Report of the Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

68th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference

Bridgetown, Barbados

October 5 to 12, 2025

REPORT

A delegation from the Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association attended the 68th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) in Bridgetown, Barbados, from October 5 to 12, 2025.

The Canadian Branch was represented by the following delegates:

- Ms. Alexandra Mendès, MP, Chair of the Canadian Branch and Head of Delegation;
- The Honourable Rosemary Moodie, Senator, Vice-Chair of the Canadian Branch;
- The Honourable Andrew Cardozo, Senator;
- The Honourable Tony Ince, Senator;
- The Honourable Pierrette Ringuette, Senator;
- The Honourable David Wells, Senator;
- Mr. Philip Lawrence, MP;
- Mr. Andrew Lauzon, Association Secretary.

The conference, hosted by the Parliament of Barbados and the CPA Barbados Branch, was attended by over 500 parliamentarians and parliamentary officials representing parliaments and legislatures from across the Commonwealth. The theme for the conference was **The Commonwealth: A Global Partner.**

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 Southeast Asia. The CPA reaches the countries of the Commonwealth as well as national, state, provincial and territorial parliaments and legislatures bringing together almost 180 CPA Branches of the Association.

Alongside the substantive conference workshops and the CPA governance meetings, the conference also included several additional events, including the 41st CPA Small Branches Conference, the 9th Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Conference, meetings of the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) network, and the 59th Society of Clerks-at-the-Table (SOCATT) meetings.

The CPA Executive Committee met ahead of the 68th CPC on October 7, 2025. The meeting was chaired by the Chairperson of the Executive Committee, Hon. Dr Christopher Kalila, MP (Zambia). CPA Executive Committee Members, including Ms. Mendès, discussed key governance issues and planning for the year ahead including updates to the CPA's legal status, financial reporting and future activities. The CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg and other staff from the CPA Headquarters also attended the meetings.

68TH COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE: OPENING ADDRESSES

The Vice-Patron of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), Her Excellency Dame Sandra Mason, President of Barbados, urged Commonwealth parliamentarians to work together to uphold the values of the Commonwealth as she opened the 68th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

Delegates were also welcomed to Barbados by Hon. Arthur Holder, MP, Speaker of the House of Assembly of Barbados; Hon. Shirley Botchwey, Commonwealth Secretary-General; Hon. Ralph Thorne, MP, the Leader of the Opposition in Barbados; Hon. Dr Christopher Kalila, MP (Zambia), Chairperson of the CPA's Executive Committee; Hon. Mia Mottley, MP, Prime Minister of Barbados; Hon. Reginald Farley, Senator, President of the Senate of Barbados, CPA President (2024-2025); and Stephen Twigg, CPA Secretary-General.

CPA GENERAL ASSEMBLY: KEY DECISIONS

The CPA General Assembly, held on October 10, 2025, was presided over by Senator Reginald Farley. The CPA General Assembly is the association's supreme authority and is constituted by delegates attending the conference. Representatives from 121 CPA branches participated.

Some of the key decisions and outcomes from the 2025 CPA General Assembly were:

- Delegates approved the new CPA Strategic Plan 2026-2029 which sets the priorities for the association for the next three years.
- Delegates were updated on the progress of the new legal status akin to an international, interparliamentary organisation following the United Kingdom (UK) Parliament passing the "Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and International Committee of the Red Cross (Status) Act 2025" and progress on the UK Government's secondary legislation.
- Delegates were updated on changes to the CPA's structural changes and the creation of the CPA Charitable Funds.
- Delegates approved the 2024 CPA Annual Report (including the audited Financial Statements), the CPA Membership Report, the CPA Budgets and Financial Management Reports.
- Delegates endorsed reports from the three CPA networks - the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP), the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) and the CPA Small Branches.

The 2025 CPA General Assembly also approved the Chief Pleas of Sark as a new CPA Branch. One of the smallest legislatures in the Commonwealth,

the CPA Sark Branch joins the CPA British Islands and Mediterranean Region. Delegates also looked ahead to the next CPC to be hosted by the CPA South Africa Branch and Parliament of South Africa in 2026.

