



Parliament of Australia

**Report of the Parliamentary Delegation to the
65th Commonwealth Parliamentary Association
Conference, Halifax**

20 to 26 August 2022

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Members of the Delegation

Leader of the Delegation

Senator the Hon Sue Lines

President of the Senate

Senator for Western Australia

Ms Sharon Claydon MP

Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives

Member for Newcastle

Senator Helen Polley

Senator for Tasmania

Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds CSC

Senator for Western Australia

Mr Andrew Wallace MP

Member for Fisher

Officials:

Mr Peter Banson

Delegation Secretary

Ms Alex Cullum

CPA Regional Secretary

Introduction

From 20 to 26 August 2022, an Australian parliamentary delegation travelled to Halifax, Canada, to attend the 65th Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Conference. The delegation comprised three Senators and two Members of the House of Representatives, listed at p.iii.

This report of the delegation details the delegation's attendance, led by the President of the Senate, at the 65th CPA Conference. An extract from the Concluding Statement of the CPA Conference is at Appendix A.

Acknowledgements

The delegation wishes to record its appreciation of the work that went into preparing for the visit, including the briefing material provided by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The delegation also wishes to thank the staff of the International and Parliamentary Relations Office for their assistance with arrangements.

The delegation wishes to record its appreciation of the work of the many staff of the Parliament of Canada and the Nova Scotia House of Assembly who contributed to the successful organisation of the CPA conference. The delegation would also like to thank His Excellency the Hon Scott Ryan, Australian High Commissioner to Canada for travelling to Halifax to provide valuable briefing and support to the delegation.



The General Assembly: Senator Helen Polley, Mr Andrew Wallace MP, Senator the Hon Sue Lines, Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds CSC and Ms Sharon Claydon MP

65th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference

The 65th Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference (CPC) was held in Halifax, Canada from 20 to 26 August 2022. The conference was hosted by the CPA Canada Region and was chaired by the Hon. Anthony Rota MP, Speaker of the House of Commons of Canada and President of the CPA (2019-2022).

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) is a voluntary association of Commonwealth parliamentarians. The aims of the CPA are to promote knowledge and understanding about parliamentary democracy, especially good governance, transparency and accountability and respect for the rule of law, and individual rights and freedoms, irrespective of gender, race, religion or culture.

The CPA is composed of branches formed in parliaments and legislatures in Commonwealth countries which subscribe to parliamentary democracy. There are over 180 branches at national, state, provincial and territory levels of all 53 Commonwealth countries, representing approximately 17,000 members. Branches are grouped geographically into nine regions: Africa, Asia, Australia, British Islands and Mediterranean, Canada, Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic, Pacific, and South East Asia.

Over 600 delegates, observers and officials from member parliaments attended the 65th CPC. The Commonwealth of Australia Branch of the CPA was represented by a parliamentary delegation comprising Senator the Hon Sue Lines, President of the Senate, Senator Helen Polley, Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds CSC,

Ms Sharon Claydon MP and Mr Andrew Wallace MP. In addition, a number of delegates attended from Australian State and Territory parliaments.

This CPC was the second attended by a delegation from the Commonwealth of Australia Branch since it rejoined the CPA in 2018. The Branch had withdrawn from the CPA in 2012, owing to concerns over governance arrangements and financial accountability. Noting progress made to address these concerns, the Branch formally rejoined the CPA with effect from 1 January 2018.

The theme of the 2022 conference was 'Inclusive, accessible, accountable and strong parliaments: the cornerstone of democracy and essential for development'.

The conference encompassed a number of components and associated activities. These were:

- meetings of regional groups of the CPA
- the 38th Small Branches Conference of members from small legislatures
- meetings of the Executive Committee of the CPA
- a plenary session and eight workshops
- the annual General Assembly of the CPA
- meetings of Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians
- the 56th General Meeting of the Society of Clerks-at-the-Table, comprising parliamentary officials.

Business of the Conference

Opening ceremony and speeches

The official opening of the conference took place on 23 August 2022.

The guest of honour at the opening, Her Excellency the Right Honourable Mary Simon, Governor-General of Canada and Vice-Patron of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, gave the opening address.

The Hon. Anthony Rota MP, Speaker of the House of Commons of Canada and President of the CPA (2019-2022), made welcoming remarks, and the Hon. George J Furey, Speaker of the Senate of Canada, read a goodwill message from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Patron of the CPA and Head of the Commonwealth.

Mr Stephen Twigg, Secretary-General of the CPA, and the Hon. Keith Bain, Speaker of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly, also made remarks.

Plenary and workshop sessions

The main business part of the conference comprised eight workshops and a plenary session covering the following topics:

- Workshop A: Remaining relevant in response to a pandemic: the role and responsibilities of parliament
- Workshop B: Role of parliaments in achieving sustainable development
- Workshop C: A people's parliament: accessibility through innovation
- Workshop D: Professional development for parliamentarians – opportunities and challenges for small parliaments
- Workshop E: Access to assistive technologies: implementation of

standards across the Commonwealth parliaments

- Workshop F: Building gender sensitive parliaments
- Workshop G: Youth roundtable – Cyberbullying: youth, trolling and mental health
- Workshop H: The climate emergency: are parliaments holding governments to account?
- Plenary session: Launch of Transitioning to Life after Parliament (CPA Victoria Branch)

Members of the delegation attended plenary and workshop sessions and participated in discussions. A summary report of the workshops and final plenary session is at Appendix A.

General Assembly

The 65th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference included the annual General Assembly of the Association, which was held on 25 August. Usual items of business included consideration and adoption of the Association's annual report, financial statements and budget estimates, and the election of office bearers.

The General Assembly agreed to a proposal by the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians meeting that at least one third of delegates to future CPCs should be women. Other decisions included a new officer role for the Chairperson of the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities network, rules for elections, an increase in the population threshold for Small Branches and a change to the rules for future appointments to the role of CPA Secretary-General.

