



**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation respecting
its participation at the 35th Commonwealth Parliamentary
Association Regional Conference of the Caribbean, the
Americas and the Atlantic**

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

**Port-of-Spain, Trinidad & Tobago
July 23-31, 2010**

Report

Theme: Modernisation of Caribbean Parliaments: Forging our own Identity Introduction

The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago was indeed pleased to have hosted the 35th Conference of the Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Ninety-eight (98) delegates, women parliamentarians, youth parliamentarians, observers and spouses from the thirteen (13) of the eighteen (18) Branches, namely, Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago participated. Observers were drawn from Barbados, British Isle and Mediterranean Region, Canada Region, Dominica and the Tobago House of Assembly participated in the Conference

The 35th Regional Conference saw the resumption of the Regional Youth Parliament and hosting of the 3rd Regional Conference of Women Parliamentarians. [Separate reports were compiled for the 3rd Conference of Women Parliamentarians and the 7th Regional Youth Parliament].

The Conference was opened by the Acting President of the Republic, His Excellency Mr. Timothy Hamel-Smith.

The theme of the Conference “**Modernisation of Caribbean Parliaments: Forging our own identity**” triggered robust discussions on the following topics:

- Parliament as an Autonomous Body – separation from the Executive Branch of Government
- Advancing our democracies through constitutional reform: Fixed term for a Prime Minister
- Making the Legislature more accessible and interactive for citizens: how to make this possible
- Providing a platform for innovative leadership within the parliamentary system
- Effective measures of ensuring accountability and transparency in government: best practices for smaller Legislatures
- Is there a role for regional Parliaments in solving our common problem of crime and youth violence?
- The most effective use of a committee system in small Legislatures: can it work?

Those topics were deemed relevant to the advancement of parliamentary democracy and the development of the respective parliaments throughout the Region. Emanating from the discussion of the plenary sessions, delegates formulated a list of recommendations for consideration of possible implementation in the legislatures.

Following the days’ discussions, participants were hosted to cocktails and or dinners. The official Conference concluded with a scenic tour of the sister isle of Tobago organized by the Tobago House of Assembly.

This Report also includes the speeches delivered at the Opening Ceremony and verbatim notes of the Plenary Sessions.

**Welcome Address by
The Hon. Wade Mark, MP
Speaker of the House of Representatives**

His Excellency Mr. Timothy Hamel-Smith, Acting President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago; the Honourable Chief Justice, Mr. Justice Ivor Archie, , and Mrs. Archie; Cabinet Ministers; Members of the Diplomatic Corps; Senator Lyndira Oudit, Vice-President of the Senate; Regional Representatives of the Caribbean, Americas and the Atlantic Region, the Chairperson of the Regional Chapter of the CWP-the Hon Dancia Penn, Members of the Parliament of the Caribbean, Americas and the Atlantic Region; Delegates; Observers, Other Distinguished Persons; Ladies and Gentlemen, GOOD MORNING.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the opening of the 35th Conference of the Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. It is indeed an honour for Trinidad to Tobago to host the Regional Secretariat of the CPA and to be able to facilitate discussions over the ensuing days on topics that are extremely important to Parliamentarians in the Caribbean. I am also pleased with the interest shown by our international observers in attending this Conference.

The Theme of this Conference is **“Modernisation of Caribbean Parliaments: Forging our own Identity”**

Modernization has become a **“buzz”** word of the last century, as nations seek to keep abreast of the advancements in technology, scientific discoveries and revolutionized methods of achieving growth and development. For an institution like Parliament, change is often slow, but nonetheless it occurs. The theme of this year’s Regional Conference is, however, an indication that the time has come for us to seriously consider change within our legislatures.

Globalisation and the promotion of good governance, has caused many Parliaments to initiate a modernization agenda. This can take many forms and does not only involve the development of information and communication technology but also incorporates other methods of enhancing and strengthening the operations of the Parliament. In addition, modernization includes administrative, institutional, procedural and even physical improvements. All these are intended to increase interaction with the citizenry, and raise the level of representation provided by Members.

