

Report on the 66th Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference

Accra, Ghana

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'The Commonwealth Charter 10 years on: Values and Principles for Parliaments to Uphold'



The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) is a network of 180 Parliaments and Legislatures across the Commonwealth that aims to promote and support parliamentary democracy and good governance.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) is the annual Conference of the CPA. It is the largest annual gathering of Commonwealth Parliamentarians, who come together to discuss global parliamentary and political issues. Each year, the Conference is hosted by a different Commonwealth Parliament.

The Conference period includes a number of elements, such as:

- the General Assembly, the CPA's supreme authority constituted of delegates from each CPA Branch
- meetings of the Executive Committee
- the CPA Small Branches Conference

- the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Conference or associated meetings
- meeting of the Regional Champions of the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) network
- meetings for parliamentary clerks and officials)
- learning and development workshops for Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff

The theme of this year's Conference was '*The Commonwealth Charter 10 years on: Values and Principles for Parliaments to Uphold*'. 2023 marks the 10th anniversary of the Commonwealth Charter which outlines the principles and values of the Commonwealth.

It was attended by over 600 Parliamentarians and Parliamentary Clerks representing Parliaments and Legislatures from across the Commonwealth.

This was the first time that the CPA Ghana Branch and the Parliament of Ghana hosted the CPA's annual conference and is the 17th time that the CPA Africa Region has hosted the CPA's annual conference.



Monday 2nd October

Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP)

CWP aim to further gender equality and representation in Parliaments

The CWP Business meeting was opened by the Chairperson of the CWP Hon. Dr Zainab Gimba MP, Member of the House of Representatives, National Assembly of Nigeria who welcomed delegates and updated on the CWP activities since the 65th CWP Conference.

There was a discussion about the need to continue to increase women's representation and participation in Parliaments across the Commonwealth.

Notably, this meeting was the first CPC held since the CPA introduced new measures aiming to ensure equal gender representation at its annual conference resulting in a 60/40 male/female gender ratio amongst voting delegates.

Delegates debated the time and format of future CWP Business meetings and conferences as well as the methods for reporting of CWP activities through the Regional Secretariats.

UN Women event: 'Ending Discrimination in Law: Celebrating the Gains'

Panel session on mapping discriminatory laws across the Commonwealth.

The event highlighted the support available to achieve gender-responsive legislation and advance state commitments around global goals pertaining to gender equality.

Dr Beatrice Duncan, Senior Policy Advisor, Rule of Law and Maureen Shonge, Policy Specialist WPP from UN Women spoke about the recent trends in discriminatory laws, successful reforms and how they were achieved.



Panellists: Hon. Donatille Mukabalisa, Speaker of the Parliament of Rwanda and Ms Marsha Caddle, MP, House of Assembly of Barbados.



Wednesday 4th November

Official Opening of the 66th CPA Conference

The Vice-Patron of the CPA, His Excellency Nana Akufo-Addo, President of Ghana, officially opened the Conference.

His Excellency urged Commonwealth Parliamentarians to work together to uphold democratic principles and the values of the Commonwealth.

The CPA Vice-Patron and President of Ghana said: “The world is still experiencing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which compelled us to work together to survive. As we exit the doldrums of the pandemic, the world has been hit again with a series of geo-political crises, including the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the recent coup d’états in some parts of Africa. These crises are a threat to the foundation of our democratic values and institutions, and a clarion call for us to work together to address this new challenge. It is a call on all Parliaments to act. I urge Commonwealth Parliamentarians to reflect deeply on the goal of the values and principles in the Commonwealth Charter and focus your discussions on the goal of attaining and maintaining the democratic ethos of this noble community. I commend the Commonwealth

for its commitment to the rule of law, open and tolerant societies, equality for all and respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms.”

Delegates to the 66th CPC were welcomed by the CPA President (2022-2023), Rt Hon. Alban Bagbin, MP, Speaker of the Parliament of Ghana who said at the opening ceremony.



