



**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation to the 58<sup>th</sup>  
Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference**

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

**Colombo, Sri Lanka**

**September 7 – 15, 2012**

## Report

The delegation of the Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association which attended the 58th Annual Conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in Colombo, Sri Lanka from September 7 – 15, 2012 has the honour to present its Report.

### **58th CPA Conference, Colombo, Sri Lanka**

The conference, hosted by the Parliament of Sri Lanka from September 7 – 15, 2012 in Colombo, was attended by more than 550 Members and officials of Parliaments and Legislatures from approximately 170 Commonwealth nations, states, provinces and territories which belong to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA). They acknowledged in particular the role that the rapidly growing world of the social media can and should play in promoting the Commonwealth principles of good democratic governance, equitable development for all and respect for human rights and the rule of law.

Support was expressed for Commonwealth involvement in helping nations to deal with a wide range of issues, from youth unemployment to terrorism, to the advance of the representation of women in prominent decision-making positions, to the development of economies in small states.

The meeting, chaired by Hon. Chamal Rajapaksa, MP, Speaker of the Sri Lankan Parliament and 2012 President of the CPA, included the Small Branches Conference on 9 and 10 September for Parliamentarians from jurisdictions with populations of up to 500,000.

The Canadian Branch was represented by the following delegation:

- Mr. Russ Hiebert, M.P., Chair of the CPA Canadian Branch
- Hon. Raynell Andreychuk, Senator
- Hon. David Smith, Senator
- Mr. Devinder Shory, M.P.
- Mr. Joe Daniel, M.P.
- Ms. Elizabeth Kingston, Executive Secretary

The Canadian Branch delegation was an integral part of the 34 member Canadian Region delegation to the Conference which also included representatives of the provincial and territorial legislative bodies of the Canadian Region.

As Regional Representative on the Executive Committee (EXCO), Mr. Russ Hiebert, M.P. attended the EXCO meetings held on September 9 -10, 2012.

### **31th Small Branches Conference**

Several delegates from the Canadian Region arrived in time to participate as either delegates or observers at the Small Branches Conference. During the Small Branches Conference, the following topics were discussed during the plenary sessions:

- Ensuring Adequate Parliamentary Scrutiny of Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
- The Impact of the Informal Economy on Economic Diversification in Small States
- Strategies to Increase Women's representation in Parliaments in Small States
- Measuring Progress and Well-being beyond GDP in Small States

### **First Plenary: Ensuring Adequate Parliamentary Scrutiny of Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs**

National policy is influenced by global issues and decisions so Parliament's role in this area is necessary to ensure openness in the process and to draw clear and concise lines of responsibilities, agreed Members from small Parliaments.

It might be a challenge to establish a majority consensus among parliamentary parties and it could stall policy developments. But it was agreed that legislators must be involved in international agreements when they are being drafted, not just when they are to be ratified.

Members agreed that Parliamentarians are now usually poorly informed about the actions of their governments in foreign affairs, so Parliaments should develop new areas of scrutiny and the existing scrutiny should be made clearer and more precise.

Parliaments have limited influence on the executive and on international agencies such as the United Nations (UN) and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). But small states are expected to sign OECD and UN treaties even though scrutinizing every single international treaty exhausts their resources. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) could assist small Parliaments in scrutinizing these agreements by facilitating an exchange of information.

Cross-party committees, with appropriate legal and other expertise and administrative support, could also focus on foreign and Commonwealth affairs prior to debate by Parliament. Another suggestion was for jurisdictions to review draft treaties from the perspective of how they will affect the lives of citizens.

Small dependent territories and subnational jurisdictions have difficulty in developing their international identities and their areas of parliamentary scrutiny. However, their involvement in foreign affairs was seen as necessary to develop consistent foreign policies for all parties.

## **Second Plenary: The Impact of the Informal Economy on Economic Diversification in Small States:**

The meeting heard that the Informal Economy (IE) is not governed by rules and affects both underdeveloped and developed countries. It was noted that countries with a high unemployment rate are more likely to have a larger informal economy. The IE encompasses gambling, prostitution, illicit drugs and unregulated trading. Members agreed that there is no single solution to the problem, if it is indeed a problem.