For Parliaments to retain their relevance in an evolving world new and innovative ways must be found to continue to meet the expectations of the people. In Trinidad and Tobago, the widespread use of multimedia, broadcast and information technology in the Parliament Chamber and at Committee meetings acts as mechanisms to strengthen communication between Parliament and the people.

During the coming week delegates will hold discussions on different aspects of the modernization of Parliament including:

- **Parliament as an Autonomous Body**
- **Making the legislature more accessible and interactive for voters**
- **Advancing our Democracies through Constitutional Reform**
- **Improving Transparency and Accountability**

In addition, on Wednesday 28th July, 2010 a Regional Youth Parliamentary Debate will be held in the Parliament Chamber of the Red House. The subject of debate will be **“the establishment of dedicated National Youth Crime Service Units within the respective Ministries with responsibility for national security regionally”**. I am sure that the voices and opinions of the youth of our region will be heard.

This Regional Conference marks another occasion for a meeting of parliamentarians and other persons of considerable experience, who together are fully capable of contributing to developing viable solutions to the many issues which face small legislatures.

I therefore now invite and encourage all delegates and others to participate fully in these deliberations and to make a significant contribution to the development of our Region.

Thank you and may God bless us all.

**Greetings from Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, MP
delivered by Sen. The Hon. Nan Rudrawatee Gosein-Ramgoolam
Minister of Public Administration**

His Excellency Timothy Hamel Smith - Acting President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

The Honourable Justice Ivor Archie - Chief Justice of Trinidad and Tobago

The Honourable Wade Mark, MP - Speaker of the House and Chairman of this Conference

Ministers of Cabinet

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Senator, the Honourable, Lyndira Oudit - Vice President of the Senate and Ag. Joint President of Trinidad and Tobago Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

Leader of the Opposition

Members of the Senate and Members of the House of Representatives

Members of the Tobago House of Assembly

Regional Representatives

The Honourable Dancia Penn – Chairperson of the Regional Chapter of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians

Other Distinguished Delegate and Observers

President of the Inter Religious Organisation and Mrs. Mohammed

Regional Secretary

Distinguished guests

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning. On behalf of the Government and People of Trinidad and Tobago, it gives me great pleasure to also warmly welcome you, the distinguished participants of the 35th Conference of the Caribbean, Americas, and Atlantic Region of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association to our shores. I am especially proud to greet you this morning as a fellow parliamentarian and also in my capacity as Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. I am also extremely pleased to note, that after 18 years, Trinidad and Tobago is once again able to host this conference, at a time when the women and the youth of the Region are making invaluable contributions to the evolution of the Region's democracies.

Yesterday, I was honoured to address my colleagues, the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians, at their third Regional Conference. As I indicated on that occasion, so too I now advise you, that each of us as representatives of the people has accepted a great responsibility. We have been charged with a mandate from our respective citizenry, to lead our nations to economic prosperity, to practice accountable and transparent governance and to facilitate human and social development. Increasingly, ladies and gentlemen, our citizens, quite rightly, also demand freedom of expression and greater participation in the democratic process.

Today the electorate of Trinidad and Tobago will go to the polls to choose their Local Government representatives for the next three years. These representatives who function at the heart of our communities are well placed to articulate the needs of our people and escalate these aspirations back to us, as parliamentarians...as custodians of the national trust.

Collectively as a Parliament, with the right to formulate laws, provide oversight and representation, the legislature must become more accessible to the people. The onus now is on each Parliament, each parliamentarian to develop creative strategies to strengthen the parliamentary system to promote continued good governance for the well being of all citizens. Ladies and gentlemen, there is no understating the fact that we will and should be held accountable for our actions and moreso for our inaction.

While our Governments are now faced with the challenges of the global economic downturn, climate change, rising crime rates, poverty eradication, provision of adequate housing and healthcare, and tailoring education to suit the needs of 21st century development; we must never lose sight of the fact that the people have placed their trust in us. They want solutions not excuses. They want timely results and they want to have a say in the decisions that will affect them.