Workshop B: Workshop B: Gender Quotas in Parliament - a means to an end? (Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians topic)

The workshop evaluated the effectiveness of gender quotas in Parliaments.

The panel consisted of:

- Hon. Savia Orphanidou, Cyprus (Chair)
- Hon. Selima Ahmad MP, Bangladesh
- Hon. Verinica Sesay MP, Sierra Leone
- Julie Ballington, Policy Advisor, Political Participation UN Women

Despite progress made in many areas, women’s representation in Parliaments remains inadequate and there are a number of barriers to women’s political participation including Structural Barriers (political parties are the gatekeepers, lack of resources for campaigning), Lack of political will (politics is historically dominated by men, resistance to change) and Harmful norms and violence (gender-based violence against women politicians).

Gender quotas have emerged as a promising strategy to address this disparity for an equitable distribution of power and influence.

Two Members from Bangladesh and Sierra Leone outlined the efforts in their Parliaments to achieve gender equality including constitutional amendments and proportional representation as well as some of the barriers facing women such as generational issues.

The UN representative highlighted that we are far from equal in terms of women in Parliament. There are 26.5% women in national parliaments in the world, 24.7% women in national parliaments in the Commonwealth countries. Concerningly, at the current rate of progress, gender parity in Parliaments would not be reached in national Legislatures before 2063 globally if further action is not taken.

There is a disparity for women in executive positions with 22.8% of women cabinet ministers worldwide and that number is 22.1% in Commonwealth countries.

Globally, 26 countries are headed by a woman as head of state/government and this number is only 7 for Commonwealth countries.

There are 15 countries with legislated gender quotas in the Commonwealth.

The recommendation was unanimously endorsed by workshop delegates that:

Parliaments of the Commonwealth, with less than 30% women Members, should implement a percentage of gender quotas through legislative means or via political party candidate selections.

Workshop F: 20 Years of the Latimer House Principles on the Separation of Powers: Is it working?

This workshop recognised the role of the CPA in drafting the original 'Commonwealth Latimer House Principles on the Separation of Powers' along with other Commonwealth organisations, but also outlined that all Commonwealth jurisdictions have a role in implementing them.

Independence of Parliamentarians: Parliamentarians must be able to carry out their legislative and constitutional functions in accordance with the Constitution, free from unlawful interference.

Examples of their independence (established in various sections of the Constitution) include Freedom of Speech, Security of Tenure: expulsion and revocation of appointment, Salaries and Remuneration, Autonomy of Management.

Panellists from Trinidad and Tobago, Malaysia and Australia outlined how their Parliaments implement the separation of powers and the challenges that it can bring.

It was recognised that during the COVID-19 pandemic, some Parliaments enacted procedures in contravention of the separation of powers.

It was suggested that a Parliamentary Service Act could be introduced as had been proposed in Malaysia.

The presenter from Derby University spoke about the principle of veto powers by the Executive that operates in several Commonwealth jurisdictions and whether this promotes democracy or is antithetical to it.

Trinidad and Tobago discussed the role of gender and diversity in governance. Measures may be taken where possible and appropriate, to ensure that the holders of all public offices reflect the composition of the community in terms of gender, ethnicity, social and religious groups and religious balance.

At present, in Trinidad and Tobago women representation in Parliament is 31%. In March 2023 the Parliament launched a parliamentary group for past and present women legislators, collaboration with the UNDP and UN Women and the Parliament has facilitated training to all members on gender budgeting and gender mainstreaming and they were the first Caribbean country to host the Young Women in Leadership Program in collaboration with PARLAmericas in March 2020.

Workshop G: The Commonwealth Charter: A Charter for all Human Rights, or just some?

The workshop deliberated how Parliamentarians and Civil Society Organisations could promote and uphold human rights values in the Commonwealth.

The panel consisted of members from KwaZulu-Natal, Turks and Caicos Islands, Scotland and the Commonwealth Equality Network and the Ghana Human Rights and Justice Commission highlighted gender equality, protection of the rights of LGBT+ persons, capacity-building, disability and refugees' rights.

