience. Importantly, look to other women for support as most will provide it.

Hon. Nathalie Roy agreed that women Parliamentarians had a responsibility to keep the door open for other women regardless of their political views. She also emphasised the importance of bringing male colleagues on the journey as many are allies.

Associate Professor Marilyn Bromberg noted research showing that Parliaments are better when there is more diversity and so it is crucial that young women consider political careers.

Hon. Alexandra Mendès, MP (Canada Federal) shared that for twenty years the Parliament of Canada has had a full-time daycare for the children of Parliamentarians and their staff.

Ms Farah Azeem Shah, MP (Balochistan) emphasised that women Parliamentarians should focus on their strength, bravery and influence rather than despairing at the obstacles in their way. For example, as mothers, we are uniquely placed to raise our children to work towards a better society. We can also support newer women Parliamentarians.

Deputy Inna Gardiner (Jersey) observed that some believe that hybrid participation puts more pressure on Parliamentarians to participate when they are unwell or are caring for a sick child. How should we address this concern?

Ms Savia Orphanidou, MP (Cyprus) agreed that breastfeeding rooms and childcare were very important, but also highlighted fertility preservation, including IVF and egg freezing. She shared that she is a single parent through a sperm donor.

Rt Hon. Elin Jones agreed that we need to celebrate women in politics. To make hybrid Parliaments work optimally, we must treat remote participation equally. Presiding Officers are responsible for encouraging respect for remote contributions. She agreed that openly discussing fertility and menopause encourages women to make decisions about their own health.

Hon. Nathalie Roy cautioned that politics is inherently competitive. Once elected you can work with fellow women to achieve change from the inside.

Hon. Cathy Launa Nori, MP (Solomon Islands) sought further advice on how women can remain in politics. In her view, politics in the Pacific came with different expectations, including that women Parliamentarians be kind and generous. She wanted to hear strategies that could help in her jurisdiction.

Rt Hon. Elin Jones suggested that the same solutions apply but could be adapted to local contexts. Women working together across political lines and embracing new approaches was critical. Solutions

could include childcare, proxy voting, improved parental leave and hybrid participation.

Senator Hon. Dr Dessima Williams, President of the Senate of Grenada observed that women could work across party lines to achieve a more compassionate, meaningful politics.

Ms Zaneta Mascarenhas, MP (Australia Federal) asked what legislators should be doing to combat the damaging impact of pornography on teenage girls and young women.

In response, Associate Professor Marilyn Bromberg noted that this year Australia had criminalised the creation of sexual deepfakes. However, the sharing of sexual deepfakes must also be criminalised. Legislative change should be accompanied by social change.

Hon. Nathalie Roy acknowledged that social media is a problem. However, in her view the main drivers of women leaving Parliament are harassment and their role in caring for children. Political life is inherently challenging, but progress will come from small solutions and women working together.

The Workshop Chair shared her reflections on the session. She acknowledged that while politics is competitive, women must work together across party lines, implement a variety of solutions, embrace technology and adapt to changing circumstances.

Discussion turned to the draft recommendation. **Hon. Tessie Lambourne, MP (Kiribati)** suggested that instead of making a recommendation to the CPA General Assembly, the CWP network should be pushing a CPA-wide mentoring programme and policy for women Parliamentarians. In her view, the CWP should be working across all Parliaments.

Several amendments to the draft resolution were proposed and briefly discussed. The following recommendation was **endorsed** by workshop delegates:

- **Parliaments should proactively explore all necessary measures and support systems to allow Parliamentarians to undertake their term in office.**

Below: Members from the CPA Canada Region pictured with the CWP President for 2024, **Hon. Lynda Voltz, MP, Member of the Parliament of New South Wales (centre).**



Images credit: CPA Canada Federal Branch



PARLIAMENTARIANS EXAMINE PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS FOR BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE AND INNOVATIVE FUTURE FOR THE SMALLEST JURISDICTIONS ACROSS THE COMMONWEALTH AT 40th CPA SMALL BRANCHES CONFERENCE

Commonwealth Parliamentarians met at the 40th CPA Small Branches Conference from 4 to 5 November 2024 to examine practical solutions for building a sustainable and innovative future for the smallest jurisdictions. The conference discussed strategies to meet the unique developmental needs of the CPA's smallest Legislatures through key thematic workshops that helped to build parliamentary capacity for Members and parliamentary staff while also creating greater opportunities for the sharing of knowledge, parliamentary strengthening and cooperation across the network.

The outgoing CPA Small Branches Chairperson, Joy Burch, MLA, Speaker of the Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly said: *"The CPA Small Branches Conference helps to build capacities for the small Parliaments and Legislatures of the Commonwealth and create greater and more constant opportunities for the sharing of knowledge and cooperation across the CPA network. The network comes together to address their common difficulties, common strengths and their shared experiences."*

The CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg said: *"The CPA works with its Small Branches network across the Commonwealth in strengthening parliamentary democracy. The smallest of the CPA's Legislatures seek to meet the same expectations of service delivery as larger Legislatures and in doing so, they recognise the importance of constantly innovating in the face of fiscal and human resource constraints; and the threats in the face of natural disasters and climate change to some of the Commonwealth's most vulnerable."*

The CPA Small Branches Conference included four plenary sessions exploring key themes proposed by the Membership: *Strengthening Parliaments through twinning; Lessons from the Australia-Pacific Partnerships; Accelerating digital innovation for resilience and growth in small jurisdictions; Balancing tradition and innovation: Modernising the Westminster system in small jurisdictions;* and a joint workshop with the CWP network



Images credit: CPA Secretariat

– *Gender and National Climate Planning: moving from commitment to scalable action.*

In the margins of the conference, the CPA Small Branches Steering Committee met to discuss the strategic direction for the network. The Steering Committee comprises the CPA Small Branches Chairperson and nine MPs who represent the nine CPA Regions. Of the almost 180 Branches of the CPA, fifty Branches are classified as 'Small Branches'. The classification for was changed by the CPA General Assembly in 2022 to raise the population threshold to one million people. Examples of CPA Small Branches include countries such as Barbados and Tonga, as well UK Overseas Territories such as Turks and Caicos or states and provinces within larger countries like Northwest Territories in Canada.

The 40th CPA Small Branches Conference took place as part of the wider 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia.