The General Assembly also included a topical debate on “The Commonwealth – A Global Partner” with presenters from each of the CPA Regions. As the Canadian representative to speak during the debate, Senator Moodie reminded her fellow parliamentarians of the Commonwealth Charter and the commitment of member states to the development of free and democratic societies and the promotion of peace and prosperity to improve the lives of all the people of the Commonwealth. She also spoke about how the Commonwealth and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association have contributed to effective international diplomacy and strengthened democracy and governance globally, as well as how they continue to shape progress in both developing and developed countries.

In addition, CPA delegates at the General Assembly approved the nomination of Hon. Sue Lines, President of the Senate of Australia, as the new CPA Treasurer for a three-year term. The role holder overseas the finances of the association and works closely with the Trustees and Finance team at the CPA.

CONFERENCE WORKSHOPS

At the 68th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, delegates took part in a wide range of workshops.

Workshop A: Strengthening our Institutions to Support Democracy (Host Branch Topic)

What can parliamentarians do to ensure their institutions are best placed to promote democracy? In times of profound democratic crisis globally, it is essential that institutions are upholding the standards that citizens expect and deserve.

This interactive workshop examined how parliamentarians can best serve their citizens by examining the institutions that serve them. Senior Clerks from the Australian Capital Territory, Anguilla, KwaZulu Natal and Maldives shared how their parliaments are upholding best practices and evaluating their practices utilizing the updated CPA Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures, which provide a guideline for how parliaments can strengthen their institutions to better support democracy.

Workshop B: Leveraging Technology: Enhancing Democracy through Digital Transformations and Tackling the Digital Divide

Across the Commonwealth, legislatures are navigating the profound opportunities and challenges of the digital age. While digital transformation offers the potential to make institutions more efficient, transparent and accessible, the persistent “digital divide” risks excluding citizens and deepening existing inequalities. Framed by a discussion on the broader challenges of digital inclusion, particularly within the context of

Commonwealth jurisdictions, this workshop aimed to move beyond theory to action.

This workshop explored this dual challenge, focusing on practical, innovative solutions that can enhance democratic processes for all. The discussion was led by the Speaker of the Lok Sabha (Parliament of India) along with experts on the topic from the Federal Senate of Brazil and the VOXPOP Foundation.

Workshop C: A Look Ahead to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) 2026: Championing the Human Factor from a Gender and Accessibility Lens

In preparation for the 2026 CHOGM that will be hosted by the government of Antigua and Barbuda, this workshop examined the significance of inclusion and representation of marginalized groups. Panellists explored how gender equality, accessibility and human rights can be further embedded into CHOGM outcome documents and policy, ensuring that the inclusion of those often underrepresented or marginalized is not an afterthought.

The discussion was chaired by the CPA Secretary-General with contributions from the Speaker of the House of Representatives of Antigua and Barbuda, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum.

Workshop D: Climate Change and its Threat to Global Health: Finding Sustainable Solutions

What can parliamentarians do to tackle the negative impact of climate change on health from a national and international perspective? This workshop examined the dynamics between climate change and its direct impact on physical and mental health, and what role parliamentarians can play to tackle this global challenge. Panellists examined the profound health impacts of a warming planet across the Commonwealth, from the rising burden of vector-borne diseases to the devastating mental health consequences of extreme weather events. Delegates also had the opportunity to discuss related questions and share what their own legislatures were doing.

This workshop session was chaired by the Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee, Dr. Christopher Kalila, alongside an expert in climate change from the University of the West Indies.

Workshop E: Building Trust and Transparency in Democracy: Financial Transparency in Parliaments and Elections

Are parliamentarians building trust with their policies on financial transparency in elections and in their legislatures? In an era of declining public trust, the financial integrity of political institutions has become a defining measure of democratic legitimacy. Allegations of opaque campaign financing, weak parliamentary oversight and a misuse of public resources continue to challenge confidence in Commonwealth governments.

