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# **Report of the Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association**

**66<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference**

**Accra, Ghana**

**September 30 to October 6, 2023**

## Report

The delegation of the Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association that attended the 66<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in Accra, Ghana, from September 30 to October 6, 2023, has the honour to present its report.

The Canadian Branch was represented by the following delegates:

- The Honourable Rosemary Moodie, Senator, Vice-Chair of the Canadian Branch and Head of Delegation (alternate Canadian Branch representative on the Executive Committee-EXCO)
- The Honourable Salma Atallahjan, Senator
- Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau, MP
- Mr. Rémi Bourgault, Association Secretary

The Canadian Branch delegation was part of the 25 member Canadian Region delegation to the conference, which also included representatives of several provincial legislatures of the Canadian Region.

As the alternate Canadian Branch representative on the Executive Committee, Senator Rosemary Moodie attended the Executive Committee meetings held on October 2, 2023.

During the 66<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, alongside the substantive conference workshops, there were also a number of additional conferences and meetings including the 39<sup>th</sup> CPA Small Branches Conference, meetings of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) and Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) networks, the 66<sup>th</sup> CPA General Assembly, governance meetings of the CPA Executive Committee and the 57<sup>th</sup> Society of Clerks-at-the-Table (SoCATT) meeting.

Commonwealth parliamentarians attending the 66<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference and associated meetings recognized the Commonwealth's commitment to democracy and met under the conference theme of 'The Commonwealth Charter 10 Years On: Values and Principles for Parliaments to Uphold.' 2023 marks the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Commonwealth Charter, which outlines the principles and values of the Commonwealth.

The conference, hosted by the Parliament of Ghana and the CPA Ghana Branch from September 30 to October 6, 2023, in Accra, Ghana, 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 (2022–2023), the Rt. Hon. Alban Bagbin, MP, Speaker of the Parliament of Ghana. This was the first time that the CPA Ghana Branch and the Parliament of Ghana hosted the CPA's annual conference and is the 17<sup>th</sup> time that the CPA Africa Region has hosted the CPA's annual conference.

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.

### **66<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference: Opening Addresses**

The Vice-Patron of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), His Excellency Nana Akufo-Addo, the President of Ghana, urged Commonwealth parliamentarians to work together to uphold democratic principles and the values of the Commonwealth.

Delegates to the 66<sup>th</sup> CPC were welcomed by the CPA President (2022–2023), the Rt. Hon. Alban Bagbin, MP, Speaker of the Parliament of Ghana; the CPA Chairperson, the Hon. Ian Liddell-Grainer, MP (United Kingdom); the CPA Vice-Chairperson, the Hon. Osei Kyei-Mensah Bonsu, MP, Majority Leader in the Parliament of Ghana; the Ghanaian Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon. Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey; and the CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg. The vote of thanks was given by the Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP), the Hon. Dr Zainab Gimba, MP (Nigeria).

### **66<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference: CPA Officer Elections**

**CPA Vice-Chairperson:** The 66<sup>th</sup> CPA General Assembly was followed by a meeting of the new CPA Executive Committee during which the Hon. Arthur Holder, Speaker of the House of Assembly of Barbados, was confirmed for 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.

### **66<sup>th</sup> CPA General Assembly: Key Decisions**

During the 66<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) in Ghana, the Canadian delegates attended the CPA General Assembly. The CPA General Assembly was presided over by the CPA President (2022–2023), the Rt. Hon. Alban Bagbin, MP, Speaker of the Parliament of Ghana, and was attended by members from 102 CPA branches. The CPA General Assembly, the Association's supreme authority, is constituted by delegates to the annual Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

The General Assembly also included a topical debate on food security and sustainability in the Commonwealth, with panellists from CPA branches including Queensland, Tanzania, Canada, Isle of Man and Turks and Caicos Islands. The Hon. Salma Ataullahjan spoke for the Canadian Region.