Images credit: CPA Secretariat



NEWLY ELECTED CPA SMALL BRANCHES CHAIRPERSON SPEAKS ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF SMALL LEGISLATURES WITHIN THE COMMONWEALTH COMING TOGETHER TO ADDRESS COMMON CHALLENGES AND TO SHARE EXPERIENCES OF THEIR PARLIAMENTS AT 40th CPA SMALL BRANCHES CONFERENCE

The newly elected Chairperson of the CPA Small Branches network, Hon. Valerie Woods, Speaker of the National Assembly of Belize pledged that the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) would have a strengthened and renewed focus on assisting CPA Small Branches and their Parliaments and Legislatures.

The Members of the CPA attending the 40th CPA Small Branches Conference elected Hon. Valerie Woods (Belize) as the new CPA Small Branches Chairperson. The role of Chairperson of the CPA Small Branches is an Officer role within the CPA's governance structure and the new incumbent will sit on the CPA International Executive Committee to bring a voice for the CPA Small Branches to the governing body of the Association.

In her acceptance remarks, the newly elected CPA Small Branches Chairperson expressed her gratitude to the Members of the CPA Small Branches, who have shown great trust in electing her as their Chairperson.

Hon. Valerie Woods, MNA is the Speaker of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of Belize. She was first appointed to the National Assembly as a Senator from 2016 to 2019 and was then elected in December 2020 as the Speaker of the House of Representatives. As the Speaker, she has been a lead facilitator on the CPA's Administrative Review of the



Parliament and on the proposed draft changes to the Standing Orders.

She is also pursuing her professional development studies in parliamentary service through the CPA Parliamentary Academy and Gender Studies through the Caribbean Institute in Gender and Development (University of the West Indies). She has also served on the Steering Committee for the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) representing the Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region and as CWP Vice-Chairperson.

The outgoing CPA Small Branches Chairperson is Joy Burch, MLA, Speaker of the Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly and previous holders were: Hon. Niki Rattle (Cook Islands) and Hon. Angelo Farrugia (Malta).

The Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Stephen Twigg said: *"I congratulate Joy Burch, the outgoing CPA Small Branches Chairperson, for the important achievements she has delivered during her term in office. On behalf of the entire CPA membership, we are incredibly grateful to her for the leadership of the CPA Small Branches network. I very much look forward to working with Hon. Valerie Woods, the new CPA Small Branches Chairperson during the next three years and wish her all the very best in this important role."*

Under CPA election rules only delegates from CPA Small Branches to the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference could take part in the vote to elect a new CPA Small Branches Chairperson. There were three candidates for the position of CPA Small Branches Chairperson: Deputy Adrian Gabriel (Guernsey); Hon. Shane Thompson, MLA, Speaker of the Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly; and Hon. Valerie Woods, MNA, Speaker of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of Belize.

The election of the new CPA Small Branches Chairperson took place at the 40th CPA Small Branches Conference held in New South Wales, Australia as part of the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

Images credit: CPA Secretariat





CPA SMALL BRANCHES WORKSHOP A: STRENGTHENING PARLIAMENTS THROUGH TWINNING: LESSONS FROM THE AUSTRALIA-PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP

Panel Chair: Ms Joy Burch, MLA, CPA Small Branches Chairperson and Speaker of the Australian Capital Territory

Discussion Leaders:

- **Mr Wilson Orisi, Committee Secretary (Solomon Islands)**
- **Mr Simon Johnston, Clerk Assistant and Serjeant-at-Arms of the Legislative Assembly (New South Wales)**
- **Mrs Kauae Been Sam, Public Accounts Committee Secretary (Kiribati)**
- **Mr Robert Tapi, Clerk of the House of Representatives (Autonomous Region of Bougainville)**

Moderator: Ms Flora Longley-Cook, CPA Small Branches Network Coordinator, CPA Secretariat

Rapporteurs: Tina Higgins and Rhia Victorino (Parliament of New South Wales)

This workshop focused on the value of parliamentary twinning, with a focus on the twinning programmes currently operating between Australian and Pacific Legislatures. The discussion started with each panellist commenting on the highlights of the twinning programme from their region.

Mr Wilson Orisi (Solomon Islands) reflected positively on the twinning programme operating between the New South Wales Parliament and National Parliament of the Solomon Islands, explaining that the institution as a whole has been greatly strengthened. He noted that the programme has led to a number of new offices being established within the department of the National Parliament of the Solomon Islands to provide greater support to Members and to the Speaker. The twinning programme also facilitated a review of the Parliament's Standing Orders to modernise the Parliament. Staff from each jurisdiction have also been exchanged in secondments.

Mrs Kaue Been Sam (Kiribati) also reflected positively on the twinning relationship between Kiribati and the Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly. She explained that formal ties between the Parliaments through the twinning programme have promoted mutual benefits and collaboration, with Parliamentarians able to provide good insights into each other's Legislatures.

Mr Robert Tapi (Bougainville) also discussed the benefits associated with Bougainville being twinned with the New South Wales Parliament. He noted that there have been Member

exchange programmes between the jurisdictions, and that twinning has helped with the development of the Parliament in Bougainville.

Like other panellists, **Mr Simon Johnston (New South Wales)** also spoke positively about the twinning programmes operating between the New South Wales Parliament and both the Bougainville House of Representatives and the National Parliament of the Solomon Islands. With five years' experience as the twinning co-ordinator at the New South Wales Parliament from 2010 to 2015, he explained that the benefits of twinning centre on the long-term multi-level connections that can be developed between Members and parliamentary staff of each jurisdiction and that the benefits of twinning are reciprocal, with both Legislatures developing important skills via the twinning relationship. Simon Johnston also highlighted how the New South Wales Parliament, as a well-established and well-resourced organisation, can work with other jurisdictions to share knowledge and support the development of locally based solutions to the unique challenges faced by smaller regions.

The panellists were asked how twinning arrangements were originally established with their Parliaments and whether the arrangements started slowly to begin with. Wilson Orisi noted that the twinning arrangements between the National Parliament of the Solomon Islands and New South Wales Parliament commenced in 2007, taking a bit of time to get underway. Robert Tapi advised that a partnership agreement was signed between Bougainville and the New South Wales Parliament in 2010, with the agreement setting out the objectives of the programme.