Future CPA meetings and conferences were also considered, with the 2023

Executive Committee meeting to be held in Gibraltar in March, the 66th CPC to be hosted by Ghana in September/October 2023, the 2024 Executive Committee meeting to be held virtually, and the 67th CPC to be hosted by New South Wales in November 2024.

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee of the CPA met on 21, 22 and 25 August. The Australian region was represented at these meetings by the Hon. Bruce Atkinson MLC (representing the Victorian CPA Branch), Senator the Hon Sue Lines (representing the Commonwealth of Australia Branch), the Hon Jonathan O'Dea MP (representing the NSW CPA Branch), and Ms Joy Burch MLA (Small Branches Chair).

Small Branches Conference

The CPA Small Branches network comprises Commonwealth jurisdictions with populations under 500,000.

The 38th Small Branches Conference was held on 21 and 22 August, under the theme 'Resilience and preparedness of CPA small branches'. The Chairperson of the Small Branches network is Ms Joy Burch MLA, Speaker of the ACT Legislative Assembly.

Through workshops and plenary discussions, members discussed strategies to meet the unique developmental needs of small legislatures, on topics including building sustainable economies, financial scrutiny and oversight and disaster risk preparedness.

A summary report of the conference proceedings is at Appendix A.



**Australian delegates at the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Meeting:
Ms Sharon Claydon MP, Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds CSC and Senator Helen Polley**

Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Meeting

Ms Sharon Claydon MP, Senator Helen Polley and Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds CSC attended the meeting of Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians, which took place during the conference. The theme for the meeting was 'Break the bias: gender equality today for a sustainable tomorrow'. Over 100 Women Parliamentarians attended the meeting from across the Commonwealth. The conference included four wide-ranging sessions for delegates on the following issues: Empowering women parliamentarians and promoting diversity/intersectionality; Effectively combating all forms of abuse and harassment in parliament; Financial empowerment of women and gender-sensitive budgeting; and Promoting gender-sensitive parliaments post-pandemic. A summary report of the meeting is at Appendix A.

The Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Steering Committee met on 21 August. Ms Sharon Claydon MP, on behalf of Senator Nita Green, represented the Australian Region on the Steering Committee, and participated as a speaker and panel member in Workshop B: Effectively combating all forms of abuse and harassment in Parliament.

Meeting of the Society of Clerks-at-the-Table in Commonwealth Parliaments

The 56th meeting of the Society of Clerks-at-the-Table was held on 24 and 25 August, concurrently with sessions of the conference. The delegation secretary, Mr Peter Banson, participated in the meeting.

The society aims to assist members to exercise their professional duties in their respective legislatures through the exchange of information, views and experience.

Conclusion

The delegation considers that the 65th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference presented a valuable forum for the further strengthening of bonds between the parliaments of Commonwealth countries, and delegates felt that they were able to make useful contributions to debates and discussions and to promote matters of importance to Australia.

It was clear to the delegation that Commonwealth parliamentarians are committed the promotion of inclusive, accessible, accountable and strong parliaments, the theme of the 2022 conference.

The Australian delegation again extends its thanks to the Members of the CPA Canada Region, and the parliamentary staff who provided such enthusiastic assistance in hosting the 65th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

Senator the Hon Sue Lines
President of the Senate
Delegation Leader

September 2022

**65th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference
Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada
20 to 26 August 2022**

Extract from Conference Concluding Statement (full statement available at: <https://www.cpahq.org/65-cpc/>)

Commonwealth Parliamentarians attending the 65th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference and associated meetings recognised the Commonwealth's commitment to democracy and met under the conference theme of *'Inclusive, Accessible, Accountable and Strong Parliaments: the Cornerstone of Democracy and Essential for Development'*.

The conference, hosted by the CPA Canada Region from 20 to 26 August 2022 in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada was attended by over 600 Parliamentarians and Parliamentary Clerks representing Parliaments and Legislatures from across the Commonwealth.

The conference was hosted by the CPA President (2019-2022), Hon. Anthony Rota, MP, Speaker of the House of Commons of Canada. The conference also included the 38th CPA Small Branches Conference and the seventh triennial Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Conference as well as a meeting of the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) Regional Champions.

This concluding statement contains

- the main outcomes of the conference,
- a summary of the workshop discussions, and
- the recommendations that were either endorsed or noted by the Members in attendance.

Alongside the substantive conference workshops and the CPA governance meetings (65th General Assembly and CPA Executive Committee meetings), the 65th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference also included a number of additional events.

The unique conference brings together Speakers, Members of Parliament and Parliamentary staff representing the nine regions of the CPA – Africa; Asia; Australia; British Islands and Mediterranean; Canada; Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic; India; Pacific; and South East Asia. The CPA reaches the countries of the Commonwealth as well as national, state, provincial and territorial Parliaments and Legislatures bringing together over 180 CPA Branches of the Association.

65th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference - Opening Addresses

The Chief Guest at the opening of the 65th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference was the Vice-Patron of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), Her Excellency Rt Hon. Mary Simon, Governor-General of Canada, who urged Commonwealth Parliamentarians to work together to uphold democratic principles and the values of the Commonwealth as she opened the 65th CPC. The CPA Vice-Patron said: *“The Commonwealth is not merely a name, but a goal. A society of nations that work together with common objectives.”*

Senator Hon. George Furey, Speaker of the Senate of Canada read the goodwill message to the conference from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Patron of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and Head of the Commonwealth. Since 1989, the Vice-Patron of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association has traditionally been the Head of State or Government of the CPA Branch hosting the annual Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

Delegates to the 65th CPC were welcomed by the CPA President (2019-2022), Hon. Anthony Rota, MP, Speaker of the House of Commons of Canada who said at the opening ceremony: *“During this conference, we will continue to learn from each other about how we can make our respective Parliaments more inclusive, accessible, accountable and stronger. The conference program is full of opportunities to network and expand our understanding about how to promote the values of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, which is to say our values.”*

The CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg paid tribute to the late CPA Chairperson, Hon. Emilia Monjowa Lifaka from Cameroon and highlighted the key agenda items for the conference.