CPA Members were encouraged to promote human rights legislation and policies in their respective jurisdictions. The need to respect cultural rights were, however, expressed by some participants.

The workshop, by majority, endorsed the following recommendation that:

The Commonwealth Charter should apply to all Commonwealth citizens irrespective of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age or political views and Parliaments should be actively working to promote the human rights of all.



Thursday 5th November

General Assembly

Key decisions and outcomes:

- CPA Status - Welcomed the legal and financial advice, and work undertaken so far to enable the CPA to be able to create a new non-charitable organisation later in 2023.
- Annual Report - Noted the CPA Annual Report for the reporting period of January to December 2022.
- Approved CPA Secretary-General's annual appraisal and application for a second and final term.
- CPA Membership Report - Noted the suspended CPA Branches, and that Regional Representatives and CPA Branch and Regional Secretaries continue to be encouraged to engage with defaulting Branches in their respective Regions to settle outstanding Branch fees or to agree a payment plan as soon as possible.
- CPA Future Membership Subscriptions - Agreed the proposal for membership fees to increase in line with the revised budget and the recommendation from the CPA Executive Committee, by 4% for both 2024 and 2025.
- Audited Report and Financial Statements: year end 31 December 2022 - Received the approved and signed.
- Budgets and Financial Management Reports - Received and approved
- Internal Auditors - Agreed to reappoint internal auditors Sayer Vincent Auditors.
- Report of the Working Group on CPC Modalities - Approved and adopted the recommendations
- Matters Submitted by CPA Branches to the 66th CPA General Assembly - Endorsed the motion submitted by the CPA Isle of Man Branch noting the work of the Commonwealth Association of Public Accounts Committees (CAPAC) and calling for strong and independent Public Accounts or equivalent Committees to sustain and promote the highest standards of public financial oversight, and encouraging Public Accounts Committees in the CPA to avail themselves of free membership of CAPAC in order to pursue these aims and to share best practice.

- Network Reports - Received and endorsed reports of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Chairperson, Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) Chairperson and the CPA Small Branches Chairperson.
- Future CPC Conferences - Encouraged CPA Branches to put forward offers to host
- Election of new Regional Representatives on the CPA Executive Committee

The General Assembly included a topical debate on food security and sustainability in the Commonwealth, with presenters from CPA Branches including Queensland, Tanzania, Canada, Isle of Man and Turks and Caicos Islands.

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 last year to recognise and highlight inspirational and active Parliamentarians for excelling in their field.

2023 Commonwealth Parliamentarian of the Year Award: Hon. Nelly Mutti, MP, Speaker of the National Assembly of Zambia in recognition of her parliamentary service and her commitment to transparency in parliamentary processes. This nomination also emphasised the Speaker's contributions to upholding the rule of law and her dedication to ensuring the citizens of Zambia have quick and easy access to information.

2023 Parliamentary Equity and Diversity Award: Hon. Ntombi Lentheng Mekgwe, MPL, Speaker of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature in South Africa in recognition of her parliamentary service and her commitment to gender mainstreaming and the promotion of women's empowerment, the work of the Multi-Party Women's Caucus in Gauteng, and the sector Parliaments (including youth, LGBTQIA+, elderly citizens and women).

2023 Parliamentarian Life-time Achievement Award: Hon. Myrna Driedger, MLA, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba in recognition of her parliamentary service and her commitment and contributions to the CWP network, particularly in the CPA Canada Region, as well as her work encouraging young women and girls to become active in politics and her 25 years of promoting the education of youth around the work of Parliament.

2023 New Parliamentarian Award: Hon. Tanya August-Hanson, MLC, Member of The Isle of Man Legislative Council in recognition of her contributions to promoting parliamentary democracy and engagement amongst young people, her role as an ambassador for the CPA, and her pioneering of the concept of Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) between Parliamentarians and the Government.

Next General Assembly will be held in New South Wales, Australia in 2024.