



# **COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION (CPA)**

## **WORKSHOP ON THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE SYSTEM**

**March 20 to 24, 2006**

**Tobago, Trinidad & Tobago**

Mr. Derek Lee, M.P. (Scarborough-Rouge River) and Dr. Maurice Vellacott, M.P. (Saskatoon-Wanuskewin) represented the Canadian (Federal) Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Workshop on the Parliamentary Committee System in Tobago, Trinidad & Tobago from March 20th – March 24th, 2006. Pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), on behalf of the Canadian delegation, I have the honour to present this report.



## Report

It was a privilege to attend the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) – *Workshop on the Parliamentary Committee System* – in Tobago, Trinidad & Tobago from March 20th – March 24th, 2006. The workshop focused on Commonwealth perspectives on the Committee system; being an effective member on a Committee, the art of committee leadership and effective committee support.

The workshop, which was chaired by Dr. Linda Baboolal, President of the Senate and Mr. Barendra Sinanan, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, was attended by Senators, Members and staff of the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago as well as Members of the Tobago House of Assembly.

The conclusions and recommendations emerging from the Workshop were wide-ranging. The Role of Parliamentarians in the committee process is crucial in ensuring transparency and accountability as it relates to the Executive Branch of government. This was in fact the first time since the Trinidad & Tobago election for Members to exchange views and reflect on the importance of strengthening parliamentary committees in that country. The principles and recommendations of the workshop are included as Appendix A and were agreed to by all Members on the second day. The Action Plan included in Appendix B is equally important as it charts the immediate course for the Trinidad & Tobago Parliament.

The Workshop's success was due to superb arrangements by the Parliament of Trinidad & Tobago; active engagement by Parliamentarians and staff, and the high quality of presentations. It is hoped that the CPA can build on the success of this event in its ongoing efforts to enhance the work of Parliamentarians across the Commonwealth.

It was an honour for the Canadian participants to represent our Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, and our Parliament, at this Workshop. The achievement and maintenance of transparency and accountability through the Parliamentary Committee process is an important one. We are encouraged that more parliamentarians are accepting this challenge.

Many thanks to my Canadian colleague Dr. Maurice Vellacott, M.P.; to our government's Department of Foreign Affairs; to the CPA Secretariat particularly Anthony Staddon; to the C.P.A. Trinidad & Tobago Branch; to the CPA Canadian Branch; to the other members of the resource team including Janice Hilchie, Table Officer at our House of Commons and Callum Thomson, Clerk to the Justice 1 Committee from the Scottish Parliament; for all their support and assistance, and to the people of Trinidad & Tobago for their warm hospitality.

Respectfully submitted,

Derek Lee, M.P.

Canadian (Federal) Branch of the



Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)



## **APPENDIX A**

### **Workshop on the Parliamentary Committee System Tobago, Trinidad & Tobago, 20 – 21 March 2006**

#### **PRINCIPLES AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

##### **PARLIAMENT**

#### **PRINCIPLES**

- Through the Parliament the accountability of the Executive to the people is assured.
- Parliamentarians must be able to carry out their legislative and constitutional functions in accordance with the Constitution, free from unlawful interference.
- Parliamentarians should maintain the highest standards of accountability, transparency and responsibility in the conduct of all public and parliamentary matters.
- The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago should be exclusively responsible for the internal management and governance of its administration.
- The Parliament should be served by a professional staff independent of the public service and dedicated to supporting Parliamentarians in fulfilling their constitutional role.
- Members must give priority to the institution of Parliament at all times.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The number of Members serving in the legislature should be increased, inter alia, to provide sufficient membership for the parliamentary committee system and to strengthen the Parliament's oversight role.
2. The role of an MP should be recognized as a full-time occupation.
3. Parliament should review its corporate structure to meet the challenge of managing more effectively its administration and financing.
4. Parliament should consider modernizing the Standing Orders of both Houses.