The Speaker of the Nova Scotia Legislature, Hon. Keith Bain, MLA said: *“On behalf of the Canadian Region of CPA, we are proud to welcome you to Halifax for this gathering of Parliamentarians. We hope that throughout the conference, the exchanges and workshops will be fruitful and that relationships will be forged and hopefully continue to flourish when you return home.”*

Delegates heard from a number of musical and dance performances during the opening ceremony including an indigenous blessing and drummers, THR!VE choir for girls, Legacy Circus, BreakSpace breakdancing group and members of the Canadian Armed Forces.

65th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference: CPA Officer Elections

Several elections took place at the 65th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference:

CPA Chairperson: During the 65th CPA General Assembly, CPA Members elected Hon. Ian Liddell-Grainger, MP (United Kingdom) as the new Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee. He has held the role of Acting Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee since April 2021. The CPA Chairperson is elected for three years by the CPA General Assembly and works with the CPA Secretary-General to lead the Association.

CPA Treasurer: During the 65th CPA General Assembly, Members endorsed the appointment of Hon. Shri Anurag Sharma, MP, Member of the Lok Sabha at the Parliament of India as the new CPA Treasurer. The Treasurer, who is a Member of the Association nominated by the CPA Executive Committee, is appointed for three years by the General Assembly and works with the CPA Headquarters Secretariat to monitor the finances of the Association. The CPA Treasurer also joins the Trustees board of the Association.

CPA Vice-Chairperson: The 65th CPA General Assembly was followed by a meeting of the new CPA Executive Committee during which Hon. Osei Kyei Mensah Bonsu, MP, Majority Leader and Member of the Parliament of Ghana was confirmed by Members of the CPA Executive Committee 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.

Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Chairperson: Hon. Dr Zainab Gimba, MP (Nigeria) was elected as the new Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) and pledged to renew the effort to increase women's representation and political participation in Parliaments across the Commonwealth. The new CWP Chairperson was elected for a three-year term at the CWP Business Meeting held at the seventh triennial CWP Conference that took place in Canada as part of the wider 65th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

CPA Small Branches Chairperson: Hon. Joy Burch, MLA, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of the Australian Capital Territory was elected as the new Chairperson of the CPA Small Branches and pledged that the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) would have a strengthened and renewed focus on assisting CPA Small Branches and their Parliaments and Legislatures. Members attending the 38th CPA Small Branches Conference elected the new Chairperson of CPA Small Branches. She has held the role of Acting Chairperson of CPA Small Branches since February 2020. The role of Chairperson of 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 Small Branches to the governing body of the CPA.

65th CPA General Assembly: Key Decisions

At the 65th CPA General Assembly held in Halifax, Canada, important discussions took place which agreed a new road map to CPA's goal of recognition as an international, interparliamentary organisation. Members approved a number of important constitutional amendments for the CPA including on governance and membership, Officer roles and appointments, women's representation as full delegates to CPC and on the CPA Executive Committee, representation of the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) network with a new Officer role for the CPwD Chairperson, provision for virtual/hybrid meetings, rules for elections, increasing the population threshold for CPA Small Branches and the regional rotation for future appointments to the role of CPA Secretary-General.

The 65th CPA General Assembly also approved the application submitted by the Parliament of Maldives (People's Majlis) to form the CPA Maldives Branch and re-join the CPA's membership. Full details of all the CPA Constitutional amendments that were approved at the 65th CPA General Assembly will be sent to all CPA Branches and published on the CPA website.

Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities network meet at 65th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference and elect new CPwD Chairperson

The Regional Champions of the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) network have met at the 65th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. The meeting was chaired by the CPA Canada Regional Champion, Hon. Carla Qualtrough, PC, MP, Minister of Employment, Workforce, Development and Disability Inclusion from the Parliament of Canada. During the meeting, Hon. Laura Kanushu, MP (CPwD Africa Regional Champion) from the Parliament of Uganda was elected as the new CPwD Chairperson and Senator Hon. Paul Richards (CPwD Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Regional Champion) from the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago was elected as CPwD Vice-Chairperson.

Future CPA Governance Meetings

During the 65th General Assembly held at the 65th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Canada, the following future CPA governance meetings and conferences were discussed:

- 2023 Mid-Year CPA Executive Committee Meeting – to be hosted by the CPA Gibraltar Branch and the Parliament of Gibraltar in March 2023 (final dates to be confirmed).
- 66th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) – to be hosted by the CPA Ghana Branch and Parliament of Ghana in Accra, Ghana from 30 September to 6 October 2023.
- 2024 Mid-Year CPA Executive Committee Meeting (virtual) – details to be confirmed.
- 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) – to be hosted by the CPA New South Wales Branch and Parliament of New South Wales in November 2024.

65TH COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE – WORKSHOPS:

Main conference theme: ‘Inclusive, Accessible, Accountable and Strong Parliaments: the Cornerstone of Democracy and Essential for Development’

The eight main conference workshops and their recommendations were as follows:

Workshop A: Remaining Relevant in Response to a Pandemic: The Role and Responsibilities of Parliament (CPA Canada Region Host Topic)

This workshop explored how emergency situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, results in the Executive branch assuming greater power to quickly mitigate the situation, often at Parliament’s expense.

This can be dangerous because it undermines the Legislative branch at a time when parliamentary scrutiny and oversight is required. Thus, the workshop sought to emphasise Parliament’s continuing importance in times of crisis and the role it plays when providing oversight of emergency responses, while further assessing the need for Parliaments to modernise themselves so they can better respond to handling crises.