Hon. Robert Cutajar, MP (Malta) asked the panel about the intersection between 'friendship groups' and twinning programmes, noting that in Malta there are 'friendship groups' although these do not have any CPA Members. The Member also asked what would be the best way forward to establish a twinning programme with another CPA Branch.

Simon Johnston distinguished between friendship groups and twinning arrangements in the New South Wales Parliament, explaining that in New South Wales, friendship groups are non-partisan groups on various issues that are very different to twinning partnerships. He explained that the genesis of the twinning programme came from the CPA who matched up Legislatures in the CPA Pacific Region with Parliaments at state and federal level in the CPA Australia Region. **Ms Joy Burch, CPA Small Branches Chairperson** added that in deciding which jurisdictions could be matched for twinning, the CPA would consider a range of issues, including what may be a natural fit with respect to a state Parliament versus a national Parliament, as well as travel considerations.

Deputy Inna Gardiner, MP (Jersey) asked what the benefits and challenges would be of having formal twinning arrangements in place, in comparison to informal networks.

Robert Tapi discussed how formal twinning arrangements provide for specific and focused activities. However, he also acknowledged that the broader idea of friendships beyond the



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activities through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). This support was arranged through the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, via the Parliamentary Strengthening Project. Wilson Orisi also spoke of the Parliamentary Strengthening Project, noting that both the project and twinning arrangements share the common objective of strengthening the oversight and legislative functions of Parliament.

Simon Johnston explained that, with the financial capacity for twinning programmes being constrained now, the Parliamentary Strengthening Project is a good example of how the UNDP can leverage

formal twinning programme are worth exploring to determine the best arrangements for a particular circumstance.

Kaue Been Sam highlighted that formal twinning programmes can assist smaller jurisdictions to engage with larger countries, enabling culture to be showcased and expertise shared.

Wilson Orisi also explained that twinning programmes can create co-operation and opportunities for understanding and improvement. He referred to the twinning programme operating between the New South Wales Parliament and the National Parliament of the Solomon Islands, which he said enabled his Parliament to identify areas of process and procedure to improve.

The panellists also discussed timeframes for twinning programmes, along with Parliamentarians' views on the programme.

Simon Johnston highlighted how the twinning programmes involving the New South Wales Parliament are open ended, with no time limit. He noted that a successful programme needs commitment from the Speaker, the Clerk of the Parliament and individual Members. On the latter, he also explained that Members from the New South Wales Parliament had travelled to Solomon Islands and Bougainville as part of the twinning programme. The experience not only provided them with insights into how Parliaments in other jurisdictions operate but highlighted some shared experiences, such as engagement with constituents and the election process. He advised that it is important to have the support of key stakeholders to get commitment to the programme. Joy Burch also noted that she has visited Kiribati and seen the benefit of exchange programmes and activities involving Members. The core function of working with constituents is common to all Parliamentarians.

The panellists also touched upon the involvement of third parties in twinning programmes, particularly with respect to funding. Robert Tapi noted that as funding for the next phase of twinning has ended, Bougainville has been fortunate to secure support for some

off the twinning programmes and use existing relationships between twinned Parliaments to assist with its initiatives.

Mrs Faagasealii Sapoa Feagiai, MP (Samoa) noted that twinning arrangements between the Parliament of Samoa and the Parliament of Tasmania have assisted with staff development and improvements to practice and procedure. The programme was valued as it helped with CPA benchmarking, along with amendments to the Standing Orders and legislation.

In terms of lessons for the future, Wilson Orisi explained that one of the challenges has been a high turnover of staff. Funding and resourcing is also a challenge. For Robert Tapi, the challenge moving forward is to keep linkages between the jurisdictions, particularly to help engage Members to be effective. Simon Johnston discussed how even without direct and structured funding support, there are still plenty of opportunities for information and resource sharing. For example, the Floating Budget Office, arranged by the UNDP, which brings parliamentary staff in to assist Pacific nations with the budget. He also noted that through the CPA's support, there has been various delegations and visits to Bougainville and Solomon Islands, and to New South Wales. In terms of the benefits, he noted that there is much to be gained by all parties from a twinning programme. In particular, learning how the Westminster system is adapted in other countries with traditional practices steeped in history and culture has been a humbling and valuable learning experience for parliamentary staff from the New South Wales Parliament.

At the end of the workshop discussion, the following recommendation was **endorsed**:

- **Parliaments should explore the potential to establish twinning arrangements with another CPA Branch to build upon cross-parliamentary relationships.**



CPA SMALL BRANCHES WORKSHOP B: ACCELERATING DIGITAL INNOVATION FOR RESILIENCE AND GROWTH IN SMALL JURISDICTIONS

Panel Chair: Hon. David Agius, MP, Deputy Speaker (Malta)

Discussion Leaders:

- Deputy Elaine Millar (Jersey)
- Hon. Ahmed Nazim, MP, Deputy Speaker (The Maldives)
- Hon. Bernie Bush, MP (Cayman Islands)

Facilitator: Ms Charlotte Corby, Programmes Officer, CPA Secretariat

Rapporteurs: Frances Arguelles and Christine Thai (Parliament of New South Wales)

This workshop discussion focused on practical strategies to accelerate digital transformation, including forming partnerships with technology firms, investing in digital literacy programs, and developing a comprehensive digital strategy across Parliament, government and industry.

The session also addressed common innovation barriers and presented real-world examples of successful digital solutions that enhance community services and stimulate economic growth, with special attention given to the importance of these innovations for small jurisdictions.

The first panellist, **Deputy Elaine Millar (Jersey)** presented on the project 'Digital Jersey', a part Government-funded innovation agency set up to diversify Jersey's economy and support industry with technological adoption and diffusion. Following the banking and financial crisis, Digital Jersey was launched in 2013 as a sustainable tech hub to support growth in the digital industry and accelerate a digital future through three key pillars focusing on Industry, Innovation and Skills.

Deputy Elaine Millar shared examples of the initiatives that Digital Jersey has delivered to date, such as the development of Data Trusts, the use of drones in the agricultural industry as well as the delivery of online programmes and training courses to improve digital literacy in business and the public sector. She also presented on Jersey's Data Trust, a world-first initiative that used Trust Law to collect data from cyclists via an attached light device while on their routes across Jersey. With 650 cyclists signed up and data collected over 17 months, the Data Trust initiative was a resounding success which has been widely endorsed by several agencies across both government and private industry.