As parliamentarians, we must develop and implement effective and efficient policies and laws for resolving these and other issues to the benefit of all citizens. We understand that Parliaments do not govern. Yet, they **oversee** the Government and Government is

formed from within the Parliament. Therefore, ladies and gentlemen as we move to “Modernize Caribbean Parliaments”, I trust that we accept that we must turn our Parliaments into the most operational instruments of responsive, accountable and transparent governance and representative legislation.

Yet even as we seek to modernise and strengthen Parliaments we must recognise and respect the Separation of Powers. The Latimer House Principle, to which we all subscribe, speak to the distinctive roles of the Parliament, the Executive and the Judiciary as the guarantors, in their respective roles, of the rule of law, the promotion and protection of fundamental human rights and the entrenchment of good governance based on the highest standards of honesty, probity and accountability.

However, the principles also speak to transparency in the conduct of all public business; the independence and accountability of the judiciary; the need for effective oversight of government through the establishment of scrutiny bodies, the role of civil society and perhaps of greatest significance for us today – the need for parliamentary procedures to provide adequate mechanisms to enforce the accountability of the Executive to Parliament.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago fully understands the need for strong mechanisms to oversee governments, as this only enhances public confidence and promotes greater acceptability of Government’s activities. Here ladies and gentlemen I want to put a plug for the strengthening of the Committee System of Parliament. We all know that there are challenges to operations of this system, particularly in our small Parliaments, but there is no doubt in my mind that the Committee System would enable Parliament to better organize its work and discharge its functions effectively in fulfilment of the mandate of the people.

Over the next two days as you meet in plenary sessions to deliberate on and discuss mechanisms to create dynamic parliaments, reflective of the laws and customs of our respective countries, I ask you to remember an overarching principle of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association – *to build an informed parliamentary community able to deepen democratic commitment and to further co-operation among its legislatures.*

It is in answering that call to democratic commitment, ladies and gentlemen, that we best serve the people who have conferred on us the responsibility to improve their quality of life. There is much work to be done to further the objectives of our democracies. I call on each of you to work together, to share experiences and to look at the workings of other Parliaments to inform our own procedures as we strive to continuously evolve better democratic mechanisms.

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you and wish you successful and fruitful discussions.

Address by His Excellency Timothy Hamel Smith, Acting President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago at the Opening of the 35th Regional Conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), held at the Hyatt Regency at 9:00 a.m. on Monday 26th July, 2010.

Thank you, Chairman, Mr. Jason Elcock

The Honourable Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and Dr. Gregory Bissessar

The Honourable Mr. Justice Ivor Archie, Chief Justice and Mr. Archie

The Honourable Wade Mark, Speaker of the House and Chairman of the Conference
Cabinet Ministers

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Senator Lyndira Oudit, Vice President of the Senate

Members of the Executive of the Caribbean, Americas and the Atlantic Region

Delegates, Observers

Members of the Media

Other Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am delighted to be here today and to be invited to address this distinguished gathering of regional Representatives.

The hosting of this 35th Regional Conference by the Trinidad and Tobago Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association comes at a time when the strength of our democracies has been tested by national elections held within the recent past. The strength of parliamentary democracy in this region can be attributed, in no small measure, to the work of the CPA. Over the years, in many significant ways, the CPA has encouraged, within this and other regions, an informed parliamentary community and has built bridges of understanding among diverse peoples. Conferences have been successfully used towards this end.

I applaud the efforts being made by the CPA to make our Parliaments more attractive to women. Indeed, a more representative Parliament will more easily earn the respect of the public than one that discourages the participation of any group. The just concluded two day Annual Meeting of the Women Parliamentarians of the Region is a critical element in any effort towards bringing our Parliaments into the modern era. I trust that from your deliberations will emerge recommendations that, if followed, will make our Legislatures more accessible and more inviting to the wider public.