From an individual's perspective, where there is no work but a pressing need to provide, depriving individuals of the opportunity to make a living the best way they can could lead to even greater burdens on government if they turn to crime.

The session recognized the need for human compassion and an understanding of the underlying causes of the IE. Governments must decide whether this is actually a problem. If it is, they should try to integrate the IE into the formal sector through education and training, appropriate taxation regimes and availability of credit to small businesses. However, the context is important and "one size does not fit all".

## **Third plenary: Strategies to Increase Women's representation in Parliaments in Small States**

Changes to the way Parliaments and political parties operate and to the way serving women Parliamentarians work are necessary to increase the numbers of women in small Parliaments, said participants in this discussion.

It was argued that gender mainstreaming is critical for sustainable development, good governance, transparency and accountability, and that women as agents for change can transform societies. Parliaments must therefore implement changes to promote language that is gender-neutral and behaviour that is non-confrontational. Establishing women's parliamentary caucuses or parliamentary committees on gender were suggested, as was alternating key House posts between the genders. Family-friendly sitting hours, childcare facilities and parental leave for Parliamentarians were also advocated, as was providing gender-sensitivity training programmes.

Political party structures need to change to bring about equitable representation of women, such as having quotas for women in candidates' lists at elections. Legislated quotas for women's representation could be used. Political party support for gender mainstreaming was seen as critical not simply to get more women elected but also to gather support for any necessary parliamentary and constitutional reforms to transform the institution of Parliament into a gender-neutral institution.

Women already in office were urged to diversify their policy priorities to include economics, finance, employment, agriculture, foreign affairs and other issues so they go beyond the gender agenda. Women MPs must lead to inspire people and change perceptions, as well as to educate people about politics and the need for more women in elected seats. Capacity-building workshops for women were suggested, as was

using present and past politicians to remove some of the reluctance to being a politician and to mentor new-comers.

#### **Fourth Plenary: Measuring progress and Well-being beyond GDP in Small States:**

Although progress and well-being were identified as subjective terms holding different meanings to different people, they were generally recognized as describing the quality of life available to people. The meeting saw the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's "Better Life Index" as a true measure of a country's development.

Gross domestic product (GDP) is not sufficient on its own to be an indicator of social progress as it measures the progress of the economy but not the society. Members agreed it is necessary to go beyond this economic indicator, adopted as an index in the 1930s to measure a country's economic development, so the progress of a people in all spheres is considered.

The global trend to measure performance of nations by more than just economic growth takes into account poverty rates, unemployment rates, disposable income, education levels, natural resources, environmental pollution, waste disposal and leisure.

GDP is an important indicator not to be ignored. But it should be considered alongside other indicators such as the "Human Development Index", which refers to such areas as literacy, health, life expectancy and standard of living to get a true reflection of a country's progress.

#### **Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Meeting**

The meeting of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians was held on 12 September. The following is a summary of the discussions.

#### **Is there such a Thing as a Women's Agenda in Parliament? If not, why not? If so, what should it be?**

Some Members expressed the view that the idea of a women's agenda in Parliament in itself marginalizes women, while others argued that such an agenda is necessary due to social inequalities that cripple women and restrict their movement in the political arena.

A women's agenda was opposed because it would reinforce a male perspective that women require special treatment due to a lack of capacity and capability. Equality must be achieved through strategic plans of action that are the result of a combined effort to instigate changes in social, economic and political spheres as opposed to a specific agenda imposed on society.

Members opposing this view pointed out that most institutions, including Parliament, were established by men for men, which makes a women's agenda in Parliament necessary to ensure the decisions made by Parliament are scrutinized through a gender lens and are gender-sensitive. To promote women to take leading roles in public life and

to ensure that others accept and acknowledge this role, it is necessary to have an agenda that responds to the various degrees of discrimination in each country.

All participants were in agreement that women's representation in Parliament is an issue that requires further attention. The need to encourage the younger generation to take part actively in politics and the role of women leaders within the CPA in advocating change would hopefully shift the attitudes of both men and women towards equality and fair treatment.