Deputy Elaine Millar also spoke about the fact that data is often unstructured, inaccessible and scattered across multiple organisations. She shared experiences relating to the Jersey Data Exchange initiative, a facility created to revolutionise the sharing of

data by providing the necessary infrastructure so that agencies can easily transfer data between entities. This highlighted how Digital Jersey has continued to facilitate digital transformation and growth across government, business, infrastructure and people, to support greater use of digital technology, ultimately contributing towards a more productive economy.

The second panellist, **Hon. Ahmed Nazim, Deputy Speaker of the People's Majlis (Parliament of Maldives)** provided an overview of 'Maldives' National Digital Identity', the roll-out of an electronic digital identity platform by the Government, whilst highlighting the unique geographical challenges of their region. Hon. Ahmed Nazim stated that since its introduction in 2012, the Maldives National Digital Identity platform 'eFaas' had successfully created an inclusive digital society that is accessible, protective, service-oriented and people-centric. He spoke about the realised benefits and ease of use of a Digital ID platform for citizens, describing how simple it is to create, use and verify, empowering citizens to share information with agencies securely through multifactor authentication.

Hon. Ahmed Nazim spoke about the rollout as an opportunity for innovative and improved service delivery, a standardisation of the official registry of legal identity across the nation which offers protections on data privacy and cybersecurity. He had also observed that over the past 10 years, the 'eFaas' Digital ID platform had an upward trajectory with up to 70% of the population now actively accessing over 450 services remotely, such as social welfare, health care and banking services, and that many of The Maldives' citizen's daily problems were easily solved through the Digital ID platform.

Below: Workshop panellists (left to right): Hon. Bernie Bush, MP (Cayman Islands); Deputy Elaine Millar (Jersey); Hon. Ahmed Nazim, MP, Deputy Speaker (The Maldives); Hon. David Agius, MP, Deputy Speaker (Malta).





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In the second half of his presentation, Hon Ahmed Nazim also presented on the establishment of the eGovernment GEMS workspace, an electronic mail service system that was prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019. The eGovernment GEMS workspace rollout has allowed for greater efficiency and digital adoption in the workplace, allowing government officers to access documents and complete their work from home. This initiative has provided a positive and safe transformative hybrid working experience, revolutionising the work-life balance for public servants in The Maldives.

The third panellist, **Hon. Bernie A. Bush, MP, (Cayman Islands)** discussed the creation of an 'eGovernment Unit', a government department specialising in improving online accessibility of key government services. Hon. Bernie Bush spoke about the establishment of the eGovernment Department in 2017, which at the time had 16 employees delivering project management and direction, business process analysis, in-house services and licensing to operating businesses with a common focus on the provision of online services across the public sector. During the COVID-19 pandemic there was a greater need for online and digital adoption and the government extended transactions via their eServices portal, further empowering civil servants. Hon. Bernie Bush also highlighted that there was also a greater need to access technology during the pandemic, with laptops supplied to students so that they could learn from home, and Wi-Fi services strengthened across the Cayman Islands. The eGovernment Department now covers 41 new online services managing various services including birth, death and marriage certificates, planning inspections, health services, new vehicle and driver licencing, and police checks.

Hon. Bernie Bush also spoke about the rollout of the Cayman Islands Digital ID program, a government initiative facilitated through two pieces of legislation in December 2022 which paved the way for the creation of ID cards and a digital identity register. Hon. Bernie Bush highlighted how the Digital ID program aimed to transform how residents interact with government and businesses, and focused on enhancements to digital infrastructure, service delivery and overall economic competitiveness.

Hon. Bernie Bush also provided practical advice for small regions that may be interested in the implementation of new digital

technologies. He spoke about the need to look into agile and scalable technologies, mobile and data analytics and cloud-based technologies that can be quickly deployed. He also emphasised the importance of:

- Fostering an environment for developing local talent
- Enhancing digital literacy through programmes and training services
- Having the skills to building the digital infrastructure
- Ensuring Members of Parliament are discussing technology in legislation where possible.

Hon. Bernie Bush concluded his presentation by discussing the importance of assisting smaller regions to adapt to new technology to make their economies more resilient to change and challenges such as economic downturns or natural disasters. He also highlighted the need to leverage 'niche' opportunities to tailor digital solutions based on the unique strengths and characteristics of each jurisdiction.

During the question and answer session which followed **Senator Dr Paul Richards (Trinidad and Tobago)** asked the panel about data protection, strategies against data harvesting from social media platforms such as Facebook, and strategies to eliminate risk management.

Deputy Elaine Millar noted that data was not centralised in Jersey, multiple systems exist separately and that there have been data protection laws in place since the 1980s compatible with EU standards to ensure data is protected. She mentioned it is also important to ensure efficient cyber security measures are developed, and the specific work that data security agencies and the police are doing to provide more information to citizens about online scams and to respond to other cyber security crimes.

Hon. Ahmed Nazim also emphasised that greater protection is an ongoing focus in The Maldives, with legislation introduced to ensure data was protected. Hon. Bernie Bush responded that social media is the biggest challenge worldwide and that the Cayman Islands have not yet gone after any social media platforms. He also explained that there were well-established data protection laws and a strong emphasis on cybersecurity in the Cayman Islands.

Deputy Adrian Gabriel (Guernsey) asked a question on the digital ID platform, noting that two systems need to be maintained,



Images credit: CPA Secretariat



both analogue and digital, to ensure support for an ageing population or citizens who do not want to engage digitally. He also asked how regions can ensure that those citizens are not left behind.

Deputy Elaine Millar responded that maintaining two systems is challenging, however it is also apparent that an ageing population may also gradually lose their ability to use technology over time, and that it is always best to have a way to support everyone in the population whether it be face to face or digitally.

Hon. Bernie Bush responded that it is important to ensure the older population is included and supported through a gradual transition when introducing new digital technologies and services. He also noted the challenges in the Cayman Islands during the uptake of the national ID rollout, such as the fact that there was a lot of workarounds justifying and educating citizens to use the new systems being introduced.

Hon. Ahmed Nazim responded that the government is continually working to promote an enabling environment to encourage all citizens, young and old, to use the online and digital ID platforms for service delivery and a streamlined experience for all.

