



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

International Relations: Parliamentary travel

By correspondence

Reference: SPCB (2024) Paper 16

Executive summary

1. The SPCB is invited to consider and approve forthcoming overseas parliamentary travel. In accordance with paragraphs 62 and 64 of Section 2 of the Code of Conduct, the travel and other costs of a visit which are wholly met by the SPCB, or are approved by the SPCB prior to the visit, is exempt from registration as an overseas visit in the Register of Interests of Members of the Scottish Parliament.

Issues and options

2. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) is divided into nine geographic regions: Africa, Asia, Australia, British Islands and Mediterranean (BIM), Canada, the Caribbean, the Americas and Atlantic (CAA), India, the Pacific and South-East Asia. The BIM region is made up of branches from Alderney, Cyprus, Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, Guernsey, Isle of Man, Jersey, Malta, Northern Ireland, St Helena, Scotland, Wales and the United Kingdom.

CPA BIMR CWP Conference

3. The 10th British Islands and Mediterranean Region (BIMR) Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Conference will take place in Valletta, Malta, from 6-9 March 2024.
4. The delegates selected to attend the conference will be Sarah Boyack MSP, Member of the CPA Scotland Branch Executive Committee (BEC) and CWP Scotland Branch Representative; and Michelle Thomson MSP, CWP Scotland Branch Representative.
5. The conference will bring together women parliamentarians and parliamentary staff from across the BIMR for this unique conference and networking opportunity. The last conference was held in 2022.

6. The theme of the conference is *Resilient Women-Moulding Girls into Strong Women* and the conference will focus on how women are impacted by an array of circumstances, which calls for greater resilience. Sessions will include *Women in Conflict; Women and the Pandemic; and Women under pressure: Period Poverty*. The conference will also include an informal session with NGOs to discuss the *Empowerment of Women to build strong characters*; and “*Girl Talk*” a session aimed at sharing female experiences. Both Members will take part in all sessions and Michelle Thomson MSP will also be a panellist on a session called *Challenges of being a Woman Member of Parliament*.
7. Furthermore, on International Women’s Day, 8 March, there will be a session called *Time for Women’s Day*, where parliaments across the region share topics of interests highlighted by young women in their country. These have been established through a group session taking place in each parliament. On 19 February Sarah Boyack MSP and Michelle Thomson MSP will host a session on behalf of the Scottish Parliament, which is being delivered by the International Relations Office (IRO) in collaboration with the Young Women’s Movement. Two of the participants from this group session are also able to take part remotely in the session on 8 March.

CPA BIMR Conference

8. The 53rd British Islands and Mediterranean Regional Conference will take place on St Helena Island 18-25 May 2024.
9. The delegates attending the conference will be Jeremy Balfour MSP, Member of the CPA Scotland BEC and Regional Champion for the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities Network (CPwD), Stuart McMillan MSP, Member of the Scotland BEC and Regional Representative on the CPA Executive Committee (ExCo) and Sarah Boyack MSP, Member of the CPA Scotland BEC and CWP Scotland Branch Representative.
10. The theme of the conference is *Addressing Challenges to Sustainable Development in Times of Global Uncertainty which will cover discussions on Digital Reforms and Artificial Intelligence; Decentralised Finance; Green Energy Solutions; Climate Emergency; Tourism Development; Improving Agriculture Productivity; and Benefit of Youth Parliament*. There will also be workshops on *Social Housing & Population; and Marine Environment & Scrutiny Committees*.
11. In addition to the above sessions, the conference will include the BIMR Annual General Meeting and a CWP Business Meeting.

12. The conference will provide delegates with the opportunity to strengthen their regional network, benefit from peer-to-peer exchange on issues affecting parliaments and parliamentarians in the BIMR.

Resource implications

BIMR CWP Conference

13. The CPA Malta Branch will meet the cost of the accommodation and meals included in the programme. All other costs will be met by SPCB through IRO's budget. The estimated cost for the parliamentary visit to Malta is £2,100 which covers travel, conference registration fees, meals and appropriate incidental expenses for 2 MSPs and 2 accompanying officials. The second official is joining the delegation in order to gain knowledge of the work of the CPA and build resilience within the IRO team.

BIMR Conference

14. The CPA St Helena Branch will meet the cost of the accommodation and meals included in the programme. All other costs will be met by SPCB through IRO's budget. The estimated cost for the parliamentary visit to St Helena is £12,100 which covers travel, accommodation in Johannesburg, meals and appropriate incidental expenses for 3 MSPs and 1 accompanying official.

Governance

15. The SPCB will recall that, within the International Strategy which it agreed in September 2021, there is a requirement for the IRO to outline to the SPCB why the visit is in person (as opposed to virtual), the travel options and environmental impact considered by the delegation.

BIMR CWP Conference

16. The Malta Branch have advised that the conference will not be available online, with the exception of the International Women's Day event on 8 March. As such, full participation by the delegates at this conference is only possible in person.
17. Due to time constraints the only viable travel option between Scotland and Malta is by air. The delegation will travel via London on the way to Valletta (direct flights not available on 6 March) and directly to Edinburgh on the return leg. The travel time between Valletta and Edinburgh is 3 hours 15 min for the direct flight.

Route	Price (£ per person)	CO2 (kg per person)
Edinburgh to Valletta return (Economy Class)	263.08	843.19

BIMR Conference

18. The St Helena Branch have advised that the only meetings available online are the AGM and CWP Business meeting. All other sessions are in person only, as such full participation by the delegates at this conference is only possible in person.

19. The only viable travel option between Scotland and St Helena is by air. The St Helena Branch advised that there is only one flight to and from St Helena per week, which goes to/from Johannesburg. Therefore, the delegation will travel via Amsterdam to Johannesburg where all BIMR delegates will meet. The flight between Amsterdam and Johannesburg takes 10 hours and 45 min. On the return leg the delegates will travel via Paris, which takes 11 hours and 25 min.

Route	Price (£ per person)	CO2 (kg per person)
Edinburgh- St Helena return (Economy Class)	1792	3757.03
Edinburgh- St Helena return (Premium Economy Class)	2385	5249.88
Edinburgh- St Helena return (Business Class)	3882	8600.44

Due to the distance and for budget reasons the IRO recommends that the delegates travel by Premium Economy Class on long-distance flights.

Publication Scheme

20. This paper will be published in line with the SPCB's Publication Scheme.

Decision

21. The SPCB is invited to consider the above travel and, in accordance with the Code of Conduct, approve the details of the travel and the associated costs provided.

22. The IRO will then notify the Members concerned they do not need to register this travel.

International Relations Office
February 2024