I join with all those who have commended the region for choosing the theme "Modernization of Caribbean Parliaments: Forging our own identity." Modernization is a broad term which encompasses ideas of progress and also involves being able to adjust to new environments. I therefore urge all of you to recognize the changed environment in which you may find yourselves, from time to time and focus, in the limited time

available to you, on essential adjustments needed by those of us who, by reason of our being Parliamentarians, are leaders of the people.

Many will agree that there is growing dissatisfaction with the standards of parliamentary behavior which have fuelled, in jurisdiction after jurisdiction, wide criticism about politics in general. There is a strong belief that Members of Parliament are too adversarial in their approaches and that our people are denied the benefits of genuine debate.

The deliberations of our Parliamentarians are today viewed by many, in the comfort of their homes. But, the sad reality is that the public is too often presented with the dominance of political sparring, at a time when a more sophisticated and educated public is seeking more substance in parliamentary debates. Our Parliamentarians need to be ever mindful that the tone which they set during their debates will ultimately be reflected in our societies. You therefore have an enormous responsibility to ensure that your words and actions are within the bounds of civil debate.

As a consequence, there is, to varying degrees, a trend towards disinterest in the work of Parliament by a growing proportion of the electorate. More critically, there seems to be a general decline in respect for Parliament. It is particularly disturbing that the perception that Parliament is irrelevant is highest among the young and these are matters that must be dealt with, if we are to recapture the interest of our youth. It is time for a change in the way business is done and your confidence allows for the opportunity to reflect on ways in which to introduce a more business-like approach to the parliamentary agenda.

I was pleased to hear Mr. Speaker's comments, earlier, on the usefulness of your deliberating on Effective Committee Systems in Small Parliaments. As you discuss that critical parliamentary tool and other measures of ensuring accountability and transparency in government, you will no doubt consider the procedures and structures that will enable our Parliaments to do a better and a more professional job of scrutiny.

Members should regard scrutiny as one of the prime requirements of their role, not only Opposition Members, but also Government and Independent Members as well. Scrutiny of legislation, for example, should have as its objective the improvements of legislation, for example, should have as its objective the improvement of legislation that comes to the Parliament, not its obstruction, simply for the sake of obstruction. But the duty to scrutinize must be understood and accepted by all – parliamentary representatives certainly, but also the public at large.

In this context, I am pleased to note that you will be considering ways to make your Legislatures more accessible and interactive for our citizens who are more interconnected than ever before. It may well be that we are too far behind in the application of modern communication methods, resulting in our losing touch with our citizenry. Today, we have an exciting but largely underdeveloped capacity to communicate and consult with the citizenry. I posit, therefore, that we ought to harness the enormous potential of e-communication to develop interactive consultation on policies or on legislation, prior to their finalization. Indeed, I expect that, within the Parliamentary Chamber itself, the use of technology would greatly enhance your ability to improve the text of the statutes which you have to consider.

I have noted that another critical area you will cover is the relationship between the Parliament and the Executive. This requires urgent focus by our region. The Latimer House Principles, developed in 1998 and adopted by several Parliaments, elsewhere, provides a platform for useful discussion on this topic. It is imperative that Parliamentarians be able to carry out their legislative and constitutional functions, free from unlawful interference and unhindered by fetters that may result from excessive executive dominance.

Also, the Regional Youth Parliament, to be held on the margins of the main Conference, comprising representatives from across the Caribbean, is one to which we all look forward, as our region's young leaders discuss ways in which Caribbean Governments can seek to deal with the prevalence of youth crime in our region.

Several previous participants will also be present in this Debate, the seventh occasion on which such an event will be held. I applaud this worthwhile initiative to involve our youth in politics, as well as the efforts many of our individual Parliaments make to host national youth Parliaments, on an annual basis.

Let us clearly understand that there will be serious, long term consequences if our Parliaments fail to consider and to implement reforms as may be required. We must guard against becoming irrelevant and we must see to it that our young people are not dismissive of politics. Our business is in the public domain and we will not be spared.

In closing, I extend a very warm welcome to all our visitors. We are happy to host you and it is my wish that your time spent with us will be fruitful.

