



**REPORT OF THE
CANADIAN BRANCH OF THE
COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION
TO THE
52nd CONFERENCE OF THE
COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION
September 1-10, 2006
Abuja, Nigeria**

The delegation of the Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association which attended the 52nd Conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in Abuja, Nigeria from September 1st to 10th, 2006, has the honour to present its report.

Report

More than 600 parliamentarians and parliamentary officials from 142 of the 170 member national, state, provincial and territorial Parliaments and Legislatures around the Commonwealth attended the meetings in Abuja as guests of the Parliament, government and peoples of Nigeria from September 1 to 10, 2006. The Canadian (federal) Branch of the CPA was represented by the following delegates:

Hon. Raynell **Andreychuk**, Senator

David **Smith**, Senator

Hon. Sue **Barnes**, P.C., M.P., Regional Representative

Russ **Hiebert**, M.P. Chair of the Canadian Branch and Leader of the Delegation

Hon. Maria **Minna**, P.C., M.P.

Patrick **Brown**, M.P.

Louise **Thibault**, M.P.

It should be noted that the official start of the Conference was Wednesday, September 6th, but that from September 1st to 4th, members of the delegation participated in at least one of the concurrent meetings of the Small Countries Conference, the Steering Committee of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) and the International Executive Committee. As outgoing Regional Representative, the Hon. Sue **Barnes**, P.C., M.P. participated in the two days of meeting of the International Executive Committee. Russ **Hiebert**, M.P., as the incoming federal Regional Representative, participated in the final meeting of the International Executive Committee on Saturday, September 9th.

Prior to the official start of the Conference, delegates were treated to a very special Nigerian cultural event in the city of Zaria, the largest Durbar in Nigeria in the past twenty years. Despite the five-hour bus ride to the ancient city of Zaria, delegates enjoyed the opportunity to view the salutes to the Emir of Zazzau by more than 100,000 people, 2500 horses and camels all dressed in traditional costumes for the event. The excursion proved to be a highlight of the delegates' time in Nigeria.

The 52nd Conference, was chaired by the Hon. Aminu Bello Masari, Speaker of the House of Representatives, Federal Republic of Nigeria and President of the CPA for 2006. The President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, His Excellency Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, GCFR, officially opened the Conference on Wednesday, September 6th. During his remarks, the President openly acknowledged the difficulties experienced by the Nigerian peoples in recent years. He referenced the difficulties experienced by Nigeria during the period of military rule and the extensive efforts since 1999 to establish deep roots for a wide-ranging parliamentary democracy. In the years since gaining independence, Nigeria had moved from the Westminster style of government to a Presidential style of government. He noted that Nigeria has remained consistent in its resolve to reclaim and rebuild its fortunes through far-reaching reforms

and sustainable development. “...Within the context of the Commonwealth, countries like ours, with a history of military intervention in governance, public perception of the role of the parliament as a vital stakeholder in ensuring good governance is limited. ...I, therefore urge Commonwealth parliamentarians not to relent in the effort to deepen public participation in the democratic process. This is the core of democratic practice all over the world. ...For parliamentarians to lay claim to representing the interests of their constituencies and those who elect them into the parliament, they must be open, transparent, accountable and responsible. This is the golden path to sustain and deepen the institution and values of democracy.”

The theme for the 52nd Conference was *Enhancing Standards of Democratic Governance and Public Perceptions of Parliament in the Commonwealth.* The Secretary General of the CPA, the Hon. Denis Marshall, QSO addressed the delegates in the afternoon session and used the opportunity to provide the delegates with a briefing on the activities of the Association since the 51st CPA Conference held in Fiji in September 2005.

