Commonwealth Plenary Conference 2012 draft report

Purpose

Members are invited to comment on, amend and agree the draft report on the 2012 Commonwealth Plenary Conference which is provided in Annex (i) to this paper.

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ANNEX (i)

58TH COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE, COLOMBO, SRI LANKA

Monday 10 September to Saturday 15th September 2012

THEME: “Ensuring a Relevant Commonwealth for the Future”

CONFERENCE REPORT

Anna Lo MLA (Northern Ireland Assembly)
Hugh Widdis (Director of Legal Services, Northern Ireland Assembly)

Duncan McNeil MSP (The Scottish Parliament)
Tavish Scott MSP (The Scottish Parliament)

Rebecca Evans AM (National Assembly of Wales)
Margaret Neal, Secretary (CPA Scotland Branch and delegation Secretary to Northern Ireland and Wales Branches)
Background

1. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) holds Plenary Conferences once per year, usually in August/September, to coincide with most member countries summer recesses. The devolved legislatures, all of which have active CPA Branches within the UK, were invited to send one delegate and also had the opportunity to send observers. The Scotland Branch was invited to fulfil the role of Secretary to the Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales Branches. This role is rotational and accordingly Wales will provide the Secretary in 2013 and Northern Ireland in 2014. The Scottish Parliament was also represented at the Society of Clerks-at-the-Table in Commonwealth Parliaments meeting in Colombo which runs in parallel with the Plenary Conference. Alison Walker, Clerk to the Scottish Parliament’s Standards Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, attended this conference.

2. The theme for this year’s Plenary Conference was “Ensuring a Relevant Commonwealth for the Future”. The format for the conference, which is determined by the International Executive Committee of CPA in discussion with the host branch, involved an Opening Ceremony, Regional Group Meetings, 10 Themed Workshops, 2 specific Plenary Sessions and a meeting of the General Assembly of the CPA. Several networking functions were also held outside of the main sessions.

3. The Conference was attended by over 650 parliamentarians and officials from all 9 regions of the Commonwealth, with 53 countries and 175 parliaments and legislatures represented. The conference provided an opportunity for parliamentarians across the Commonwealth to learn about the strengths and challenges of democratic governance.

4. A copy of the full conference programme can be obtained at the link below.

Monday 10 September 2012

5. The delegation from the devolved legislatures arrived in Sri Lanka on Monday 10 September. The delegation’s first meeting was a briefing by HE John Rankin, the British High Commissioner to Sri Lanka.


7. Later that evening delegates attended the Welcome Dinner which was hosted by Hon. Chamal Rajapaksa, Speaker and President of the CPA.
Tuesday 11 September 2012

Official Opening Ceremony

8. The Opening Ceremony took place on the morning of 11 September at the Nelum Pokuna Mahinda Rajapaksa Theatre. Sir Alan Haselhurst MP addressed delegates on the challenges facing democratic politics and how the CPA must also renew and progress. This was followed by an address by the Hon. Chamal Rajapaksa, Speaker and President of the CPA, who emphasised that he hoped the deliberations by delegates at the conference, would strengthen democracy and good governance in the CPA Member States.

9. Lastly, His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Vice Patron of the CPA, also addressed Members and stressed the importance of appreciating the different cultures and values of each country where democracy has taken root and is developing. He noted that democracy can only truly function when these differences are understood and respected. In particular, the President highlighted that Sri Lanka was the first country to elect a female Prime Minister and that he was particularly committed to assisting the professional contribution of women in democratic bodies.

10. Please refer to the link below for keypoints and verbatim accounts of speeches by the Speaker of Parliament and the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka can be accessed at the link below: https://cpc2012.parliament.lk/docs/nb_20120912.pdf

British Islands and Mediterranean Regional meeting

11. In the afternoon, Members of the Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland delegations attended the British Islands and Mediterranean Regional (BIMR) meeting. A copy of the Agenda for that meeting is attached at Annex A.