It is now my pleasure to declare open the 35th Conference of the Caribbean, The Americas and the Atlantic Region of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

Message of Thanks by the Honourable Lyndira Oudit, Vice President of the Senate and Joint Vice President of the Trinidad and Tobago Branch of the CPA

His Excellency Timothy Hamel-Smith, Acting President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago; the Honourable Kamla Persad-Bissessar, MP, Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago; the Honourable Chief Justice, Mr. Justice Ivor Archie; the Honourable Wade Mark, MP, Speaker of the House; Ministers of Cabinet; Members of the Diplomatic Corps; Members of the Senate and Members of the House of Representatives; Members of the Tobago House of Assembly; Regional Representatives, and Chairperson of the Regional Chapter of the CWP-the Hon Dancia Penn; Other Delegates and Observers; Regional Secretary; Distinguished Guests and visitors; Members of the Media; Ladies and Gentlemen, GOOD MORNING.

It is a privilege and a great joy for me to first of all thank His Excellency Mr. Timothy Hamel-Smith for opening this 35th Conference of the Caribbean, Americas, Atlantic Region of the CPA. Your presence here is evidence of your continued interest in the Parliament and the workings of our democracy.

Your Excellency Mr. Timothy Hamel-Smith, we are deeply appreciative of your astute comments on the topics to be discussed under the general theme: "*Modernisation of Caribbean Parliaments: Forging our own Identity*". We recognize, without a doubt, that the region has presented our representatives at this Conference with an immense opportunity to significantly shape the course of democracy in our region. We have

heard your warning for us to reform the way we do business and I feel certain that your words to us this morning have added further thought and enthusiasm to the delegates of this Conference to engage in serious and meaningful deliberations. Thank you, Sir.

We are also grateful to the Speaker of the House, the Honourable Wade Mark who gave such a warm welcome to our guests and conveyed sincere words of encouragement to the delegates. His words reveal that as a people we are confronted by accelerating trends in modern society which make it impossible for us to continue as if there was no need for change. We certainly have taken stock of the need for change.

We thank all of our other guest speakers for their words of inspiration. Democracy is well served by your commitment and dedication.

On behalf of the Executive Committee of the Trinidad and Tobago Branch of the CPA, I thank the delegates from all the jurisdictions for making the effort to be here in Port of Spain to discuss issues that are so pertinent at this juncture in our democratic evolution. I have no doubt that your deliberations on issues of common interest will foster a deepening of democratic values and mutual understanding within our region.

We spend the next few days looking for the pathways towards modernization of the Parliaments represented here. We are compelled to do so by a demanding public, expecting accountable, transparent, responsible and responsive governance. That is the way of the world *today*. A world technologically driven and more exacting in results and time deliverables.

It is important, however, as we strive to *forge ahead* that we stay true to who we are as nation states as well as a regional entity. Friends, our region occupies a unique and distinctive position within the Commonwealth of Nations. Wide ethnic, religious and cultural diversities do exist but in peaceful harmony; we are all small but we are many. Individually as well as collectively, we can show the world true understanding of peaceful democracy and shared principles of sustainable governance.

In this vein, I will also like to express thanks to the Hon. Danica Penn, Chairman of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP). The CWP has the very important role of exploring strategies for increasing female representation in Parliaments as well as working towards the mainstreaming of gender considerations in all CPA activities and programmes. Under the chairmanship of the Hon. Dancia Penn, women Parliamentary representatives have already met and I trust that they would have enjoyed very productive and rewarding working sessions and fellowship.

The decision taken at our regional Conference held last year in Guyana to resume the meetings of the regional Youth Parliament Conference is indeed appreciated. We look forward to welcoming the young participants of the region when they arrive on our shores tomorrow. Involvement of the youth is necessary for sustainability of democracy within the region as, indeed, we look to them for our future.