Deputy Tom Coles (Jersey) asked a question about working from home arrangements and strategies to combat the recruitment and retention issues experienced in recent years post pandemic. He also asked whether there were any new initiatives relating to training and upskilling in the professional environment.

In her response to the question, Deputy Elaine Millar acknowledged that the pandemic forced employers and businesses all over the world to be flexible and enable workers to work from home. Through that experience, everyone now has laptops and flexibility in the workplace is now considered valuable and is widely recognised norm. She expressed that nowadays workplaces need to focus on having people in the office to train and ensure a level of competence before they can commence their working from home arrangements. In turn, businesses need to be conscious of this and manage accordingly, ensuring staff are well-trained and supported in the workplace.

Hon. Bernie Bush noted that post-COVID, there were complaints from Government departments and Ministries had requested civil servants to return to the office. He noted that some employees were

“The session also addressed common innovation barriers and presented real-world examples of successful digital solutions that enhance community services and stimulate economic growth, with special attention given to the importance of these innovations for small jurisdictions.”



Images credit: CPA Secretariat

Above: The delegation from the Parliament of Kiribati.

seen to be taking advantage of the work from home arrangements, and the government sector has now mandated all employees return to work in the office.

Hon Tauaneia Marea MP, (Kiribati) asked a question in relation to the costs associated with implementing digital innovations such as the National ID systems and noted that the CPA should consider providing a standardised software for small island jurisdictions to ensure affordability, instead of each jurisdiction developing their own.

Deputy Elaine Millar responded stating that the cost of the Digital Jersey is partly funded by the government as well as through subscriptions and industry. Hon. Ahmed Nazim noted that in The Maldives the identity platform was funded with the help of the World Bank and added that although a lot of capital is required to develop and roll out a large scale national ID system, it is worth it for the ease of service and convenience to both governments and citizens.

Hon. Bernie Bush responded that the cost to set up digital innovations costs millions of dollars to ensure cyber security measures are met.

Hon Tessie Eria Lambourne MP (Kiribati) requested an amendment to the workshop recommendation, stating that together the CPA Small Branches network should explore and engage with practical strategies to accelerate digital innovations that build resilience and drive economic growth and foster social well-being.

The following recommendation at the workshop was *endorsed* as follows:

- Together, the CPA Small Branches network and Parliaments of the Commonwealth should explore and engage with practical strategies to accelerate digital innovations that build resilience, drive economic growth and foster social well-being.

CPA SMALL BRANCHES WORKSHOP C: BALANCING TRADITION AND INNOVATION: MODERNISING THE WESTMINSTER SYSTEM IN SMALL JURISDICTIONS

Panel Chair: Ms Claire Christian, MHK (Isle of Man)

Discussion Leaders:

- **Hon. Manzoor Nadir, Speaker of the National Assembly of Guyana**
- **Hon. Hima Douglas, Speaker of the Niue Assembly**
- **Hon. Kate Reid, MLA (Northwest Territories)**

Moderator: Ms Flora Longley-Cook, CPA Small Branches Coordinator CPA Secretariat

Rapporteur: Caroline Hopley (Parliament of New South Wales)

The workshop focused on how the Commonwealth's smallest jurisdictions are able to balance tradition and innovation under the Westminster System.

Hon. Manzoor Nadir, Speaker of the National Assembly of Guyana began the discussion by giving an overview of Guyana. He noted that the country is the fastest growing economy in the world today, due to the discovery of oil, which is forecast to grow to 1.3 billion barrels in the next three years. He also noted that Guyana will remain in a zero neutral position until 2050 as the country is made up of 85% forest cover.

In 1980, the Guyanese Constitution introduced a novel system with an Executive President and 65 seats in a unicameral House with a Prime Minister. The President could also appoint four technocrat Ministers and two Parliamentary Secretaries with no voting rights. However, Hon. Manzoor Nadir indicated that many felt that the President had too much power.

In 2000, Guyana underwent major constitutional reform for better scrutiny. This included Members having more oversight of the Executive and the introduction of four sectoral Committees: Social Services, Economic Services, Foreign Relations and Natural Resources. These Committees are chaired alternately, on a yearly basis, by Government and Opposition Members. No more than two Committees are chaired by an Opposition Member or Government Member in any one year. Senior appointments, such as the Police Commissioner and members of the judiciary, must be made by the President in consultation with the Leader of the Opposition to prevent corruption and ensure timeliness.

Hon. Manzoor Nadir outlined the key challenges for Guyana as it moves forward as a small Westminster jurisdiction. First, there are no full-time Parliamentarians. Instead, Parliamentarians juggle full-time jobs, consultations with constituencies, and attending sittings and meetings.

Second, the Guyana Parliament often has very small majorities, for example, a one seat majority following their last election. Third, there are ongoing challenges to innovation. For example, there is an inability to gain agreement by the Leader of the Opposition since the establishment of the new constitutional structure in 2000, resulting in significant lags in appointment times for the Chancellor and the judiciary.

Fourth, accommodation of Guyana's indigenous population, which comprises 15% of its total population. In 2006, the Amerindian Act was introduced, which recognises and protects the collective rights of Amerindian Villages and Communities, the granting of land to Amerindian Villages and Communities, and the promotion of good governance. Importantly, the Act established the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, which is made up of indigenous people, appointed on merit and selected by the two major political parties. The Ministry guarantees the principle of free, prior and informed consent to all Amerindian People regarding policies that affect them. In particular, the principle enables recognition and protection of Amerindian lands by setting out the process by which Amerindians can apply for legally protected grants of land which they have traditionally occupied, as well as providing for applications for extensions to Village lands. In addition to these changes, representation of indigenous people in the Guyana Parliament has also increased and is currently close to 30%.

Fifth, the significant challenge of border issues with Venezuela over a disputed territory that makes up one third of the country and has been under Venezuelan law since December 2023. The disputed area contains close to 40,000 indigenous people spread over 300 villages. Hon. Manzoor Nadir noted that the issue is draining financial resources from other areas of the country.

Hon. Kate Reid, MLA (Northwest Territories) presented on how the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories operates using its multilevel governance (MLG) system.