In opening his remarks, Mr. Marshall noted that this would be his final report to the membership as Secretary General. He spoke with pride about the increasing number of jointly funded activities directed towards supporting sustainable and effective democratic institutions across the Commonwealth. Over his five years as Secretary General, he was pleased to report on the strides made within the organisation to the strengthening of the institution of Parliament despite its being a long-term frustrating process, noting that *“What’s at stake is a transparent and accountable political process and political and economic development. ... This has always been the raison d’être of CPA,; but we are now placing far more attention on identifying other parliamentary support programmes being undertaken so that there is greater co-operation and co-ordination between the many organisations and groups who work with the parliaments of the Commonwealth and around the world or support them through parliamentary development programs.*

“This work is producing results. There is greater awareness of the need for Parliament to be independently financed, to have adequate resources, both for Members and staff – neither of whom are always adequately advised or trained for the job. Many Parliaments are now looking to the CPA for advice on the establishment of corporate bodies which will enhance their independence from the Executive whilst ensuring that adequate resources are made available to enable them to discharge their functions more effectively.”

Many of these advances are a result of the close working relationships developed with the World Bank Institute and the World Bank leading to an increasing ownership by parliamentarians of Poverty Reduction Strategies and strengthening parliamentarians’ opportunities for financial oversight within their parliaments and committees. *“CPA activities are increasingly focussed on good governance and poverty reduction in member countries in need of support.”*

He then welcomed the Commonwealth Secretary General, the Rt. Hon. Don McKinnon, as a special guest speaker for the Opening Plenary Session and invited him to make a few remarks. Mr. McKinnon noted how pleased he was at the choice of theme and

topics for the 52nd CPA Conference as they reflect concerns of the Commonwealth Heads of Government and the Commonwealth Secretariat. *“...all strive for democratic good governance, and very few achieve it. The ‘journeying’ – and the spirit in which that journeying is carried out – is everything. ...As Secretary-General Denis Marshall remarked when he announced the theme some weeks ago, your discussion here are not only a matter of exchanging experiences. They are also to do with promoting change by influencing policies and actions, especially on the part of the global agencies which have more and more influence over all of us in the Commonwealth.”*

Linked directly to the role of global agencies, Mr. McKinnon mentioned the twin pillars of the Commonwealth ongoing activities: the promotion of democracy and, sustainable development – noting that the two are mutually reinforcing, and continue to be discussed at CPA Conferences at the plenary sessions or within the workshops.

During his remarks, he noted that over the five years he has addressed the CPA Conference, some common themes have been repeated, among them – the move to build democratic institutions; building democratic cultures to sustain the institutions; developing the right relationship between the ruling and the opposition parties; the recognition of those who hold power on the limits of their power, and establishing a balance between the Executive, the Legislative and the Judicial arms of a democracy. The full text of his remarks is available on the CPA website: www.cpahq.org.

The six workshops of the Conference took place on Thursday, September 7th, with the three plenary sessions occurring on Friday, September 8th, and Saturday, September 9th. The workshops’ themes included:

Workshops:

- A. Strategies in the Care and Support of HIV/AIDS Orphans and other Vulnerable Children: The Role of Parliamentarians.
- B. Domestic Violence: Is Legislation Enough to Combat Abuse and Child Abduction?
- C. Trans-national Security Threats: Unregulated Migration and Cross-Border Controls.
- D. Climate Change and Desertification: How can Parliamentarians Influence the Work of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development?
- E. The Role of Parliament in Constitutional Reform.
- F. The Role of Parliamentarians in Promoting Good Governance through Increased Fiscal Transparency.

Plenary on a Gender-Related Theme:

Equal Participation of Women and Men in Decision-Making Processes at all Levels, with particular emphasis on Political Participation and Leadership.

Nigerian Host Branch Plenary Session:

The Role of Parliamentarians and Civil Society in Poverty Reduction.

Final Plenary:

Enhancing Good Governance with Transparency, Accountability and Exemplary Punishment for Corrupt Practices.