Our entertainment this morning was refreshing and delightful. Please join me in conveying appreciation to the young ones who sang and danced for us, so beautifully. (Applaud)

It will be remiss of me if I did not express appreciation for the organizational efforts of those who have brought us to this point. To our Regional Secretary, we say thanks for

your guidance. We especially wish to commend and show our appreciation to the Conference Coordinator, Mrs. Lynette Joseph-Guevara and her dedicated team from the Regional Secretariat and the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. Thank you for a job well done.

As you may be aware local government elections are being held today here in Trinidad and Tobago. We are extremely pleased that so many have taken the time to join us at this opening ceremony this morning. We say thanks to all distinguished officers, Members of Parliament and to the Media representatives present here.

Once again, I urge all the delegates and observers to make the best of the discussions over the next few days of this Conference. Indeed, it is my sincere hope that what is shared and learned will be translated into meaningful changes within our respective jurisdictions. I wish you a most successful conference.

RECOMMENDATIONS/SUGGESTIONS EMANATING FROM THE 35TH COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION

Session 1: Parliament as an Autonomous Body

- The need for checks and balances within the Westminster System since the 'separation of powers' may not be a reality
- Autonomy is needed for Parliaments to function freely.
- Modernisation in the Caribbean cannot be complete without the autonomy of Caribbean Governments.
- Parliaments should therefore seek: Administrative Autonomy; Institutional and Political Autonomy ;and Financial Autonomy
- A weak feeble and subservient Parliament is a threat to democracy.

Session 2: Advancing our Democracies through Constitutional Reform

- As Parliaments evolve there is a definite need for constitutional Reform.
- Constitutional Reform should involve calling Governments to account, and this should promote good governance
- The issues of fixed terms and referenda were also seen as critical issues in the reform agenda.
- The conduct of elections was a matter that should be addressed bearing in mind the number of matters before the courts.
- Electoral System must also address the region's uniqueness

Session 3: Making the Legislature More Accessible

- Enabling citizens to interact with members via technology: websites; television and radio; youth fora such as the Youth Parliament.
- Educating the population – via schools; competitions; media

Session4: Providing a Platform for Innovative Leadership

- Innovation is necessary since it is the engine of any experiment and brings about change.
- Innovation is required in – quality of debates; role of political parties; use of technology; upholding the principles of democracy; and the role of the citizen
- The need for dedicated research personnel for MPs.
- Need for changes in the Standing Orders to eliminate some of the challenges being faced by Presiding Officers

Session 5: Effective Measures of Ensuring Accountability

- Need for built in control systems to prevent corruption and promote integrity.
- There is need for laws to strengthen the Integrity Commission
- Deficiencies in the Westminster Model must be addressed to address Integrity, Accountability and Transparency.

Session 6: Is there a Role for Regional Parliaments in solving our Common Problem of Crime and youth Violence

- Reviewing the Education System
- Develop programmes through legislation which are relevant to the youth
- Parliamentarians must lead by example in terms of behaviour
- Parliamentarians should be directly involved in youth affairs.
- The role of the family in crime and violence must also be addressed
- Labour laws also need to be reviewed.
- Anti-gang legislature is also possible.

Session 7: The Most Effective Use of the Committee System

- Democratic Legislatures depend on Committees and therefore modernisation of the system is necessary to meet the region's needs.
- Manage extensions
- Attendance should be mandatory
- Research facilities need to be addressed.

Respectfully submitted,

Mr. Russ Hiebert, M.P., Chair for,
Mr. Joe Preston, M.P.
Canadian Branch of the
Commonwealth Parliamentary
Association (CPA)

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)
ACTIVITY	35th Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Regional Conference of the Caribbean, the Americas and the Atlantic
DESTINATION	Port of Spain, Trinidad-and-Tobago
DATES	July 23 to 31, 2010
DELEGATION	
SENATE	-
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Mr. Joe Preston, M.P.
STAFF	-
TRANSPORTATION	\$1,936.03
ACCOMMODATION	0.00
HOSPITALITY	0.00
PER DIEMS	\$ 196.50
OFFICIAL GIFTS	0.00
MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES	0.00
TOTAL	\$2,132.53