### **Opening Ceremonies of 58th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference**

On September 11, 2013 His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Vice Patron, CPA officially opened the 58th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

As is the usual practice at the Annual Conference, the Secretary General of the Commonwealth, Mr. Kamallesh Sharma, and the Secretary General of the CPA Secretariat, Dr. William F. Shija, addressed the delegates following the official ceremonies. Both concentrated their remarks on the general themes of the Conference, including parliamentary governance, democracy and development and the years of close cooperation between the CPA and the Commonwealth Secretariat on issues of mutual interest and concern.

Canadian delegates participated in the following workshops:

- Empowering Future Generations through Access to Health, Education and vocational Training
- Should the Commonwealth Establish a Commissioner for Democracy, the Rule of Law and Human Rights?
- The Politics of Constitution-making, the Role of Parliaments in relation to the People
- Ensuring adequate Parliamentary Scrutiny of Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
- The Role of Parliamentarians in Conflict Resolution and Peace-Building
- Engaging Political Parties to Improve Gender-responsive Governance
- Terrorism – The Threat to Democracy, peace and Security
- Tackling Youth Unemployment

## **Workshop A: Empowering Future Generations Through Access to Health and Education and Vocational Training**

Sri Lanka's achievements for its people in the fields of health and education, producing indices said to be the best in the South Asian region and almost on a par with some developed countries, were highlighted at this conference workshop.

Direct state intervention and massive investment in providing access to free health and education were cited as the major reasons for Sri Lanka's achievements. Universal suffrage, enjoyed by Sri Lankans since 1931, enabled voters to extract benefits in these fields from successive governments. State intervention in food distribution since the Second World War was also cited as contributing to Sri Lanka's accomplishments in these vital fields.

Delegates showed keen interest in learning from and sharing the experiences of Sri Lanka in these fields as its policies have in turn contributed to a low unemployment rate, very low infant and maternal mortality rates, adult literacy of 98 per cent and consistent economic growth of around six per cent a year in recent years.

## **Workshop B: Should the Commonwealth establish a Commissioner for Democracy, the Rule of law and Human Rights?**

The core values of the Commonwealth, as set out in the 1991 Harare Declaration are peace, democracy, global economic development, the rule of law and the liberty of individual citizens under the law. The implementation of these values requires proper stewardship. The issue arises as to how such stewardship should be expressed in the Commonwealth.

Some did not agree there is a need to establish an office of Human Rights Commissioner, believing that such an office would unnecessarily duplicate the work of the United Nations and other bodies while undermining the internal affairs of member states.

Others said the office is crucial to the role of the CPA, as a means of ensuring the protection of its Members in their expression of views as individual citizens and Parliamentarians, without being subject to harm or abuse.

While some agreed with the principle of an individual Commissioner, others looked towards the establishment of a Commission comprised of representatives from CPA member states. In the end, there was no consensus on the question.

## **Workshop C: The Politics of Constitution-Making: The Role of Parliaments In Relation to the People**

Meaningful consultation with the people is crucial to building a constitution's legitimacy so, as the body elected to represent the people, it is the responsibility of Parliament to

ensure that the constitution reflects the views of the people, agreed workshop participants.

Discussing a number of measures that are important to the process of constitution-making, participants also agreed that constitutions may need to be updated or revisited to keep pace with social development. Many Commonwealth countries in particular may face this issue as their original constitutions were drafted at the time of independence from the colonial power.

Some participants argued for the benefits of including social and economic rights (such as the right to education or employment) in constitutions, while others expressed concern about how such rights could be enforced and instead took the view that they should be expressed as aspirational goals.

Given the role to be played by Parliaments in constitution-making, participants debated the merits of different electoral systems in ensuring that Parliaments mirror the society they are elected to represent, including the benefits and disadvantages of having upper and lower Houses of Parliament and instituting quotas for women's representation in Parliaments.

#### **Workshop D: Ensuring Adequate Parliamentary Scrutiny of Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs**

Senator Raynell Andreychuk was a designated presenter in this workshop.

Members acknowledged the complexity of dealing with foreign policy issues in Commonwealth countries, especially because this area has been in the exclusive domain of the executive arm of government with limited participation by Parliament.