The key decisions and outcomes were:

1. 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 organization later in 2023. Noted the legal and financial advice and work undertaken so far to enable the CPA to be able to create a new non-charitable organization later in 2023. Agreed to create a new non-charitable organization at the 66<sup>th</sup> CPA General Assembly. Welcomed and supported the renewed efforts to persuade the UK Government to agree to legislate to recognize the CPA as an international, interparliamentary organization. Agreed to the pre-assessment stage of the benchmarks and instructed the CPA Secretariat to write to all

CPA branches as soon as the 66<sup>th</sup> CPC has concluded. The communication from the CPA Secretariat should seek potential expressions of interest from branches and include the assessment framework and methodology and a series of FAQs. A decision on the next stage will be made at the Mid-Year CPA Executive Committee meeting in 2024.

2. Annual Report — Noted the CPA Annual Report for the reporting period of January to December 2022.

3. CPA Secretary-General's annual appraisal and application for a second and final term — Approved the recommendation of the CPA Executive Committee that the CPA Secretary-General be appointed for a second and final term, with this commencing on August 1, 2024, and ending on August 1, 2028.

4. 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 to a payment plan as soon as possible. Noted the outstanding fees and agreed to the proposals for handling those branches with arrears and for support to be provided to branches as required. Acknowledged progress made to date in respect of reinstating previously suspended CPA branches together with further action outlined during the meeting.

5. CPA Future Membership Subscriptions — Approved 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.

6. Audited Report and Financial Statements — Year-end December 31, 2022 — Received the approved and signed CPA Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year to December 31, 2022.

7. Budgets and Financial Management Reports — Received and approved the result for the period and the forecast financial result for the year and the year-end financial position at December 31, 2023, in respect of the following reports and budgets:

(i) CPA Secretariat Financial Report: period ended June 30, 2023

(ii) CPA Secretariat Forecast 2023, Budget 2024 and Projection for 2025

(iii) Working Capital Fund Financial Report: period ended June 30, 2023, Forecast 2023 and Budget 2024

(iv) Conference Assistance Fund Financial Report: period ended June 30, 2023, Forecast 2023 and Budget 2024

(v) 2024 CPA Headquarters Budget and provisional budget for 2025

With regard to the Conference Assistance Fund, the meeting also noted the increased subventions for 2025 onwards.

8. Internal Auditors — Agreed to reappoint internal auditors Sayer Vincent Auditors.

9. Report of the Working Group on CPC Modalities — Approved and adopted the recommendations of the CPA Working Group on CPC Modalities as endorsed by the CPA Executive Committee in April 2023.

10. Matters Submitted by CPA Branches to the 66<sup>th</sup> 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 CAPAC membership in order to pursue these aims and share best practices.

11. 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.

12. Future CPC Conferences — Encouraged CPA branches to put forward offers to host future Commonwealth parliamentary conferences in 2025 and subsequent years.

13. Election of new regional representatives on the CPA Executive Committee — Elected, on valid nomination from CPA regions, the prescribed number of incoming regional representatives on the CPA Executive Committee for each region of the Association.

Delegates also looked ahead to the next Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference – the 67<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) – to be hosted by the CPA New South Wales Branch and Parliament of New South Wales in November 2024.

### **66<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference – Workshops**

**Main conference theme:** The Commonwealth Charter 10 years on: Values and Principles for Parliaments to Uphold

Eight workshops were held during the conference.

The workshops provided a space for delegates to share their experiences as parliamentarians and discuss issues including human rights, the separation of powers and gender quotas. Highlights included a showcase on how deepfakes can spread disinformation and a youth roundtable attended by students from universities across Ghana.

#### **Workshop A: The Threat of Terrorism to Statehood: The Role of Parliament (CPA Ghana Branch host topic)**

The workshop explored the threats of terrorist extremism to democracies and statehood, shedding light on the multifaceted challenges it poses across West Africa and their implications for security and stability. It further delved into the role that parliaments must assume in combatting this menace to safeguard the security and integrity of states.