## **THE COMMITTEE SYSTEM**

### **PRINCIPLES**

- Parliamentary committees have an essential monitoring role in holding government and its agencies to account.
- Committees must function independently of the Executive.
- All Members should endeavour to work together to improve the committee system.
- Committee Members are expected to attend Committee meetings.
- Committee members, including Chairpersons, should extend normal courtesies to witnesses.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Cabinet Members should not be appointed to oversight committees.
2. Adequate resources must be allocated to support the administrative, research and legal needs of committees.
3. Consideration should be given to amending the Standing Orders to allow Bills to be referred to committees after First Reading.
4. Consideration should be given to live broadcast the proceedings of public committee meetings.
5. Committees should initiate follow up inquiries to review the government's response to recommendations.
6. All Select Committees established by the Standing Orders should be appointed and become operational at the first available opportunity.
7. Membership of committees should be reduced and an appropriate quorum be established.



## **THE AUDITOR-GENERAL, PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE (PAC) AND THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS ENTERPRISES COMMITTEE (PAEC)**

### **PRINCIPLES**

- The Government must be held to account for the management and use of public resources.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The Auditor-General must be provided with the appropriate resources in order to carry out her duties and issue reports in a timely fashion.
2. The PAC and PAEC must be adequately resourced to ensure that they are able to carry out their functions in a timely fashion.

The forgoing Declaration was agreed to by consensus and it was agreed that a report on the workshop will be prepared and tabled for further discussion.



## **APPENDIX B**

### **Workshop on the Parliamentary Committee System Tobago, Trinidad & Tobago, 20 – 21 March 2006**

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMMEDIATE IMPROVEMENT TO THE COMMITTEE SYSTEM**

#### **IMMEDIATE PRACTICAL GOALS FOR IMPLEMENTATION BY JUNE 30, 2006**

1. The President of the Senate and Speaker of the House to meet with the Prime Minister and other Leaders of the Houses to arrive at consensus on the role and importance of the committee system in Parliament.

The meeting shall seek a commitment from the Prime Minister to facilitate the expeditious passage of related cabinet notes submitted by the Clerk of the House on:

- (a) The urgent need for a team of professional resource persons to be recruited to assist Committee Chairs and Members.
  - (b) Directing the Chief Personnel Officer on the importance of retaining and properly remunerating the permanent trained Clerks of Parliament.
  - (c) The need for a Parliamentary Relations Office or Officer in each Ministry.
  - (d) The need for a proper review of the responsibilities of the Vice President of the Senate and Deputy Speaker of the House as well as the role of the Chair of parliamentary committees.
  - (e) The urgent need to provide adequate accommodation for the proper functioning of Parliament, particularly parliamentary committees and staff facilities.
2. A note for Cabinet to be prepared following the meeting with the Prime Minister for necessary executive action in order to implement (a) to (e) above.
3. The Speaker of the House and President of the Senate shall also discuss with the Prime Minister the need to table legislation for the reform of the management structure of the Parliament.



4. A Seminar to be arranged for Chairmen/Vice Chairmen on the art of questioning witnesses to be facilitated by an experienced Attorney-at-Law.
5. Consideration to be given to arranging attachments of Chairmen and Vice Chairmen at Parliaments with more developed Committee Systems.
6. The Clerk to include in upcoming budget funding for the implementation of all proposals emanating from this workshop.
7. The Speaker to sign a memorandum to the Minister of Finance re: the Parliamentary Budget and, if necessary, meet with Minister of Finance on issues of relevance.
8. A Liaison Committee comprising the President of the Senate, Speaker of the House and the five Chairmen of Joint Committees be established immediately.

More effort to be placed on the continuous training of support staff.



## **Travel Costs**

<b>NAME OF ASSOCIATION</b>	Canadian (Federal) Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)
<b>ACTIVITY</b>	Workshop on the Parliamentary Committee System
<b>DESTINATION</b>	Tobago, Trinidad and Tobago
<b>DATES</b>	March 20 – 24, 2006
<b>NAMES OF MEMBERS</b>	Mr. Derek Lee, M.P., Dr. Maurice Vellacott, M.P.
<b>TRANSPORTATION</b>	<b>\$ 4,974.23</b>
<b>ACCOMMODATION</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>
<b>HOSPITALITY</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>
<b>PER DIEMS</b>	<b>\$ 374.94</b>
<b>OFFICIAL GIFTS</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>
<b>MISCELLANEOUS/REGISTRATION FEES</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 5,349.17</b>