



PARLIAMENT
REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO



Office Of The Parliament Of
The Republic Of Trinidad And Tobago

REPORT ON THE 62ND COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY

C O N F E R E N C E



**Collaborative
Commonwealth**

Unity, Diversity and
Common Challenges

11-17 December 2016

London, United Kingdom



The Commonwealth Parliamentary
Conference is the annual conference of
the Commonwealth Parliamentary
Association (CPA).

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Background

Introduction

1. The 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference took place from December 11-17, 2016 and was hosted by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Headquarters Secretariat. Over 400 Members and Clerks representing Parliaments and legislatures from across the Commonwealth attended the Conference. The main theme for 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference was: **Collaborative Commonwealth: Unity, Diversity and Common Challenges**.
2. The meeting was chaired by the Chairperson of the CPA International Executive Committee, Hon. Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury MP, Speaker of the Parliament of Bangladesh. It also included the 35th Small Branches Conference (SBC) and the 5th Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Triennial Conference.
3. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference is the annual conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Global political issues and developments in the parliamentary system are analyzed in conference debates among leading Parliamentarians representing Parliaments and Legislatures throughout the Commonwealth.

Delegation

The Trinidad and Tobago delegation comprised the following persons-

Hon. Bridgid Mary Annisette-George, MP

(Leader of the Delegation)

Sen. Nigel De Freitas

Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly, MP

Sen. Khadijah Ameen

Ms. Chantal A. La Roche

Conference Activities

Official Opening Ceremony



4. The official opening of the conference was held on Wednesday December 14, 2016. During the opening ceremony, the Chairperson of the CPA International Executive Committee, Hon. Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, MP, Speaker of the Parliament of Bangladesh, urged Commonwealth Parliamentarians to work together to find common solutions to global issues. Dr. Chaudhury commented as follows: *"The diverse nature of the membership provides the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association with a unique position within the parliamentary community to offer a comprehensive perspective on how to strengthen parliamentary democracy Commonwealth-wide and discuss new and innovative approaches on how to do so."*
5. The gathering was also addressed by Commonwealth Secretary-General, Rt Hon. Patricia Scotland QC who likened the conference to a bee-hive: *"The Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference is like a beehive. It buzzes with pollinators whose work will result in fruit throughout the Commonwealth. Thanks to Commonwealth Parliamentarians coming together, law reform and progressive social and economic development are accelerated. The Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Mr. Akbar Khan*

also delivered a welcome address during which he focused on Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's *"diversity yet shared values of democracy"*.

6. Delegates were treated to a performance by the Commonwealth Youth Choir during the ceremony.

Fifth Triennial Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Conference

7. The **Fifth Triennial Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Conference** also commenced on December 14, with the theme **"Political Violence against Women"**. The **Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP)** was founded in 1989 to increase the number of female elected representatives in Parliaments and legislatures across the Commonwealth and to ensure that women's issues are brought to the fore in parliamentary debate and legislation. Over 100 Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians attended the conference from 43 countries and 56 Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Branches across the Commonwealth.
8. The CWP Conference was opened by the outgoing **Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians, Rt Hon. Rebecca Kadaga MP, Speaker of the Parliament of Uganda**. The topics addressed during the CWP sessions included:
 - *Violence and Intimidation of Women during Elections;*
 - *Parliament's Role in Raising Awareness of Political Violence against Women, and Women's Equal Civil and Political Rights;*
 - *Legislating Effectively to Protect Women from Political Violence; and*
 - *The Role of Civil Society and the Media in Tackling Political Violence against Women.*
9. A new Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians was elected for a three-year term during the CWP Business Meeting, held on December 16, 2016. The newly elected **Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP), Hon. Dato' Noraini Ahmad MP (Malaysia)** has pledged to renew the effort to increase women's political participation across the Commonwealth.



CPA Executive Committee

10. The meetings of the CPA Executive Committee ahead of the 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference were held 12th and 13th December, 2016. Sen. Nigel De Freitas attended these meetings, representing the CAA Region.