The Northwest Territories uses a unique consensus government system. There are no political parties. Instead, all Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) are independent Members. Following each election, the MLAs elect a Speaker and a Cabinet to set priorities for the parliamentary term. By its nature, the Cabinet is always in minority government. 'Regular Members', who are not part of the Cabinet, act as an unofficial opposition. The Constitution is set out in the federal *Northwest Territories Act*, which can only be amended by the Parliament of Canada.

The Northwest Territories Government is the product of significant 'devolution'. In 1967, the Capital of the Northwest Territories was established in Yellowknife. In the 1980s, the Canadian Government transferred responsibility of several policy areas to the Northwest Territories Government, including forestry and fire suppression, healthcare services, fisheries, airports and highways. In 2014, after decades of negotiations, the Northwest



Images credit: Parliament of New South Wales and CPA Secretariat



Above: Workshop panellists (left to right): Claire Christian, MHK (Isle of Man); Hon. Hima Douglas, Speaker (Niue); Hon. Kate Reid, MLA (Northwest Territories); Hon. Manzoor Nadir, Speaker (Guyana).

Territories took responsibility for land and resources from the Canadian Government. The final Northwest Territories Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement was signed on 25 June 2013, and the *Northwest Territories Devolution Act* officially came into force on 1 April 2014.

The Devolution Agreement places more control over land in the hands of northerners. The Northwest Territories Government now amends and replaces mirrored legislation such as the *Protected Areas Act*, *Public Lands Act* and acts regarding environmental rights. Through a unique revenue sharing plan, it also ensures that Northwest Territories residents and Aboriginal groups directly benefit from the responsible development of the region's resource potential.

The Devolution Agreement also established an Intergovernmental Council (IGC) allowing collaboration between indigenous governments on land and resources management. In 2020, the IGC entered into a legislative development protocol with the Northwest Territories Government to respect indigenous populations. The Protocol formalises the collaborative development process of Northwest Territories land and resource legislation. The Opposition is encouraged to engage and contribute, and each indigenous organisation determines their level of involvement in the Bills drafted.

To ensure the involvement of indigenous people, co-development of legislation was introduced in 2023, known as the Process Convention. Once a Bill is introduced, a Standing Committee must review it within 180 days in consultation with Indigenous governments, including on the floor of the House during Committee of the Whole review of a Bill. This Process Convention has five guiding principles:

1. decisions are made cooperatively
2. indigenous governments are not stakeholders
3. convention does not undermine self-government
4. doesn't detract from privileges of Committees
5. doesn't detract from privileges of the Executive or individual Members.

So far, only one piece of legislation has undergone this process, that being the *Forest Act*, which followed the worst wildfire in the Northwest Territories causing 70% of the Territory to be evacuated. Further expansion for co-development is being considered, particularly for social policy with indigenous governments to modernise the *Education Act*.

Hon. Kate Reid noted that she hopes that 'devolve and evolve' will continue.

Hon. Hima Douglas, Speaker of the Niue Assembly presented on the challenges of adapting to the Westminster system as the smallest state in the Pacific Region. The Speaker noted that '*The smaller the state, the more messaging you need to make the Westminster System work for you.*'

Niue is a self-governing state in free association with New Zealand. This arrangement allows the Niue people to govern themselves and retain New Zealand citizenship, with the New Zealand Government having responsibility for foreign affairs and providing necessary economic assistance. More recently, in recognition of recent times, Niue has been allowed to establish diplomatic relations with a number of other countries.

The basic structure of government in Niue consists of a Head of State, the British monarch, who is represented by the Governor-General of New Zealand, with the Executive function being exercised by the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and a House of elected representatives.

Niue has adapted the Westminster system to accommodate the traditions of its people. For example, the electoral system has been adapted to reflect the customary village-based decision-making process. 14 villages can elect one representative each to the Assembly. The whole electorate then elects 6 additional Members. This gives a total of 20 Members plus the Speaker, who is elected from outside the ranks of the elected Members. In the absence of political parties, the Prime Minister is elected by an absolute majority of the Members, then the Prime Minister selects three Members to be in their Cabinet.



Hon. Hima Douglas emphasised the importance of adapting and integrating traditions and culture (which are a 'living entity' in Niue) into governance systems, and explained how this facilitates trust.

Another feature of the Niue system of government is that there are no political parties. Some have been established in the past; however, they were never successful in convincing voters of the benefits of the party system. Instead, voters viewed it as a threat to their direct line of access to the Parliament and decision-making processes.

Niue recently completed a self-assessment against the CPA's *Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures* to ensure their processes are still relevant after 50 years of self-governance.

Ms Claire Christian MHK (Isle of Man) asked what are the pros and cons of the Westminster System in small legislatures?

Hon. Hima Douglas responded that it can be a challenge to use existing structures as a basis for adapting the Westminster System. Traditional leaders have taken a while to accept that decisions of Parliament need to be agreed to by a vote, rather than by a village consensus.

Hon. Kate Reid agreed and noted that more voices can make it a more complicated process, but also a positive one.

Hon. Manzoor Nadir responded that in the National Assembly of Guyana they experience the challenge of effective parliamentary oversight of the Executive in a Parliament with a slim majority where almost every member of the Executive is a Minister, which results in significant delays to Committee proceedings.

Hon. Robert Cutajar, MP (Malta) asked if the panellists have the same Standing Orders as the UK House of Commons and if the Speaker's rulings referred to other Westminster rulings.

Hon. Kate Reid responded 'yes'. Hon. Hima Douglas responded that the Niue Assembly's Standing Orders are based on the New Zealand Parliament's Standing Orders, but they have been adapted to suit local requirements. Hon. Manzoor Nadir responded that 'yes', the National Assembly of Guyana has similar Standing Orders to Westminster and cooperates with other Caribbean Parliaments in relation to the Speaker's rulings.

“A workshop participant asked how small jurisdictions can strike a balance between preserving the principles of the Westminster System and innovating to meet contemporary governance challenges? Another workshop participant asked if legislation has ever been prevented from being introduced since adapting to the Westminster System.”

A workshop participant asked how small jurisdictions can strike a balance between preserving the principles of the Westminster System and innovating to meet contemporary governance challenges?

Another workshop participant from the Isle of Man asked if legislation has ever been prevented from being introduced since adapting to the Westminster System.

Ms Tina Browne, MP (Cook Islands) asked how the panel balances older traditions with newer innovations.