The workshop illustrated that Parliament itself became a confluence for the COVID-19 pandemic's impacts, as Canadian Parliamentarians at both the federal and provincial level adapted to the virus' effects both within and outside the Legislature.

Delegates heard about the benefits and shortcomings of adopting hybrid sittings and electronic voting at various jurisdictional levels to prevent the transmission of the virus. Generally, attendees agreed that the lack of scrutiny by Parliament during the pandemic resulted in an upsurge of 'government overreach' by the Executive branch, although these were checked in most cases. Furthermore, they discussed the viability of continuing hybrid and electronic voting in a post-pandemic world, as a means of overcoming geographic and personal hindrances to attending Parliament, as well as the possible shortcomings associated with these practices.

Attendees also raised national experiences of the pandemic and commented on their shared experiences of increasing public reliance on their constituency offices due to the pandemic's impact on the economy, public health, and food supply, among other areas. Finally, the role of Parliament in planning for the next pandemic was debated by Members, some of whom raised the challenges posed by said planning, due to a myriad of ever-changing public interests within their home countries.

The following recommendation was endorsed as follows:

Parliaments (both large and small) should develop contingency plans for future pandemics and crises. The contingency plan should facilitate the discharge of Parliaments in all of its roles and responsibilities and make allowances for procedural changes, public consultation where possible and be adaptable in accordance with the specific crisis.

Workshop B: Role of Parliaments in Achieving Sustainable Development (Talk show and Q&A)

With seventeen (17) new goals including ending poverty and hunger, realising gender equality, reducing inequalities, and ensuring climate action, it was clear when they were agreed that the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) had high hopes for the potential of the period from 2015 to 2030. However, the role that Legislatures around the world play in ensuring the implementation of these goals remains an often-unexplored topic. This session discussed this theme and provided guidance to elected representatives on the role they can play in ensuring the implementation of the SDGs.

The session also addressed sustainable development outside the SDGs and what other mechanisms there are for measuring progress on the topic within Commonwealth jurisdictions and the wider world. Financing for development

was a key theme in addition to how Parliaments can encourage such support for development projects in their oversight of this work.

The format for this workshop consisted of individual panellist presentations, a Q&A period followed by an audience exercise answering three key questions related to the SDGs.

The following recommendation was endorsed:

Members of Commonwealth Parliaments should familiarise themselves with the SDGs, their indicators and the mechanisms that they have to contribute toward their implementation by 2030.

Workshop C: A People's Parliament: Accessibility through Innovation (Plenary and Q&A)

Where Legislatures may have previously acted as bastions of traditions and norms, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically accelerated transformations in parliamentary life. In many cases, CPA Branches were required to undergo years of modernisation in a matter of weeks, if not instantaneously. There is now a question of whether this spirit of adaptation and innovation will continue in the medium to long-term.

This workshop looked specifically at innovations that have increased the accessibility of Parliaments for those people the institution represents. The session investigated links between parliamentary representation and the digital transition and at the pros and cons of virtual/hybrid approaches. The session also explored the non-technological adaptations and approaches that have emerged during the pandemic and whether they will continue to endure.

In India, technology has strengthened democracy and brought India's democratic institutions closer to the people. While Parliament itself has become increasingly digitized, social media and mobile applications allow people to access broadcasts and information about Parliament from their mobile devices.

House visits and 'meet-the-people' sessions are used by Parliamentarians in Singapore to stay connected with their constituents, while targeted outreach services, vaccination dialogues, mobile health checks, and legal clinics allow Parliamentarians to provide information and services directly to constituents in their communities.

In Western Cape, virtual and hybrid sittings of the Provincial Parliament allowed parliamentary business to continue despite COVID-related restrictions. Other measures, such as holding the opening of Parliament in communities away from the parliamentary precinct, helped connect the Provincial Parliament and its Members with the people they serve, while a

board game was created as a tool for raising awareness of how Parliament works.

The following recommendation was endorsed as follows:

Parliaments should remain open and accessible institutions to all members of the public that they represent and should, where possible and appropriate, explore modern and innovative approaches to meeting this requirement.

Workshop D: Professional Development for Parliamentarians - Opportunities and Challenges for Small Parliaments (Small Branches topic)

This workshop explored approaches taken, particularly by small Parliaments, to provide professional development aimed primarily at elected representatives. The challenges in introducing or implementing such programmes were discussed, as well as the approaches that have been taken to date. It was noted that a successful professional development program requires engagement and support from within, and that Parliamentarians themselves need to be involved.

The New South Wales Legislative Assembly elected a new Speaker in 2019. Under their speakership work began to create a professional development program for Members, and in May 2020, a program was e-launched to the New South Wales parliamentary community.

The School of Continuing Studies at McGill University offers professional development programs for Parliamentarians and has done so for 10 years. Their programs are designed for busy adults, combine theory and practice and are offered fully online or blended with a 1-week residential course at McGill. These programs have had over 500 graduates from more than 50 countries.

Recognising the challenges faced by small Parliaments, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association launched the CPA Parliamentary Academy in May 2021. This online resource is available to all CPA members.

Delegates heard how ParlAmericas works to support the professional development of small states' Parliamentarians in the Caribbean Region. Through collaboration with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and other organisations, they are working to coordinate services and streamline offerings to better serve the professional development needs of Parliamentarians.

The following recommendation was endorsed as follows:

A core responsibility of all Parliaments (both large and small) should include the provision or facilitation of professional development for Parliamentarians. Such provision should be innovative and adaptive, and tailored to the needs of new and or more experienced Members.