Panellists including the Ghana Minister for National Security and a Commandant from the Ghana Defence College underscored the role that parliaments must play in combatting these threats: promoting good governance, ensuring accountability, sensitizing the public through awareness campaigns and education, fostering national cohesion and unity, improving the quality of investigative mechanisms by funding security institutions, enacting laws to protect citizens, promoting collaborative endeavours between governments and civil society organizations (CSOs), allocating adequate resources to security organizations to counter terrorism and driving accountability by ensuring efficient use of resources by security agencies.

At the end of the workshop, participants were of the view that parliaments should collaborate with stakeholders to improve governance architecture and ensure equitable distribution of resources, benchmark best practices for the involvement of parliaments in combatting terrorism, perform their oversight responsibilities to ensure accountability, make appropriate legislation to combat cross-border terrorism and address the root cause of terrorism.

### **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. Despite progress in many areas, women's representation in parliaments remains inadequate. 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 journey to achieving gender equality requires dedication, funding, legislative support and political will. The UN Women representative noted that women's representation is far from equal and suggested that there are several instances where a quota system has been passed but not implemented due to certain barriers. At the current rate of progress, gender parity will not be reached in national legislatures before 2063 if further action is not taken.

Workshop delegates unanimously endorsed the following recommendation: 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 C: What Does Sustainable Trade and Economic Development Mean for Small Jurisdictions? (CPA Small Branches topic)**

The workshop explored what sustainable trade and economic development means for small jurisdictions as well as the challenges and opportunities they face in promoting sustainable economic growth through international trade. It was discussed that most small jurisdictions vary in size and population, thereby presenting unique challenges faced by each in terms of global markets, infrastructure, market access and regulatory barriers.

Members from Jamaica, Malta, The Gambia and Fiji outlined their experiences of sustainable trade and development and emphasized that economic development requires a multi-faceted approach that meets the needs of small jurisdictions and finds innovative ways to use their strength and ability to be agile. The concept of sustainable trade was also seen as a critical feature in minimizing poverty in small jurisdictions, and sometimes smaller jurisdictions are barred from entering international markets due to low volumes of production.

Lowering trade barriers to promote economic development, promoting gender equality, an active private sector, developing transportation links of small jurisdictions to the international market, balancing economic growth and environmental diversification as

well as social equity were also discussed as some of the factors to promote and improve sustainable trade and economic development.

Workshop delegates unanimously endorsed the following recommendation: The Commonwealth's parliaments in the smallest jurisdictions should collaborate to promote fair and sustainable international trade.

#### **Workshop D: Youth Roundtable: Role of the Commonwealth in International Security and Peacebuilding (Youth topic)**

This workshop took the form of a youth roundtable with youth participants invited from a number of Ghanaian youth organizations. The workshop focused on how the Commonwealth can address the issue of international security and peacebuilding, and members of Parliament from Australia Federal, the United Kingdom and Guyana provided insight into their experiences. With 1.2 billion of the world's population made up of youth aged between 15 and 24 years, it was acknowledged that the youth are often ignored in decision-making and policy formulation, yet they bear the brunt of the effects of climate change and insecurity. It was also recognized that, with the growth of information technology in the world coupled with more people turning to social media platforms, many young people need more protection online and measures should be in place to tackle cyberbullying. The representative from the Ghana National Peace Council explained that Ghana has a peacebuilding mechanism that helps resolve conflict and encouraged its adoption by other countries.

During the Q&A session, many young people expressed frustration with youth unemployment levels and the sidelining of youth in decision-making. However, the panellists encouraged youth participants to go through the appropriate channels for redress.

Workshop delegates unanimously endorsed the following recommendation: Commonwealth parliamentarians should champion peacebuilding initiatives, actively involve youth and collaborate across the Commonwealth network in order to bolster the Commonwealth's role in international security for a more peaceful, secure future.