However, with the emerging trend toward parliamentary diplomacy and the growing knowledge of citizens on transparency and accountability, Members speaking in the workshop urged the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association to continue to strengthen the capacity of the Legislature to demonstrate competence in foreign policy matters.

Foreign policy is an expression of a country's national interests and so should reflect the aspirations of the people who are sovereign. The value of involving Parliamentarians, as representatives of the people, in foreign policy issues cannot be over-emphasized.

The workshop noted the imperative of repositioning parliamentary structures, such as standing or special committees, to respond effectively to the demands of parliamentary diplomacy through parliamentary scrutiny.

The workshop further noted the gap between developed and developing member states in parliamentary scrutiny, especially in foreign policy considerations, and urged Members to share knowledge and experiences on best practice which would be a stimulus for change.



## **Workshop E: The Role of Parliamentarians in Conflict Resolution and Peace-Building**

*“By its very nature, Parliament brings divergent interests and divergent opinions to one place at one time for discussion.”*

Devinder Shory M.P. was a designated presenter in this workshop.

Parliamentarians must go beyond dialogue to strengthen national institutions, including Parliament, as a key part of their vital role in resolving and preventing conflicts, stressed speakers in this workshop.

It was widely agreed that the valuable experience of Parliamentarians in building understanding among communities should be exploited both domestically and internationally to air grievances, resolve disputes and prevent conflicts as well as to reconcile opposing forces, to end conflicts and prevent them from erupting again. But Parliamentarians must go beyond dialogue facilitation to ensure that institutions are either established or maintained to provide a just and equitable society for all.

Prime among institutional measures should be parliamentary and electoral reform to guarantee that all communities are – and perceive that they are – fully represented and heard in the nation’s primary political forum. Parliaments must also be strengthened so they legislate and hold the executive accountable effectively, transparently and in the interests of all sections of society.

The workshop noted that Parliaments must also campaign to depoliticize and strengthen other institutions such as the judiciary, the police and security forces. Commissions such as those to prevent corruption and to protect human rights must be established or strengthened. All these institutions must be monitored to ensure they operate according to the rule of law and without partisan political or communal biases.

## **Workshop F: Engaging Political Parties to Improve Gender-Responsive Governance**

Great gains have been made by women in Parliaments and Legislatures in recent years due to affirmative action policies, cultural and social changes favouring greater representation of women and women supporting women to take on leadership roles, agreed the workshop.

There continue to be challenges, however, in achieving gender-responsive governance, so the workshop identified a range of strategies for the future, focusing first on political parties. They should develop formal and informal ways to promote gender equity, support women in leadership roles and assess policies on criteria to promote gender equality.

All members of the community, including men in political roles, should be engaged to ensure that gender equality is not seen as a “women’s issue” but as a fundamental precondition to democracy, development and diversity.

Active support should also be provided to women in leadership roles across the political divide through mentoring, training and implementing policies that achieve gender equality. Educating political colleagues and the broader community about the overall benefits of having women in decision-making roles was also advocated in the workshop.

### **Workshop G: TERRORISM – The Threat to Democracy, Peace and Security**

Preventative measures against terrorism must address social distributive justice by implementing national policies to alleviate alienation and deprivation, said Members speaking at this workshop. Social injustice and hatred must be denied at all levels and registers of approved religious teachers should be established to ensure that the right ideologies are taught. Terrorism must be dealt with in a multidimensional level. Offending countries must be isolated and funding and resources blocked.

Parliamentarians must reach out to the community and deepen relations with the citizenry. As leaders, they must protect the world from terrorist ideology by delivering positive messages and providing good governance, speaking out with passion to lead the fight against terrorism.

The workshop noted that terrorists have become very creative in their outreach through the Internet. In 2002 there were 202 websites; today there are more than 300. People are seduced and recruited via online communication. Internet websites promoting terrorist ideology and tools of terror should be banned and the terrorist held accountable. Cyber terrorism has also become a real threat to governments. The fight against terrorism might require the suspension of certain rights and freedoms of citizens, it was suggested.