All panel members responded that they did not recall an example where legislation has been blocked from being introduced.

Hon. Hima Douglas responded that where there is a conflict between traditional and new systems, a decision is reached by talking 'until they are exhausted'. Fortunately, this doesn't often happen.

Hon. Manzoor Nadir responded that it can be difficult, especially when Private Members' Bills do not progress. However, there has been little traction for change to an alternative system, such as a Presidential system as in the United States.

Hon. Kate Reid responded that as the Northwest Territories Government has only existed for 57 years, the Legislature is always in question and continually trying to find the best balance between public government and the traditions of its indigenous people.

Hon. Tessie Lambourne, MP (Kiribati) asked whether each villager votes, or does the village as-a-whole make decisions? How is an Opposition determined if there are no parties?

Hon. Hima Douglas responded that the Government is the Cabinet and everybody else either supports the Government or is in Opposition.

A workshop participant asked whether it is a challenge that there is only a thin separation of powers, and how this is dealt with?

Hon. Akierra Missick, MHA (Turks and Caicos Islands) stated that Government Members on the backbench should 'toe the party line', as the only reason they are able to hold their positions is because of their electorate and the party.

Hon. Manzoor Nadir responded that 'toeing the party line' or 'not toeing party line' has consequences. For most candidates under the Westminster System, the party has all the power. Members have to be exceptional to challenge the existing system.

Hon. Kate Reid responded that she represents her constituents, she does not represent a party. Parties have failed in her Legislature and consensus is rooted in the history of indigenous groups and the importance of talking until you reach agreement.

Hon. Hima Douglas responded that the separation of powers has become blurred over time. However, the current terms of reference for the Niue Assembly's Public Accounts Committee includes the 'proper scrutiny of the Government's budget and holding it to account'.

The recommendation at the workshop was *endorsed* as follows:

- **Parliaments should continue to adapt and innovate to strengthen their governance systems, while ensuring these efforts respect and engage with tradition and local content.**



CPA SMALL BRANCHES WORKSHOP D AND CWP WORKSHOP B (JOINT WORKSHOP): GENDER AND NATIONAL CLIMATE PLANNING: MOVING FROM COMMITMENT TO SCALABLE ACTION

Panel Chair: Senator Hon. Alvina Reynolds, President of the Senate of Saint Lucia

Discussion Leaders:

- **Hon. Gervais Henrie, MNA, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Seychelles**
- **Hon. Dulcie Tei, MP (Tonga)**
- **Ms Marianne Gilchrist, Strategic Partnerships and Networks Manager, ASU Julie Ann Wrigley Global Futures Laboratory**

Moderators: Ms Bénite Dibateza, CWP Coordinator and Ms Flora Longley-Cook, CPA Small Branches Coordinator, CPA Secretariat

Rapporteur: Alex Read (Parliament of New South Wales)

This workshop explored the intersection of gender equality and climate change. While everyone is impacted by climate change, each person faces different impacts based on gender and other social vulnerabilities. Women will experience greater impacts, which will potentially worsen existing gender inequalities. Panellists highlighted how drivers of gender inequality lead to unequal exposure to the effects of the climate crisis and natural hazards. However, they warned against treating women as ‘just victims’ in climate action planning as women can be powerful agents of change.

Panellists from smaller island nations highlighted how gender is factored into their National Climate Plans and policies. Although island nations bear the smallest responsibility for the climate crisis, their nations are already facing the worst impacts of climate change. These nations must continue to advocate for global climate action while progressing their own national plans.

The first panellist, **Hon. Gervais Henrie, MNA, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Seychelles** provided an introduction to how climate change is impacting The Seychelles and an overview of the initiatives being implemented as part of its climate planning. He explained that The Seychelles is taking committed action in water management, renewable energy and other sustainable practices in response to climate change.

Firstly, he explained that water demand is high and currently unsustainable. The Seychelles has a National Water Policy designed to protect water reserves and manage them for social and environmental benefits that are equitable and sustainable. The Seychelles will need significant funding from international loans to implement their strategies. One of the main projects is raising the height of the main dam by six metres.

Secondly, he outlined the actions that The Seychelles is taking to develop renewable energy resources through installing wind turbines and solar panels. A wind farm was commissioned in 2013 and is operating well. The Public Utilities Corporation is also commissioning a solar farm in line with its energy policy drafted in 2010. The projects were funded through concessional loans with US\$8.5 million raised on the international financial market.

The third action he discussed focused on individual responsibility and programmes that promote personal and collective actions. He explained that action needs behavioural change and The Seychelles government developed programmes to educate people to make positive contributions by decreasing their water and energy consumption. In the 2025 budget, significant funds have been allocated for low interest loan schemes for households to improve energy and water efficiency.

The Seychelles also has a gender plan for 2019-2024 which specifically mentions the importance of gender issues. Hon. Gervais

Below: Workshop panellists (left to right): Senator Hon. Alvina Reynolds, President (Saint Lucia); Hon. Gervais Henrie, MNA, Deputy Speaker (Seychelles); Marianne Gilchrist (ASU Julie Ann Wrigley Global Futures Laboratory); Hon. Dulcie Tei, MP (Tonga).



Images credit: CPA Secretariat



Henrie concluded his presentation by reiterating that we all need to be doing as much as possible as politicians and that the climate should be conserved for future generations.

The second panellist, **Marianne Gilchrist, Strategic Partnerships and Networks Manager, ASU Julie Ann Wrigley Global Futures Laboratory**, talked about the global perspective on integrating gender issues into climate change planning for countries and the intersection of gender and climate change for small nation states. Marianne Gilchrist explained that women disproportionately experience the impacts of climate change due to structural inequality.

However, she highlighted the importance of women in driving resilience and noted that they are making significant contributions to climate change action. She said that while women are underrepresented in decision making processes, climate action will be more effective if women are more able to contribute to and make decisions about climate change strategies.

She also talked about nations' National Determined Contributions (NDC) and ensuring that gender considerations are incorporated into these. Nations should collect better data about gender and climate change which will inform the way that gender is considered in their national climate plans and strategies.

Universities and scientists can be valuable in providing support to Parliamentarians so they can make informed decisions on climate strategies. Small states have limited access to those resources, so it is important they are supported by research institutions.