#### **Workshop E: Environmental Approaches in Tackling Energy Poverty**

The workshop heard from panellists from Kenya, India Union and Crown Agents, a UK government agency, on the implementation of clean energy and facilitating the adoption of biofuels. Commonwealth parliamentarians have a key role to play as legislators, scrutineers and representatives to help drive this agenda.

India is developing policies based on five key enablers: energy availability, accessibility, affordability, sustainability and efficiency. India has developed schemes in tackling energy poverty, such as Saubhagya and Ujjwala, and boasts the largest solar park in the world. However, the panellist from Kenya remarked that it is the responsibility of both government and citizens to tackle energy poverty. A major challenge remains the unwillingness of communities in rural areas to transition from fossil fuel to clean energy as charcoal continues to be a cheaper option. Some solutions that have been initiated are rural electrification, diversification of electricity sources, creation of a national energy policy, compulsory use of solar for water heating systems and community sensitization.

Workshop delegates unanimously endorsed the following recommendation: Parliamentarians across the Commonwealth must seek to ensure there is secure, reliable, efficient, affordable and environmentally sustainable energy provision available to all.

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

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

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 recognized that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, some parliaments enacted procedures in contravention of the separation of powers. It was suggested that a Parliamentary Services Act could be introduced as had been proposed in Malaysia. The panellist 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.

### **Workshop G: The Commonwealth Charter: A Charter for All Human Rights, Or Just Some?**

The workshop deliberated how parliamentarians and civil society organizations (CSOs) could promote and uphold human rights values in the Commonwealth. Discussions led by members from KwaZulu-Natal, Turks and Caicos Islands, Scotland, 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. However, some participants expressed the need to respect cultural rights were.

The majority of workshop delegates endorsed the following recommendation: 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.

### **Workshop H: E-Parliaments: An Effective Mechanism for Intersectional Diversity and Equitable Public Engagement?**

The workshop focused on how effective e-parliaments would promote public engagement and enhance parliaments' legitimacy, transparency and accountability and how to best include marginalized groups. Parliamentarians from Trinidad and Tobago, New South Wales and Malaysia outlined the need for making parliaments more accessible, particularly to persons with disabilities, and the need to mitigate the risk involved in integrating technology into the work of parliament. During the COVID-19 pandemic, e-parliaments helped enhance public engagement in parliamentary processes through digital methods. However, there continues to be a number of challenges for parliaments regarding the best way to engage the public and in measuring and evaluating these



activities. Although the role of technology is essential in promoting democracy, there are notable challenges such as the digital divide in society and data protection and privacy rights.

Workshop delegates unanimously endorsed the following recommendation: Parliaments should embrace their representative function, both in the diversity of its membership and through engaging with the public, including via appropriate and innovative approaches.

### **COMMONWEALTH WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS (CWP)**

Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians aim to further gender equality and representation in parliaments.

Women parliamentarians from across the Commonwealth met at the 66<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) in Accra, Ghana. Meetings of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) network were held at the conference to discuss gender sensitization and quotas. This was also 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.

The CWP Business Meeting was opened by the CWP Chairperson, the Hon. Dr. Zainab Gimba, MP, Member of the House of Representatives, National Assembly of Nigeria, who welcomed delegates and gave an update on CWP activities delivered since the 65<sup>th</sup> CPC in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, in August 2022. The CWP Chairperson also pledged to renew the effort to increase women's representation and political participation in parliaments across the Commonwealth.

Delegates debated the time and format of future CWP business meetings and conferences as well as the methods for reporting CWP activities through the regional secretariats, with a motion passed by delegates containing further recommendations for the CWP Steering Committee (more time to be allocated for CWP business meetings, CWP reports to be distributed to members prior to business meetings, themes to be developed to guide annual CWP activities, and new members to receive an induction into the CWP).

The CWP Steering Committee met in Ghana representing seven of the nine CPA regions: Africa, Asia, Australia, British Islands and Mediterranean, Canada, Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic, and Pacific.