12. The BIMR regional representatives, Sir Alan Haselhurst MP, Deputy Mike O’Hara, Hugh Bayley MP and Dr Pambos Papageorgiou MP were on hand to provide updates from their own perspectives on key developments which had taken place at the International Executive Committee meeting earlier that week.

13. The meeting was largely dominated by discussions around existing and continuing tensions within the International Executive Committee and the content of the CPA Working Party report.

14. Three key issues emerged which included the status of the CPA, a proposed internal audit function and the CPA accounts.
15. It was explained that removing section 47(2) from the constitution of the CPA would not resolve the issue in relation to the charity status of the CPA. It was further explained that the CPA would require to be dismantled, in accordance with strict legal requirements, and a new charity would have to be set up to allow any new organisation to access reserve funds.

16. It was explained that the Working Party interim report, as drafted following the meeting in Quebec in July 2012, had set out recommendations which included setting up an internal audit function. The recommendations had then been discussed at a further meeting of the Working Group in Sri Lanka. The Working Party had agreed, by one vote, that the recommendation in relation to the internal audit function should be removed.

17. Several delegates expressed concern at the lack of information in relation to the financial position of the CPA. It was generally felt that a paper would have been useful along with a copy of the final accounts in order that delegates had the opportunity to be better informed regarding the financial position on the CPA in advance of the regional meeting and the General Assembly.

18. The meeting was adjourned until 9.00am on Wednesday 12 September.

Opening Plenary

19. Dr William Shija, Secretary General of the CPA and Hon. Kamlesh Sharma, Secretary General of the Commonwealth, addressed the opening plenary. Dr Sharma drew attention to the fact that the CPA was a vital component in the global architecture of the Commonwealth. He pointed out that one of the strengths of the Commonwealth, as a community, was its capacity to convene, to connect, bringing people and institutions together for mutual and collective benefits.

20. Dr Shija spoke about the importance of CPA programmes including maintaining its gender programmes to support women in parliament. Dr Shija also spoke about the importance of regional exchanges to share information on common issues.

Wednesday 12 September

Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP)

21. Rebecca Evans AM attended the CWP business meeting. Ms Evans found the meeting to be extremely interesting. However she felt that more time should have been allocated to this very important section of the CPA conference.
Regional meeting

22. The Regional meeting was re-convened at 9.00am to continue discussions and address remaining items on the agenda.

23. Roberta Blackman-Woods MP chaired this meeting supported by Deputy Mike O’Hara, and Dr Pambos Papageorgiou MP. Hugh Bayley MP joined the meeting later.

24. It was generally agreed that whilst it was very disappointing that the internal audit recommendations had been removed from the Report of the Working Party, it was essential, in order to move forward the other recommendations, that the report was ratified at the General Assembly.

25. It was hoped that, if the Working Party recommendations were adopted, the CPA would be de-registered as a charity and a way would be found under charity law to enable the CPA to access reserves. It was hoped that a solution could be found to allow a proposal to be considered by the International Executive Committee and approved at the General Assembly in 2013.

26. Roberta Blackman-Woods MP reported that the BIMR was not represented at the meeting of the CWP Steering Group. Some delegates expressed concern about the lack of representation. The Regional Secretary informed the meeting that he had received nominations from Branches, interested in the CWP Steering Group position, by the agreed closing date of 19 July 2012. The discussion which followed, highlighted that some delegates had expected that a paper outlining options for selecting a woman member (as agreed at the AGM in Edinburgh in June 2012), to serve on the Steering Group for the ensuing 3 year period, would be available for discussion at this meeting. In the absence of such a paper, it was agreed that Branches should provide the Regional Secretary with any thoughts on how best to select the new representative from nominees as soon as possible.

27. Delegates were reminded that the Chair of the CWP position would require to be filled in 2013 following the General Assembly in South Africa.

28. It was generally agreed that:

- BIMR must have their representative in place for the next meeting of the CWP Steering Group;
- Consideration should be given to a postal election to ensure that this matter was dealt with quickly;
- Consideration should be given to increasing the time allocated to CWP meetings at Conferences; and
• Whoever was elected would be required to “have a strong voice within the CWP”.