Workshop E: Access to Assistive Technologies: Implementation of Standards Across Commonwealth Parliaments (Plenary and Q&A)

This session explored the challenges that persons with disabilities face when interacting with Parliament, especially the experiences of Members of Parliament. It included a presentation covering some of the most accessible technologies from an assistive technology expert. It also included a discussion of what resources are available and what are needed for Parliamentarians to implement assistive technologies without duplicating effort.

Important progress has been made in the decade since the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), however this has not been enough. Despite constituting approximately 15% of the world's population, persons with disabilities continue to be disproportionately represented in governance and at all levels of decision-making. Persons with disabilities historically and globally have been the subject of cultural and legal hindrances which have limited their ability over generations to reach their full potential. Today, persons with disabilities participate in terms of real numbers in a minimal way in the political/parliamentary process despite their representation in populations globally.

Inclusive and representative Parliaments are crucial to ensuring a healthy and fair democracy. Legislative and policy work can have a tremendous impact on the lives of persons with disabilities, both articulating the rights that persons with disabilities are entitled to and protecting them from discrimination in political, economic and social spheres. Parliament has a particular responsibility to serve as a role model for society and to lead the way in creating a disability-responsive government at the national and local levels.

This workshop comprised of a review of some of the assistive technologies currently available followed by a panel discussion about experiences as Members of Parliament with disabilities, successes in implementing changes, identifying gaps of what is needed for further change, and what can be done on a policy level.

The following recommendation was endorsed:

Parliaments must adopt assistive technologies to enhance the accessibility of their institutions to persons with disabilities.

Workshop F: Building Gender Sensitive Parliaments (Gender topic)

Women Parliamentarians have held the responsibility of protecting and securing women's rights and gender equality in Parliaments for many years. Through networking, they have helped to shift this responsibility to the

Commonwealth Parliaments in which they serve, the institutions responsible for representing the needs of all citizens.

Women represent half of the world's population, but gender inequality is clearly visible throughout Parliamentary Committees, in legislative and government leadership roles, within parliamentary organisations, and especially political parties. The workshop participants recognised the importance and value of gender-sensitive Parliaments and delegates provided thought-provoking commentary on the successes and failures of their Parliaments in the pursuit of gender sensitivity.

Women Parliamentarians reflected upon the support they receive from, and aspire for, from their male colleagues. Male Parliamentarians present listened and commented on how inequality in the workplace, affects the ability of women to run, serve and succeed in office. A male participant recognised his own responsibility in making Parliaments truly democratic and provided examples of the changes his Parliament has undertaken to support the equality of women and LGBTQIA+ citizens. Another Parliamentarian reflected upon how male political candidates with families are not questioned about their ability to serve in office, but female candidates are unjustly subjected to criticism.

Delegates discussed how Parliaments should create a culture for the equal participation of women and underrepresented genders. The assembled stressed the importance of Parliaments responding, acting and being held accountable to make their institutions gender sensitive.

The workshop included presentations from Parliamentarians from the Northwest Territories (Canada), the KwaZulu-Natal Legislature (South Africa) and an academic specialising in politics and gender. The panellists reminded delegates that CPA has resources available to help institutions become gender sensitive Parliaments.

The original recommendation for the workshop was amended and approved as follows:

Commonwealth national and sub-national Legislatures should strongly support the promotion of gender-sensitive Parliaments and report progress annually at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

Workshop G: Youth Roundtable - Cyberbullying: Youth, Trolling and Mental Health (Youth topic)

This Youth Roundtable session was focused on the theme of cyberbullying, with special emphasis on its implications for youth engagement in society and democracy. The session, which was divided into two parts, was chaired by the Deputy Speaker of the Parliament of Saint Lucia.

The first part of the session consisted of presentations from two panellists. The first panellist, a Member of Parliament of the United Kingdom, delivered remarks focusing on the online harm faced by UK Parliamentarians, and what support mechanisms are in place or being developed to respond to that harm. The second panellist, a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Nova Scotia, delivered remarks focusing on online harassment of young people and elected officials in Nova Scotia, and the difficulties faced in preventing or addressing that harassment. The panellists' presentations were followed by a question-and-answer session which saw enthusiastic and passionate input from delegates in the audience.

The second part of the session saw delegates divided into break-out groups, with each group being tasked with generating a set of strategies to deal with cyberbullying as an issue. The session then reconvened in plenary to hear the results of the break-out discussions. The break-out discussion themes and issues included what campaigns against cyberbullying should focus on, what success stories exist in the Commonwealth and beyond with respect to responses to cyberbullying, what mental health support can be offered to victims of online harm and how Parliaments can maintain oversight of social media companies whose platforms are used for cyberbullying.

At the end of this discussion, the workshop then discussed the following recommendation:

Commonwealth Parliaments should establish, or develop, existing mechanisms that support their younger Members when experiencing poor mental health or abuse online.

Issues with the proposed recommendation were discussed, and various suggestions for potential amendments were made. Ultimately, the recommendation was not explicitly endorsed, noted or rejected.

Workshop H: The Climate Emergency: Are Parliaments Holding Governments to Account? (Plenary and Q&A)

This session explored the climate emergency and whether and how Parliaments are holding governments to account in combatting climate change. Participants heard that the goal to limit temperature rise to 1.5C is only just possible if we make immediate reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

Some of the issues that were discussed were the failure of most governments to meet their own climate change targets, the lack of short-term goals, and the problems with being constrained by the election cycle. In the current cost of living crisis, governments have been tempted to scale back climate promises and to lower fuel taxes. Some jurisdictions say that oil and gas

revenues are being used to lift people out of poverty, however the environment is suffering.

Small, especially island, nations who contribute very little to the world's carbon emissions are at the highest risk of climate disasters. They struggle to know how to influence larger nations with high carbon emissions to curb their continued usage of fossil fuels. Within nations, it has been recognised that disadvantaged groups such as women, children, indigenous peoples, LGBTQ+ people, and people living in poverty suffer the worst effects of climate change.