The CWP Steering Committee elected the Hon. Kate Doust, MLC, from the Parliament of Western Australia as the new CWP Vice-Chairperson for a one-year term and agreed on the establishment of a new subcommittee to examine a future work program for the network.

### **UN Women event: Ending Discrimination in Law: Celebrating the Gains**

In the margins of the 66<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, delegates also attended a CWP and UN Women co-hosted event that highlighted the support available to achieve gender-responsive legislation and advance state commitments around global goals pertaining to gender equality.

Women in all parts of the world suffer violence and discrimination, and they are under-represented in political and economic decision-making processes. Parliamentarians and

experts gave key highlights from legal assessments across the Commonwealth, concrete actions that have been taken and the elements of successful reform efforts.

### **39<sup>th</sup> CPA Small Branches Conference**

Theme: Mobilizing Relationships and Resources for Greater Sustainability

Following several recent natural disasters that have affected the smallest jurisdictions in the Commonwealth, parliaments and governments are increasingly required to prepare for different eventualities. Commonwealth parliamentarians met at the 39th CPA Small Branches Conference to examine the unique challenges they face in mobilizing resources for greater sustainability. The conference discussed strategies to meet the unique developmental needs of the CPA's smallest legislatures through key thematic workshops that helped build parliamentary capacity for the CPA Small Branches and create greater opportunities for the sharing of knowledge, parliamentary strengthening and cooperation across the network.

Summaries were supplied by rapporteurs present at each workshop. Copies of the complete workshop reports from the 66th CPA Conference from which excerpts have been taken in the preparation of this report are available online at <http://www.cpahq.org>

### **Other**

The delegation laid a wreath on behalf of the Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association at the Christiansborg War Cemetery, part of the Commonwealth War Grave Commission, where eight Canadians who died in World War II were buried.

At the end of the week, the Canadian High Commission organized three activities for the Canadian delegates attending the conference:

- Senator Ataullahjan took part in a community stakeholders forum hosted by the Alliance for Women in Media Africa (AWMA) on women's participation in politics;
- Mr. Cannings heard from the Ghana Climate Innovation Centre (GCIC) and green entrepreneurs about their efforts to develop profitable and locally appropriate solutions to mitigate or adapt to climate change; and
- Ms. Gaudreau attended a panel discussion on Canada–Ghana trade relations.

### **Acknowledgements**

The delegation would like to thank the High Commissioner of Canada to Ghana, Ms. Martine Moreau, for her hospitality and the High Commission staff for their support during the conference and for the excellent program prepared for the delegation.

In conclusion, the delegates would like to express their appreciation to the Library of Parliament for the excellent background information they prepared for the use of the delegation during the conference. The delegation also appreciated the assistance provided by Global Affairs Canada.

Respectfully submitted,

Alexandra Mendès, MP

Chair of the Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

**Travel Costs**

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| <b>ASSOCIATION</b>    | Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association |
| <b>ACTIVITY</b>       | 66 <sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference        |
| <b>DESTINATION</b>    | Accra, Ghana  |
| <b>DATES</b>          | September 30 to October 6, 2023                               |
| <b>DELEGATION</b>     |   |
| SENATE                | Hon. Rosemary Moodie<br>Hon. Salma Ataullahjan                |
| HOUSE OF COMMONS      | Richard Cannings<br>Marie-Hélène Gaudreau                     |
| STAFF                 | Rémi Bourgault  |
| <b>TRANSPORTATION</b> | \$ 35,149.48  |
| <b>ACCOMMODATION</b>  | \$ 10,895.45  |
| <b>HOSPITALITY</b>    | \$ 60.61  |
| <b>PER DIEMS</b>      | \$ 2,309.61   |
| <b>REVENUES</b>       | \$ 16,371.01  |
| <b>MISCELLANEOUS</b>  | \$ 1,105.35   |
| <b>TOTAL</b>          | <b>\$ 33,149.49</b>   |

*\*Only expenses not reimbursed by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association are included.*