29. Lord Foulkes proposed that a motion be drafted and signed by the BIMR about the Commonwealth Games on lessons learned from the 2012 Olympic Games. The motion would then be presented to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 2013. It was further agreed that that it would be appropriate to put forward the motion at the General Assembly. The Commonwealth Games are due to be held in Glasgow in 2014.

30. The Regional meeting closed and delegates participated in the Conference workshops.

Workshops

31. There were 8 separate workshops. These were:

B. Should the Commonwealth Establish a Commissioner for Democracy, the Rule of Law and Human Rights?
C. The Politics of Constitution-Making, the Role of Parliaments in Relation to the People.
D. Ensuring Adequate Parliamentary Scrutiny of Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.
E. The Role of Parliamentarians in Conflict Resolution and Peace-Building.
F. Engaging Political Parties to Improve Gender-responsive Governance.
G. Terrorism - The Threat to Democracy, Peace and Security.
H. Tackling Youth Unemployment.

32. Members were encouraged by the CPA Secretariat to move between workshops. Anna Lo AM had been invited to speak at the Role of Parliamentarians in Conflict Resolution and Peace-Building workshop. The workshop was well attended with at least 70 delegates present at any given time. A copy of Ms Lo’s presentation is available at Annex B.


34. Tavish Scott MSP attended the workshops on Ensuring Adequate Parliamentary Scrutiny of Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and the Role of Parliamentarians in Conflict Resolution and Peace-Building.

36. Rebecca Evans, Anna Lo and Tavish Scott were invited, as delegation leaders, to attend a dinner hosted by His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

37. Summaries of the outcomes of all workshops can be found on the conference website at: https://cpc2012.parliament.lk/

Thursday 13 September 2012

38. Delegates attended a range of events organised by the host branch.

Friday 14 September 2012

General Assembly

39. All delegates and observers from the devolved legislatures attended the CPA General Assembly. A copy of the Agenda is attached at Annex C. All reports, audited accounts and the Strategic Plan were adopted.

Closing plenary

40. In the afternoon the final plenary was held titled The Role of Social Media in Modern-Day Politics. All Members attended this and the subsequent closing ceremony.

Other activities

41. Delegates attended other events during the week. Sufficient time was set aside for networking with other CPA members at these events. In many cases, some of the most important discussions took place on these informal occasions.

42. The Secretary of CPA Scotland Branch met informally with two members of the Malawian delegation and had the opportunity to meet briefly with the Acting Clerk of the National Assembly of Malawi, to discuss the next stage of the parliamentary relationship between both parliaments.

Conclusion

43. For all four Members this was their first time attending the CPA’s Annual Conference. One of the main benefits of attending is the access it provides to parliamentarians from across the Commonwealth, emphasising the challenges that many parliaments face in dealing with very similar issues. It is clear that attendance at this conference provided Members with an ideal opportunity to learn more about how democracy works in other places.
44. The 2013 Commonwealth Plenary Conference will be hosted by the South Africa Branch.

45. The reports from Duncan McNeil MSP, Tavish Scott MSP and Rebecca Evans AM are attached at Annexes D, E and F respectively.

46. More information about this Conference may be obtained by contacting the Scotland Branch Secretary.

Margaret Neal  
Secretary  
Commonwealth Parliamentary Association  
Scotland Branch
Annex A

BRITISH ISLANDS AND MEDITERRANEAN REGIONAL MEETING
TUESDAY 11 SEPTEMBER 2012

AGENDA

1. Opening Remarks and Apologies.

2. Introduction and welcome by the Chairman, Hugh Bayley MP.

3. CPA Update and Reports from Regional Representatives

4. Activity Updates and Reports from Branches

5. CWP Update

6. Any other business
SPEAKING NOTES
(WORKSHOP – WEDNESDAY 12TH SEPTEMBER)

“The role of Parliamentarians
In
Conflict Resolution and Peace-Building”
(Ten minutes for each speaker (3 or 4) and then open discussion)

My name is Anna Lo and I am a Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. For those of you who are not familiar with political arrangements in the United Kingdom, the Northern Ireland Assembly, along with the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly, is one of the devolved regional governments within the United Kingdom. These devolved legislatures have powers over all relevant internal issues such as health, education, job creation etc., with the UK retaining control over defence, foreign affairs and the bulk of fiscal policy.