Some solutions that Parliamentarians can implement are climate change education for all Members, non-partisan working groups, and collaboration with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in educating the public on climate change. Parliamentarians can ask questions in Question Periods; propose legislation to limit climate change which will, at the least, foster debate; act as scrutineers to make sure that climate change policies are being implemented by governments; and influence budgetary decisions on climate change adaptation and mitigation as opposed to fossil fuel subsidisation.

One example of a forward-looking policy is the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Every piece of policy considered by the Welsh Parliament has to be viewed through this prism, which includes environmental issues.

The following recommendation was endorsed:

Parliaments have a responsibility to ensure that national climate laws and policies are robust, ambitious and in line with international commitments such as the Paris Agreement. Parliamentarians should, therefore, be bold in holding governments to account when progress is slow or lacking.

38TH CPA SMALL BRANCHES CONFERENCE

Conference Theme: 'Resilience and Preparedness of CPA Small Branches'

Over recent years, logistical, financial and infrastructure demands have placed huge demands on the smallest jurisdictions in the Commonwealth and Parliaments and Governments are increasingly required to prepare for different eventualities.

Commonwealth Parliamentarians met at the 38th CPA Small Branches Conference to examine the unique challenges they face. The conference discussed strategies to meet the unique developmental needs of the CPA's smallest Legislatures through key thematic seminars and development

activities that will build parliamentary capacity for CPA Small Branches and create greater opportunities for the sharing of knowledge, parliamentary strengthening and cooperation across the network.

The newly elected 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 CPA Small Branches come together to address their common difficulties, common strengths and their shared experiences.”*

Over the years, the CPA Small Branches network has highlighted the importance of tackling climate change for the Commonwealth, especially its 31 small and developing states which are often the least polluting but the first casualties of climate change.

In the margins of the conference, the CPA Small Branches Steering Committee met to discuss the strategic direction for the network. The CPA Small Branches Steering Committee comprises the CPA Small Branches Chairperson and seven Commonwealth Parliamentarians who represent the seven Regions of the CPA with Small Branches: Africa; Australia; British Isles and the Mediterranean; Canada; Caribbean, Americas and the Atlantic; Pacific; and South-East Asia.

CPA Small Branches Workshop A: Disaster Risk Preparedness for Small Jurisdictions

This session explored the range of governance mechanisms that small jurisdictions have and can implement, including through institutions, policies and legal frameworks that coordinate and oversee disaster risk preparedness. It also explored how the application of different disaster risk preparedness strategies has enabled small jurisdictions to increase their resilience and become more prepared in the face of disasters.

The workshop heard that disaster is fundamentally about people and the harms caused to communities by hazards. To better understand how to respond to disasters, consideration was given to defining the key concepts - disasters, resilience, hazards, threats, and risks. What is important in formulating a response to a disaster is not the cause of the disaster but its consequences. Emergency plans must address the most urgent information needed when disaster strikes: Who is in charge? Who is on the response team? What decisions are taken automatically? What must be considered? Where to get extra support? Ultimately, a successful response depends on asking the right questions and asking for help.

Small island jurisdictions are among the most disproportionately impacted by climate change, facing environmental vulnerabilities, and often lacking the resources and capacity to develop disaster risk and management institutions.

The workshop considered the example of Tonga, an island nation that is at high risk due to geological hazards and climate change. In response to the threats faced, the Legislative Assembly of Tonga has passed legislation to provide financial and planning tools to government react and maintains a role in scrutinising government action on emergency preparedness and management.

The following recommendation was endorsed:

Parliaments from small jurisdictions should build on and find effective ways to hold governments to account for strategies aimed at preparing for and managing disaster risk, including through the use of oversight and accountability mechanisms at their disposal.

CPA Small Branches Workshop B: Building Sustainable Economies in CPA Small Branches

This session explored the factors affecting economic growth and sustainable development in small Commonwealth countries. Although many small Commonwealth jurisdictions, including CPA Small Branches, differ in population size, geography and development progress, they share many challenges and vulnerabilities. As the workshop's Chair noted, this includes high exposure to natural disasters, climate change and global economic shocks, as well as more limited domestic revenues and opportunities for borrowing. Their vulnerabilities are also compounded by low economic diversification, often characterised by high dependence on tourism and remittances. These factors seriously hinder their economic growth prospects and ability to invest in sustainable development.

Small jurisdictions have long found solutions to many of their challenges and pursued unconventional development strategies, often with great success. These strategies have harnessed such assets as innovation, ocean resources and local community knowledge. Delegates heard about some of the challenges faced by the Cayman Islands and Malta in recent years, as well as the efforts to address them, from two panellists.

Notable among these challenges are the COVID-19 pandemic and an increase in the frequency and intensity of tropical cyclones. Delegates were also given an overview of the work being done by the Institute of Island Studies on Prince Edward Island in Canada to increase understanding of the issues faced by islands around the world regarding sustainable development.

Parliaments and Parliamentarians are well placed to use their legislative, oversight and representative functions to better governance through more

effective democratic and accountable institutions. This will help ensure that the right policy decisions are being taken by government and resources are being allocated for the mutual benefit of the national economy and the needs of individuals and communities.

The following recommendation was endorsed:

Through their legislative, oversight and representative functions, Parliamentarians from small jurisdictions should actively engage in economic development policies to ensure that they are responsive to all societal groups, are environmentally sensitive and are broadly aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

CPA Small Branches Workshop C: Financial Scrutiny and Oversight: How can small Parliaments ensure effective accountability?

This workshop session explored the various methods in which small parliamentary jurisdictions can effectively implement scrutiny and oversight through accountability and responsibility. Factors that lead to successful scrutiny include the separation of powers, effective planning, inquiries, report investigation, use of appointed oversight and scrutiny Committees, and consideration of SMART recommendations.