The session was moderated by Senator Cardozo and included panelists from Saint Lucia, Queensland and a financial expert from Nexus PFM Consulting. Participants explored how parliaments can strengthen financial transparency in their internal operations and how electoral processes can be made more robust.

Workshop F: National Parliaments vs Provincial, Territorial and Devolved Legislatures: Protecting and Preserving the Separation of Powers

How can parliaments ensure the fair distribution of powers in multi-level governance systems within the Commonwealth? This workshop examined the distribution of powers in multi-level governance systems within the Commonwealth, focusing on the balance between national and sub-national legislatures. It emphasized the importance of institutional responsibility and non-encroachment, drawing on the Commonwealth Charter and the Commonwealth Latimer House Principles. Delegates also had the opportunity for group discussions looking at solutions which could tackle unique and broader challenges faced by parliaments. The workshop was chaired by a Member from the Welsh Senedd and delegates also heard from a Member of the Parliament of India and an expert from the CPA Secretariat.

Workshop G: The Role of the Commonwealth in Good Governance, Multilateralism and International Relations

How can the Commonwealth strengthen good governance and remain a trusted voice in multilateralism and international relations? This workshop explored how the Commonwealth can remain a credible actor in an increasingly fractured world by strengthening its commitment to good governance, championing multilateral cooperation and supporting parliamentarians as key agents of international engagement.

Drawing on the Commonwealth Charter, the Harare and Millbrook Declarations and the Commonwealth Latimer House Principles, the discussion highlighted how parliaments can resist democratic backsliding, navigate geopolitical and economic turbulence and respond to global challenges such as climate change, artificial intelligence and disinformation.

This workshop included participants from Pakistan, New Zealand, Cyprus and the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Youth Roundtable: Staying Safe and Free to Thrive: Empowering Young People to Overcome Modern Challenges - From Gang Violence to Cyber-Bullying

Young people across the Commonwealth face a wide range of interconnected challenges - from the physical threats of gang violence and exploitation to the digital risks of cyber-bullying, online harassment and misinformation. These pressures can limit their freedom to learn, participate and thrive, often leaving them vulnerable to harm, exclusion or disengagement from society.

The Youth Roundtable provided a safe and inclusive platform for young people from Barbados to share lived experiences, learn from each other and work with policymakers to co-create practical strategies for safety, resilience and empowerment.

Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff from across the Commonwealth joined the discussion, which drew inspiration from Commonwealth commitments to youth development, human rights and digital inclusion, ensuring that young people's voices are central to shaping solutions.

9th COMMONWEALTH WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS (CWP) CONFERENCE

Theme: Parliaments since Beijing +30: Progress, Challenges and the Road Ahead for Gender Equality

Women parliamentarians from across the Commonwealth came together for the 9th Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Conference to discuss women's representation in parliaments, gender sensitization and quotas amongst a wide range of topics. The theme of the conference was: "Parliaments since Beijing +30: Progress, Challenges and the Road Ahead for Gender Equality" and highlighted 30 years since the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, China in 1995, where the United Nations (UN) adopted the landmark Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action on gender.

The conference brought together over 100 delegates to discuss equal representation in parliaments through a series of workshops and governance meetings including four learning and development workshops for delegates. The host branch of Barbados also held an open debate session where women parliamentarians provided contributions from the floor.

Delegates at the CWP conference also elected Catherine Fife, MPP (Ontario), as the new Chairperson for a three-year term, marking the first time that a woman from the Canadian Region has held the role.

CWP Workshop A: Good Practices and Strategies to Realizing Gender-Sensitive Parliaments across the Commonwealth

How can Commonwealth parliaments become effective gender sensitive institutions? Despite growing representation, many parliaments across the Commonwealth still face systemic challenges in becoming truly gender-sensitive institutions where women have equal opportunities to participate, contribute and lead. This workshop aimed to move beyond identifying these challenges to a proactive exploration of solutions.

Guided by the CPA Gender Sensitizing Parliaments Guidelines and Seven-Step Field Guide, this interactive workshop equipped participants with the tools to either start or further their parliament's gender sensitive journey. Panellists came from Zambia, Jersey, Western Cape and Fiji and they

shared their own parliaments' perspectives on the role of a gender sensitive institution.