Unless it provides the fruits of freedom, democracy becomes meaningless. In the pursuit of true democracy, peace and security, terrorism is an enormous challenge. It impacts on democracy and affects people's lives and must be separated from religion.

### **Workshop H: Tackling Youth Unemployment**

Youth unemployment in many countries is a growing problem that warrants intense and expeditious action guided by a systematic and nation-wide government action plan starting with the education system. Educational and training programmes should be designed to make people employable in both the public and private sectors.

Higher female unemployment also needs to be addressed as young women should have opportunities for employment which are equal to opportunities for young men.

In order to be productive, young people should have access to technological and technical tertiary education. Additionally, labour market information on employment opportunities should be easily accessible by every young person.

Employment in the agricultural sector was also stressed. The contribution to national productivity from this sector is very high and more people could find employment there.

It is important to focus on the impact of under-employment as well as unemployment. Most young people in some countries were said to aspire to jobs in the government sector and when it is unable to accommodate them, they become frustrated. Young people seeking employment after education could be engaged in voluntary services until they find jobs.

### **Final Plenary: The Role of Social Media in Modern-day Politics**

Russ Hiebert, M.P. was a designated presenter in the final plenary.

The social media must be used by Parliaments, Parliamentarians, governments and political parties as they are highly effective tools to involve and inform citizens in public policy-making and in the formation of governments. But all these groups must develop strategies to deal with a wide array of both positive and negative effects of these rapidly growing media, argued participants in the final plenary session.

The positive effects of the various forms of social media were laid out as Members recorded a high degree of their own participation in some or all of the social media. These media can empower the public in a way that is far faster, cheaper and more pervasive than other forms of communication. They encourage pluralism, reach young people more than other media and encourage greater participation, accountability and transparency.

Parliamentarians can use their “celebrity” status in such media as Facebook and Twitter to interest people in politics and political issues. Social media have been effective in election campaign fund-raising, especially encouraging small contributions from individual voters.

But delegates cautioned that the social media alone cannot change the world and institutions and individuals in the political field must learn how to distinguish between good and bad uses. The uncontrolled nature of social media postings means they can be misleading and manipulative and can misinform. Irresponsible and irrelevant material can also overload readers and swamp genuine political reporting and comment – and the capacity of individual Members to deal with them.

The social media can be used to fuel rioting, as happened in the United Kingdom in 2011. They are not yet fully available in developing countries and, even in countries with good urban internet access, they are often not readily accessible by rural citizens and by the poor.

However, the workshop noted the social media are such powerful, effective and low-cost information sources that the problems surrounding them cannot and should not stop Parliaments and Members from developing effective ways to use them to inform responsibly and, in so doing, help teach young people how to separate good information from bad.

Summaries were supplied by rapporteurs present at each workshop session. Copies of the complete Workshop Reports from the 58th CPA Conference from which excerpts have been taken in the preparation of this report are available on line at the following address: <http://www.cpahq.org>

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. Also, the delegation very much appreciated the tremendous assistance provided by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade both prior to travel to Sri Lanka as well as by the Acting Canadian High Commissioner, Richard Bale and High Commission staff while attending the conference.

Respectfully submitted,

Mr. Joe Preston, M.P.

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

## Travel Costs

<b>ASSOCIATION</b>	Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)
<b>ACTIVITY</b>	58 <sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference
<b>DESTINATION</b>	Colombo, Sri Lanka
<b>DATES</b>	September 7 – 15, 2013
<b>DELEGATION</b>	
SENATE	Hon. Raynell Andreychuk, Senator, Hon. David Smith, Senator
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Mr. Russ Hiebert, M.P., Mr. Devinder Shory, M.P., Mr. Joe Daniel, M.P.
STAFF	Elizabeth Kingston
<b>TRANSPORTATION</b>	\$15,257.45
<b>ACCOMMODATION</b>	\$5,703.19
<b>HOSPITALITY</b>	\$277.79
<b>PER DIEMS</b>	\$1,835.91
<b>OFFICIAL GIFTS</b>	\$190.75
<b>MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES</b>	\$1,635.05
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$24,900.14</b>