The workshop informed on several governance procedures, including the budgeting process found in small jurisdictions and effective practices for greater budgetary efficiency. Turks and Caicos' parliamentary budget consideration was an example of a small Parliament's budgeting process. The Isle of Man's Committee processes were also presented to consider the role of Committees on financial scrutiny. Factors for more effective oversight Committees included inquiries of public expenditure, effective planning of the impacts, scope, and outcome of topics, and considering evidence and recommendations made by the public and Legislative branches.

The Public Accounts Committee was discussed extensively as an essential tool for investigation. Factors for successful Public Accounts Committees were presented based on a handbook that studied financial oversight and development in small jurisdictions. These factors include the legal authority given to the Public Accounts Committee, in which smaller jurisdictions benefit more from a set constitution rather than Standing Orders; the Committee's resource capacities, such as the number of civil servants, the size of the Committee, and Members' skills and experience of the topics being discussed (a recommendation allowing Ministers to join Committees as Members in smaller jurisdictions was debated); and the Public Accounts Committee's motivation and willingness to fulfill its mandate in the form of Joint Committees in bi-cameral Legislatures rather than elected Members.

Efficient scrutiny and oversight in small jurisdictions differ based on the needs of the public and the goals set out by governments. However, commonalities in achieving effective administration were the main discussion in the workshop. Impacts of successful oversight implementation, including the public and the media in the scrutiny process, Committee witness protection, and enhancing the capacity of oversight systems, were debated later in the session.

The following recommendation was endorsed:

Parliaments should have the necessary independence and resources, including any necessary training and capacity building opportunities, to undertake effective financial scrutiny and oversight.

CPA Small Branches Workshop D: Wellbeing Indicators for CPA Small Branches

This workshop looked at what areas of well-being typically require more attention in smaller jurisdictions, what well-being indicators can be used to measure development and progress of these areas, and how various initiatives, policy guidelines and other frameworks can be included in the legislative process in order to champion well-being in these jurisdictions.

The panel discussed how well-being measures overall can bring societal progress in ways that go beyond macro-economic data and statistics, such as GDP. In order to measure all factors of national growth, a country's economic, social and environmental sustainability must first be assessed in order to identify what areas need more work. Historically, smaller jurisdictions can be greater affected when there is an external disaster (i.e., COVID-19 that saw an interruption to their tourism and movement), but small economies are arguably more adept in combatting these through a greater policy flexibility aided by a closer proximity between policy-makers and constituents.

The strengths and weaknesses of such jurisdictions should be considered when determining what areas of economic, social and environmental development need to be prioritised, what indicators could be implemented in order to assess their development and how this can be done (i.e. through policy interventions). Delegates discussed and reported on common issues facing their jurisdictions. Common issues noted by delegates included the cost of housing and encouraging young people from smaller jurisdictions to return home after seeking education abroad.

The following recommendation was endorsed:

Through their legislative, oversight and representative functions, Parliamentarians from small jurisdictions should use well-being indicators to guide legislative scrutiny in order to further national growth.

7TH TRIENNIAL COMMONWEALTH WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS (CWP) CONFERENCE

Overall theme: 'BreaktheBias: Gender Equality Today for a Sustainable Tomorrow'

Women Parliamentarians from across the Commonwealth have gathered in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada for the 7th triennial conference of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP), held ahead of the wider 65th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

The CWP Conference was opened by the Vice-Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians, Hon. Valerie Woods, MP, Speaker of the House of Representatives, National Assembly of Belize who welcomed delegates. The CWP President (2022), Hon. Myrna Dreidger, MP, Speaker of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly spoke to the CWP conference 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. The CWP Conference also heard from Members from the Parliaments of Canada, India, Uganda, Sri Lanka, Australia, Malaysia, Scotland, Gujarat, Trinidad and Tobago, United Kingdom and New Zealand as well as experts from the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), the World Trade Organization.

Hon. Dr Zainab Gimba, MP from the House of Representatives at the Federal Parliament of Nigeria was elected as the new Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians in succession to the outgoing CWP Chairperson, Hon. Shandana Gulzar Khan (Pakistan).

Ahead of the CWP Conference, the CWP Steering Committee met in Canada representing the nine CPA Regions: Africa; Asia; Australia; British Isles and the Mediterranean; Canada; Caribbean, Americas and the Atlantic; India; Pacific; and South-East Asia. Members of the Steering Committee also re-elected Hon. Valerie Woods, MP (Belize) as the CWP Vice-Chairperson.

CWP Workshop A: Empowering Women Parliamentarians and Promoting Diversity / Intersectionality

This workshop explored how Parliaments and Legislatures can empower women Parliamentarians and better accommodate and promote increased diversity. In particular, this session looked at the importance of women and other underrepresented groups, including persons with disabilities, serving in public office, especially positions of parliamentary leadership.

The first panellist highlighted the increasing presence of women in political life in India and emphasised that true democracy can only be realised when all segments of society have a voice. The second panellist from Uganda explained how women with disabilities are often the most vulnerable members of society and are too often left out of the conversation about political representation. The Member emphasised that it comes down to political will to have dedicated spaces for persons with disabilities in parliamentary leadership. Delegates also heard from the panellist from the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) about effective steps that can be taken to close the representation gap and achieve a gender-sensitive Parliament.

The discussion at the conclusion of the workshop explored various issues in respect of women's inclusion in political life, including youth engagement, the effectiveness of gender quotas in Parliaments and how to ensure substantive participation of women, and the need to engage political parties to encourage diversity within their membership and why this is important.

The following recommendation was endorsed:

In promoting women's empowerment and greater diversity in public office, Parliamentarians and Legislatures should take an institution-centric approach towards lasting change.