Canadian representatives at Workshop A - Strategies in the Care and Support of HIV/AIDS Orphans and other Vulnerable Children: The Role of Parliamentarians were the Hon. Maria Minna, P.C., MP and the Hon. Sue Barnes, P.C., MP. Despite HIV/AIDS having been a topic at previous workshops, participation was heavy for this year's workshop. Several delegates made informative and substantive interventions during the discussions following the presentations. Ms. Minna endorsed the need to strengthen the UN on women's issues citing the recommendations of the UN AIDS Envoy to Africa Stephen Lewis's remarks during the AIDS 2006 Conference in Toronto. In his concluding remarks, the Moderator of the workshop, Nigel Evans, MP said, *"I look forward to the day when there would be no need for further workshops on this issue, but the effects of the pandemic mean that this issue needs to be pushed to the very top of the CPA Agenda."*

Mr. Gordon Hogg, MLA (BC), and Mr. Charlie Wyse, MLA (BC), who made interventions relating the current legislative situation in British Columbia in this area, provided the Canadian perspective on Workshop B - Domestic Violence: Is Legislation Enough to Combat Abuse and Child Abduction?. Other members of the Canadian delegation present at the Workshop took notes of the points raised for further discussion on their return to Canada. It was evident during the presentations, that the situation in Canada is very different from that being experienced in some Commonwealth countries.

Many members of the Canadian delegation participated in Workshop C - Trans-national Security Threats. Mr. Simon Crean, MP (Australia) chaired this workshop. Senator David Smith made an intervention on behalf of the Canadian delegation during the discussions responding to comments made by an African delegate alleging that racism was an integral factor in limiting the number of immigrants into the developed nations. Senator Smith responded by noting *"...Canada, as a developed country and a member of the G8, takes in (proportionally) three times as many immigrants as the USA, which has a similar economy. Persons migrating to Canada do so for economic reasons, reunification with family, or as refugees, although the latter do not always meet the requirements for refugee status."*

In concluding the workshop discussions, the Moderator, Mr. Crean recommended that the report of the workshop provide the basis for further study on the topic by the CPA, in particular to develop its own approach to the recommendations from the workshop in dealing with the issue, and asked that the matter be taken forward at the meeting in India in 2007.

The Hon. Cecil Clarke, MLA, Speaker of the Nova Scotia Legislature moderated Workshop D – Climate Change and Desertification. This workshop was of great importance to those delegates representing island nations and those nations south of the Sahara. Increasing temperatures and rising sea levels are a major threat to small island nations in both the Indian Ocean and the Pacific. The effects of global warming

have multiplied in those countries with poorer economies and large populations leading to increasing desertification, which resulted in warnings of threats to food security based on climate changes and their impacts on poorer nations. In concluding the workshop, the moderator noted that education and awareness of the problem is critical, and that “...*despite the relative pall of gloom that hangs over the subject, there is room for opportunity.*” In an unusual move, the participants in the workshop concurred in the communiqué on climate change and desertification adopted by the Small Countries Conference earlier in the week. A copy of the communiqué is available on the CPA website: www.cpahq.org.

Workshop E: The role of Parliaments in Constitutional Reform was moderated by the Hon. Bernadette Rounds Ganilau, MP (Fiji) and was held on the Thursday afternoon. During the discussions, it was noted that there has been an explosion in the number of constitutional reforms processes based on the changes in perception of the importance of constitutions and that the role of parliamentary bodies is central to the constitutional reform process. Many of the participants noted that their constituents regard their constitutions as living organisms that are responsive to their changing needs. Concerns were raised about the reasons for rapid constitutional change, with many of the smaller countries risking instability and potential collapse of their constitutions. These situations arise when less attention is paid to the needs of the population and more attention is paid to the requirements of that country's development partners.

Shri Sommath Chaterjee, MP, Speaker of the Lok Sabha of India moderated the Workshop F - Role of Parliamentarians in Promoting Good Governance Through Fiscal Transparency. This topic has become of increasing importance over the past years at CPA Conferences and Workshops. Senator Raynell Andreychuk spoke of the impact of the Fiscal Accountability Act and its strengthening of the oversight role of members of parliament in general and, the Public Accounts Committee in particular. The effect has been to provide for adequate resources for effective scrutiny of the Auditor-General's reports and attachment of expert staff to the Public Accounts Committee. Several other members of the Canadian delegation sat in on this session and provided additional comments to Senator Andreychuk for her intervention.