The Society of Clerks-at-the-Table (SOCATT)

11. **Society of Clerks-at-the-Table (SOCATT)** meetings were held on the December 14-15, 2016. The Society of Clerks-at-the-Table in Commonwealth Parliaments exists to:
 - *Provide a means by which the Parliamentary practice of various Legislative Chambers of the Commonwealth may be made more accessible to Clerks-at-the-Table, or those having similar duties, in any such Legislature in the exercise of their professional duties; and*
 - *Foster among Officers of Parliament a mutual interest in their duties, rights and privileges.*
12. Meetings were chaired by **David Natzler, Clerk of the House of Commons.**
13. **Presentation of papers on parliamentary procedure, privilege and practice**, were made on the following topics:
 - *Supporting an Inclusive Parliament (Beverley Isles – House of Commons, Canada)*
 - *ICT applications to support House and committee operations (Robyn McClelland – House of Representatives, Australia)*
 - *Use of languages other than English in the Chamber (Michael Tatham – Northern Territory, Australia)*
 - *Support for private members' bills: principles, procedures and practice (Andrew Mylne-Scottish Parliament)*
14. Following the presentations, smaller break-out groups were then established for further discussion on the themes presented.
15. Persons present also delivered short oral presentations of recent procedural or other events of general interest from individual Parliaments.
16. The discussion on the Report and Accounts of the Society for 2014 and 2015 were led by Crispin Poyser, SOCATT Secretary.

Conference Workshops

17. The 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference Workshops took place with several workshop topics:

- *The role of the Commonwealth in fostering freedom of religion or belief;*
- *Ending violence against women and girls: The impact of social media and the internet in perpetrating violence;*
- *The role of Parliamentarians in implementing and monitoring policies relevant to the Sustainable Development Goals;*
- *The role of the Commonwealth in supporting the outcomes of the COP21 Paris Agreement on Climate Change;*
- *The radicalisation of young people and how we are dealing with this challenge throughout the Commonwealth; and*
- *The role the media plays in public mistrust of Parliamentarians.*

18. The Trinidad and Tobago delegation, represented by Sen. Nigel De Freitas (discussion leader) and Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly, led debate on the topic *“The media plays a large role in public mistrust of Parliamentarians”*. The workshop took the form of a debate, with two of the discussion leaders speaking in favour of the motion and one speaking against. The Trinidad and Tobago delegation was selected to speak against the motion.



19. Recommendations from the workshop were:

- *The media portrayal of politicians and parliamentarians fuels public mistrust, deflects young people from politics and compromises those who work for constituents in public office.*
- *The media acts as an ombudsman for every endeavour in public life. Its accurate coverage of parliamentarians can encourage introspection and requisite course correction.*
- *The CPA should provide masterclasses or training for Parliamentarians on interaction with members of the media, effective communication and the use of social media.*



Launch of CPA Parliamentary Lecture Series

20. The CPA launched the *CPA Fundamentals Programme on Parliamentary Practice and Procedure* a pioneering flagship university accredited by the CPA Parliamentary Fundamentals Flagship Programme.

21. This will be the first course of its kind and through the new CPA Fundamentals Programme, the CPA aims to assist Commonwealth Parliaments in building the capacity of their newly-elected and returning Parliamentarians, by equipping them with:

- *greater depth of knowledge of parliamentary practice and procedure;*

- *increased in-depth and practical knowledge based on accepted theories and international good practices; and*
- *an accredited qualification from an internationally recognised university that will benefit participants for life during and after Parliament.*

CPA Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Regional Hot Topic Forum

22. The CPA Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Regional Hot Topic Forum on the topic 'Seeking to increase Women's Political Participation' was held on 15 December 2016. The (CPA) launched the CPA Regional 'Hot Topic' Forums in November 2016 in the CPA Asia Region to provide an opportunity for the CPA Membership and the wider community to engage with experts on a particular topic, which is of specific regional relevance. The Forum was the second Regional 'Hot Topic' Forum in the newly launched programme.



23. The Forum heard from a number of distinguished speakers including: Hon. Shirley Osborne MLA, Speaker of the Montserrat Legislative Assembly, Caribbean Regional Chair of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians and outgoing Vice Chairperson of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association; Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar MP, Leader of the Opposition in Trinidad and Tobago and former Prime Minister; Dr Josephine Ojiambo, Deputy Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Secretariat; Hon. Rayburn Blackmore MP, Minister of Immigration & National Security, Dominica; and Professor Verene Shepherd, Director of the Institute for Gender & Development Studies and Professor of Social History, University of the

West Indies. The evening's moderator was Hon. Alix Boyd-Knights MHA, Speaker of the House of Assembly of Dominica.



General Assembly

24. The 62nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference concluded with the plenary of the General Assembly. The General Assembly is the Association's supreme authority and is constituted of delegates to the Annual Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.



Sources: <http://www.cpahq.org/cpahq/>