CWP Workshop B: Debate Not Hate: Not Accepting Abuse as an Outcome of Free Speech

How can parliaments combat violence and harassment against women parliamentarians in the digital space? Free speech is a fundamental pillar of democratic societies, but it must not be misused as a shield for harassment, intimidation, discrimination, or threats. Across the Commonwealth, abuse and harassment in its many varied forms, micro-aggressions and misogyny, particularly targeting women parliamentarians, are eroding healthy political discourse and discouraging democratic participation. As technology permeates every corner of our daily lives, it is being weaponized to harm women and girls, posing serious threats to their safety and well-being, making it increasingly difficult for women to feel safe not only in public spaces, but in their own homes too.

This workshop aimed to unite parliamentarians in order to combat harassment and violence within political and parliamentary spheres and to provide a collaborative platform to explore how parliaments and parliamentarians can foster respectful debate, safeguard political engagement and ensure that they are seen and heard without fear or harm. Panellists came from Guernsey, British Virgin Islands and Sri Lanka.

CWP Workshop C: Parliamentarians Combatting Discriminatory Laws that Perpetuate the Disempowerment of Women

How can parliamentarians pursue and champion legislative reform for gender equality? Across the Commonwealth, discriminatory laws continue to undermine women's rights, entrench economic inequality and signal that gender discrimination is acceptable. At the same time, recent years have seen notable reforms that demonstrate what is possible when political will, strategic advocacy and evidence-based policymaking come together.

A new publication, *Understanding, Assessing & Achieving Equality before the Law in the Commonwealth: A Practical Handbook for Change Agents with Historical Records, Statistical Data and Case Studies,* provides up-to-date mapping of such laws and highlights successful reforms.

Produced by UN Women, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the Commonwealth Secretariat, and the World Bank Group's Women, Business and the Law, the handbook serves as a practical tool for parliamentarians seeking to lead change. Vital structured engagement with legislators enhances and strengthens efforts to address legislation, deepens public debate and enhances accountability in the movement towards greater gender equality and equity.

This workshop launched the new handbook and provided a unique space for parliamentarians to share reform experiences, discuss priority areas for legislative change and commit to concrete next steps.

CWP/CPwD Joint Workshop D: Overcoming the Barriers to the involvement of Women with Disabilities in Politics

What are the barriers faced by women with disabilities in politics and what are ways to overcome these? This interactive workshop explored the unique barriers faced by women with disabilities in political life, with reflections of those with lived experience and those that advocate for their wider representation.

Panellists from Scotland, New South Wales and Barbados began the discussion by sharing the personal, structural and cultural challenges they have encountered on the road to elected office - from inaccessible political party systems and campaign infrastructure to broader issues of gender discrimination.

Delegates were also able to provide contributions and reflections during the collective dialogue in order to promote empathy, raise awareness and identify tangible pathways to support political participation of women with disabilities across the Commonwealth.

BILATERAL MEETINGS

On the margins of the conference, the Canadian delegation held bilateral meetings with delegations from the UK and New Zealand. A range of topics of mutual interest were discussed during these meetings, including trade, defense and security, and immigration. Ms. Mendès also met separately with Christopher de Souza, Deputy Speaker and Head of the Singaporean delegation, to discuss diplomacy and international relations in the context of the Commonwealth, as well as the respective parliamentary systems of Canada and Singapore. Throughout the conference, members of the delegation met with parliamentarians from across the Commonwealth to share views and discuss best practices in the parliamentary context.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The delegation would like to thank the Library of Parliament for the background information prepared for the conference. The delegation is also appreciative for the briefing material provided by Global Affairs Canada.

TRAVEL COSTS

Travel expenses associated with this activity can be found in the delegation's financial report. This report is available in the Financial Disclosure section of the Parliamentary Diplomacy website.

Respectfully submitted,

Alexandra Mendès, MP

Chair of the Canadian Branch of the
Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)