The Hon. Maria Minna, PC, MP was a keynote speaker at the Plenary Session on *Equal Participation of Women and Men in Decision-Making Processes at all Levels, with particular emphasis on Political Participation and Leadership*. Among the points raised and discussed during the session was the proposal to make constitutional amendments to ensure the composition of national parliaments reflects the zebra effect. In some of the African parliaments that use a combination of direct election and party lists, the parties are reluctant to include women's names on the party list. Ms. Minna stated that she favours constitutional amendments to implement quota systems to ensure that sufficient women are elected to parliament within the next four to five elections.

Several of the delegates urged women MPs to become role models to encourage girls to look at politics as a career. This suggestion has become an element in the work program of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians – Canadian Region. Several of the African delegates discussed variations of the affirmative action policies implemented by political parties. A copy of the full report of this plenary session is found at www.cpahq.org.

Nigerian Host Branch Plenary Session: The Role of Parliamentarians and Civil Society in Poverty Reduction. The Hon. Aminu Bello Masari, MP, Speaker of the House of Representatives and President of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association moderated this plenary session. Throughout the presentations and subsequent discussions, it became apparent that parliamentarians must take a more active role in developing and monitoring programs to reduce poverty. A variety of different approaches were discussed including: decreasing the brain drain from poorer countries to richer ones; improving access to education; tailoring programs to individual countries' needs, and moving from the current approach of treating poverty as a purely economic problem. A copy of the full report is available at www.cpahq.org.

The Final Plenary Session – Enhancing Good Governance with Transparency, Accountability and Exemplary Punishment for Corrupt Practices was held on Saturday, September 9, and the Hon. Aminu Bello Masari, MP again chaired the session. The presentations and discussions had a common theme, that effective anti-corruption laws are part of the solution to solve poverty and development problems. The losses directly related to the degree of corruption have a definitive impact on the economy of those countries where corruption is rampant. Among the solutions suggested by the presenters were strong Freedom of Information legislation; improving productivity of government bureaucracies; strong anti-corruption legislation combined with transparency and efficiency in the delivery of government services; the political will of parliamentarians to set high standards for themselves, and the enforcement of current anti-corruption laws by effective agencies and commissions concentrating of anti-corruption measures. A copy of the report of this plenary session can be found at: www.cpahq.org.

The Annual CPA Conference also provides the members with an opportunity to review the activities and finances of the Association at the General Assembly. At this meeting, Mr. Russ Hiebert, MP was confirmed as the Regional Representative for the Canadian Branch of the CPA to serve for a period of three years. Among the decisions taken during the General Assembly was an increase of 2.2 per cent in the International Contribution for 2008, reflecting the current rate of inflation in the United Kingdom. Dates and venues for future CPA Annual Conferences were discussed, India will host the 53rd CPA Annual Conference, September 21–30, 2007, Malaysia will host the 54th CPA Annual Conference in 2008, however, venues have still to be offered for the 55th and 56th CPA Annual Conferences.

In conclusion, the delegates would like to express their appreciation to the Parliamentary Research Branch of the Library of Parliament for the excellent background information they prepared for the use of the delegation during the Conference. Special thanks are offered to Mr. David Angel, High Commissioner of Canada to Nigeria and the officers of the Canadian High Commission for their extremely professional assistance prior to and during the delegation's time in Abuja.

Respectfully submitted,

Russ Hiebert, MP
Chair
Canadian (Federal) Branch
of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian (Federal) Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)
ACTIVITY	52 nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference
DESTINATION	Abuja, Nigeria
DATES	September 1–10, 2006
SENATORS	Hon. Raynell Andreychuk Hon. David Smith
MEMBERS	Hon. Sue Barnes, P.C., M.P. Mr. Russ Hiebert, M.P. Hon. Maria Minna, P.C., M.P. Mr. Patrick Brown, M.P. Ms. Louise Thibault, M.P.
STAFF	Ms. Carol Chafe, Executive Secretary
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 36,390.29
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 3,649.55
HOSPITALITY	\$ 0
PER DIEMS	\$ 3,226.83
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 264.00
MISCELLANEOUS/REGISTRATION FEES	\$ 827.15
TOTAL	\$ 44,357.82