Ms Marianne Gilchrist concluded her presentation by identifying key objectives: to mainstream gender in policies, support women entrepreneurs and ensure equal representation of women at decision making levels.

The third panellist, **Hon. Dulcie Tei, MP (Tonga)** talked about the unique climate change challenges that Tonga is experiencing and the key strategies and policies that it is developing to integrate gender issues into their development objectives. She highlighted that Tonga is the second most 'at risk' nation in the world to climate change and the Pacific Region is facing enormous challenges. However, Tonga has made significant steps to recognise how gender plays a role in mediating climate change action.

“Panellists from smaller island nations highlighted how gender is factored into their National Climate Plans and policies. Although island nations bear the smallest responsibility for the climate crisis, their nations are already facing the worst impacts of climate change. These nations must continue to advocate for global climate action while progressing their own national plans.”

Tonga's National Action Plan recognises that climate change impacts a range of demographics, particularly vulnerable populations of people. Those vulnerabilities must be at the centre of climate action. She explained that the Legislative Assembly of Tonga held its first survey on gender and environmental issues in 2022. The survey found that women have distinct and different roles in environmental management but their roles in developing environmental policies is limited. She called for an increase in women's participation in the development of environmental policies. She outlined further examples of work to address the impacts of climate change, such as the 2019-2025 Climate Change Policy, community resilience training, long term recovery programmes and gender and disability inclusion guidelines. Hon. Dulcie Tei concluded her presentation by emphasising that there are opportunities for Parliamentarians to educate each other with their learning.

The fourth panellist was the moderator, **Senator Hon. Alvina Reynolds, President of the Senate of Saint Lucia**. She provided an overview of the links between gender inequality and sustainable development and highlighted the commitments that Saint Lucia has made regarding gender in its National Climate Planning. She talked about how they are implementing those commitments and noted Saint Lucia's unique position and its vulnerabilities to climate change.

She then outlined the key instruments and legislative frameworks that Saint Lucia has developed to address climate change and gender issues. Their National Adaptation Plan includes a range of measures to address climate change, encourage sustainable development and address gender issues. This Plan guides implementation of programmes based on a coordinated and participatory approach. Section 4.9 of the Plan sets out gender considerations and calls for mainstreaming of gender in all climate change action policies.

Major achievements of the National Adaptation Plan include: waste to product pilot programmes supporting public awareness of waste, reforestation and rehabilitation of lands, improvements to agricultural productivity, improvements in water management and climate resilient infrastructure.

Senator Hon. Alvina Reynolds concluded her presentation by emphasising that nations must follow through with their commitments to provide financial support to other countries for climate change measures. Small developing nations are resilient and will continue to be represented and advocate on the global scale.

The question-and-answer session following the panel presentations included a discussion on holding governments and corporations accountable and the importance of education and other social policies.

Hon. Akierra Missick, MHA (Turks and Caicos Islands) asked how can Members of Parliament hold Executive bodies accountable for direct investment for islands and countries without harming their fragile ecosystems? As most development is funded by foreign countries, how can smaller nations hold governments accountable to protect the environment?

Hon. Gervais Henrie answered that Parliamentarians must take this risk seriously and ensure they understand the terms of



Images credit: CPA Secretariat



investments. It is important to have relationships with the Executive to hold them accountable and remain informed about projects. They should also be mindful of personal ethics and ensure integrity in decision making. Hon. Dulcie Tei discussed the importance of Standing Committees to scrutinise the Executive and hold them accountable to the decisions they make. She also reiterated the importance of personal relationships with Members of the Cabinet. Senator Hon. Alvina Reynolds suggested that if formal accountability approaches aren't successful then Parliamentarians can try working with the media, challenging the government to release information and otherwise do whatever is necessary.

Hon. Kate Reid, MLA (Northwest Territories) asked how do Parliaments keep corporations accountable for climate change action, particularly as they are responsible for the majority of greenhouse emissions? Marianne Gilchrist answered that legislative interventions are needed to ensure corporations are accountable. Hon. Gervais Henrie answered by talking about the importance of corporate social responsibility. Governments should continue to develop policies that make it attractive for corporations to take action.

Senator Hon. Beth Syengo (Kenya) asked about whether there is such a thing as climate democracy? Marianne Gilchrist answered by giving examples of how Kenya has mainstreamed gender in its climate change policies. She said there is no climate change democracy as those most impacted by climate change are often the least responsible. Hon. Gervais Henrie said that it is an ongoing battle to get climate change democracy. Countries need to keep advocating to have their voices heard. He also suggested that bigger countries need to invest but smaller nations can't afford to wait for help to come. One initiative that The Seychelles is employing is imposing a 'bed tax' for tourists to help raise revenue that can be invested in infrastructure projects. Hon. Dulcie Tei noted the importance of forums like the CPA and the UN as platforms for countries most impacted by climate change to cooperate and

advocate for action. Senator Hon. Alvina Reynolds talked about the importance of education and noted examples of programmes that are important to addressing gender equity and climate change. She encouraged Parliamentarians to use their voice to discuss the impacts and experiences of women.

Hon. Akierra Missik, MHA (Turks and Caicos Islands) asked a question about the economic advantages of planting trees. She also asked about education in changing mindsets and about how to incorporate childcare, aged care and a Universal Basic Income as climate strategies. Senator Hon. Alvina Reynolds answered that it is important to work with women who are supporting vulnerable women such as pregnant women, childcare workers and aged care workers. She said a multipronged approach is needed to care for those women to support their personal health. Hon. Dulcie Tei talked about examples in Tonga of programmes for women and children such as education and support programs supported by the Ministry.

Senator Hon. Dr Dessima Williams, President of the Senate of Grenada asked a question about climate planning and for more examples of successful scalable actions so obligations to the international community can be fulfilled. She commented that legislators from the global north should pay attention to companies that operate in the global south and support them to comply with environmental policies. Senator Hon. Alvina Reynolds said that time had run out to answer this question but that panellists had given some examples of scalable action.

The wording of the workshop recommendation was then discussed in some detail with suggestions from Grenada, Guyana, Kenya, Western Cape, Belize and Canada Federal.

The following recommendation at the workshop was *endorsed* by participants:

- **Parliamentarians should advocate for the further mainstreaming of gender into National Climate Plans.**

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