CWP Workshop B: Effectively Combating all forms of Abuse and Harassment in Parliament

This workshop looked at the issue of harassment and abuse in Parliament and the harmful impact it has on Parliamentarians, staff and Parliament as an institution. It considered the role of Parliamentarians and what they can do to combat the issue in Parliament. The session also allowed attendees to learn and share best practices that Commonwealth Parliaments can put in place as mechanisms towards solving the issue.

Women can face significant difficulties when entering politics in male-dominated environments. The workshop considered the challenges faced by women entering politics in Sri Lanka where there are few women legislators. Education was advocated as critical to combating sexual discrimination and achieving a culture of equality.

In Australia, revelations about sexual misconduct in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces resulted in the Australian Human Rights Commission conducting an independent review. The workshop heard about the efforts to implement the Commission's recommendations. In seeking to advance the role of women in Parliament, it was recognised that achieving equal representation is just the first step; changing the culture of Parliaments is the greater challenge.

Women in politics are subject to widespread harassment, sexist remarks and abuse. The workshop delved into the legal framework and policies applicable to sexual harassment in Malaysia, where women's representation in Parliament remains below the global average.

In Manitoba, the development of a policy on sexual harassment was a top priority for the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. The importance of achieving all-caucus support, of thorough legal review, of proper definitions and of the examination of complaints by an independent investigator with competence in such investigations was emphasised.

The following recommendation was endorsed:

National and sub-national legislatures across the Commonwealth should ensure that their Parliaments have policies and legislation in place to effectively tackle harassment and abuse in all its forms for all persons in Parliament.

CWP Workshop C: Financial Empowerment of Women and Gender-Sensitive Budgeting

This session explored the importance of Parliament's use of a gender-based lens in the development of budgets, policies and legislation to ensure and promote equality and the gender-inclusive economic empowerment of women across the Commonwealth. Particular focus was placed on recognising that the challenges and barriers that women face in terms of financial literacy and access to support varies from region to region. Some of the potential tools that Parliaments and Parliamentarians have to address these shortfalls such as Gender Equality Indices, audits, policies and Committee work were addressed. The collection of data and statistics was also discussed as an important tool to understand the disparities women face in terms of wage and employment inequity, access to government support, procurement and even trust in government.

The discussion included barriers women face in areas where gender neutrality may be mistakenly assumed. For example, the rules found in trade agreements are not written in gender specific language. However, the social and legal environments in some regions may limit a woman's right to own property, access capital, education, health care and travel. These limitations highlight the importance of applying these rules through a gender-based lens. These limitations negatively impact access to traditional financial services which in turn impacts access to trade. Therefore, Parliaments must establish laws that overcome these obstacles.

The following recommendation was endorsed:

Commonwealth Parliaments must ensure that all budgets incorporate a gender lens and all policies and agreements are gender sensitive.

CWP Workshop D: Promoting Gender-Sensitive Parliaments Post-Pandemic

This workshop focused on the challenges of actively recruiting women to enter politics after the pandemic. Issues that were faced by women Parliamentarians pre-pandemic have intensified during the pandemic.

The Speaker of the House of Representatives of Trinidad and Tobago stressed that Parliaments should actively work at the recruitment and retention of women working in parliamentary administration and other internal staff, not just as elected officials. Parliament should be a place where women want to contribute; not just a place to work.

A Member of the House of Commons of the UK stated that political parties have been left to fix the problem of gender equality, but feels that Parliaments have a pivotal role in ensuring that more women are elected. The Member urged all of CPA to support women to become Parliamentarians as after more than a decade of work, we have not made as much progress as needed.

A Member of the House of Commons of Canada discussed the need for more family friendly sitting hours and improving the quality of life for Parliamentarians. Hybrid sittings gave the opportunity for Parliamentarians to be in their constituency and vote in the House without travel. There is political will amongst Parliaments to explore the idea of virtual participation to facilitate participation for people that would traditionally be unable to contribute due to the working hours required.

The third panelist, a Member of the Parliament of New Zealand, acknowledged how hard COVID-19 has been on all communities but has also provided an opportunity to think how we run our Parliaments. The focus for New Zealand in the past five years has been on making the Parliament more accessible and family friendly which in turn can change the dynamics and atmosphere within Parliament. It was suggested that the pressure and tension in Parliament can be released by the addition of children and small dogs.

The following recommendation was endorsed:

Commonwealth Parliaments should use lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic to proactively explore gender sensitive practices and policies.

56TH GENERAL MEETING OF THE SOCIETY-OF-CLERKS-AT-THE-TABLE (SOCATT) IN COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTS

The 56th Meeting of the Society-of-Clerks-at-the-Table (SoCATT) took place in the margins of the 65th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. The meeting brought together Parliamentary Clerks and parliamentary staff from Commonwealth Parliaments to discuss the latest legislative practices and to share best practice.

The Co-Chairs of the meeting were from the Parliament of Canada - Mr Gérald Lafrenière, Interim Clerk of the Senate and Clerk of the Parliaments and Chief Legislative Services Officer, and Mr Charles Robert, Clerk of the House of Commons.

Presentations were made during the two-day meeting by a number of different Parliamentary Clerks on subjects including:

- the Canadian Parliamentary system and recent developments in Canada;
- Parliamentary Projects at the UK House of Commons;
- Sessional orders as a vehicle for procedural reform in the New South Wales Legislative Council;
- The e-Parliament - a novel digital approach in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan;
- Procedural and administrative impact of the truck convoy protest in Ottawa;
- Victoria's gender equity action plan;
- Relevance and importance of zero hours in the Parliamentary system of India;
- Role and function of Parliamentary Committees in the Rayja Sabha, India.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Mr Matthew Hamlyn, SoCATT Secretary (United Kingdom) outlined a number of SoCATT reports and decisions, and proposals for the agenda for the 57th SoCATT General Meeting were agreed.