I suppose what makes Northern Ireland notable, and the reason why I have been asked to speak, is that in the 1990s Northern Ireland emerged from a violent internal conflict between its two main communities.

On the surface of it the conflict in the 1960s stemmed initially from peaceful protest around the denial of full civil rights to the minority community; however, there was a much deeper and older cultural identity conflict between two ‘ethnic’ groups which spiralled into violence. In 1972 the Northern Ireland Parliament was suspended and Direct Rule from London was imposed. There are parallels with the ethnic conflict that escalated here in Sri Lanka between the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamils.

Although Northern Ireland’s most recent “Troubles” date from the late 1960s the conflict is much older going back centuries and centring on identity, religion and culture. On a very basic level one side is predominantly Roman Catholic with an Irish cultural identity and a desire to see the reunification of Ireland, while the other side is predominantly Protestant with a British cultural identity and a desire to remain within the United Kingdom.

I suppose I have an interesting perspective on the conflict in Northern Ireland as I arrived there from Hong Kong over 30 years ago and the party to which I belong, the Alliance, seeks to draw support from both sides in the conflict and advocates the end of division and segregation.

While Northern Ireland has put the worst of its conflict behind it there are still violent elements within our society who would like to take us back into conflict. As a parliamentarian it is my job to make sure that structures and principles are put in place to prevent that happening.
The CPA has often involved itself in the role of bringing parliamentarians to consider issues around conflict resolution and peace-building, just as we are doing here today. In October 2010, under the auspices of the CPA and the World Bank Institute, fourteen parliamentarians representing eight Commonwealth parliaments in countries recently or currently affected by conflict, met in Vienna, Austria.

They highlighted the key role that parliamentarians can have in preventing conflict and in lasting peace-building. They stressed the need for improving democratic governance, particularly its oversight functions and systems for ensuring accountability by the executive, including the budget process and public sector financial management. They identified a number of principal causes of conflict including:

- Poverty;
- Abuses of the rule of law and the constitution;
- Effects of climate change;
- Tribal, ethnic and class differences;
- Inequitable distribution of the benefits of resource development along tribal, personal and family lines; and
- Corruption.

In the case of Northern Ireland I could point to issues around “abuses of the rule of law and the constitution” and “tribal” differences that precipitated “The Troubles”.

For us this period was characterised by armed resistance against the security forces of the State and by the targeting of military, economic and civilian targets in Northern Ireland and in other parts of the UK.

The parliamentarians in Vienna realised grievances have to be addressed before they erupt into conflict and, likewise in reducing tensions in post-conflict situations before violence breaks out again. They highlighted the need to enact laws that are: “...effective, fair, sufficient, appropriate and acceptable and which are implemented to sustain the nation rather than an individual government”.

Parliamentarians must leave their political bias at the door of the committee room or wherever when they scrutinise the actions of their executive. This is further strengthened by parliamentarians doing what we do naturally – meeting together, as we are here, to communicate and promote dialogue rather than conflict. Parliamentarians must cross borders to talk and always make the effort to avert violence bloodshed.

A number of current conflicts have their basis in the scramble to control natural resources, often oil. These kinds of resource-based conflicts can be internal to a state or they can cross borders. In some cases they can escalate to an international level, particularly when the resources involved are in short supply.
As the Vienna group highlighted that parliamentarians must ensure that the budget process that they scrutinise applies revenues: “...in a fully transparent and equitable way to prevent and resolve grievances and conflicts.” They also stressed the importance of something that is always more difficult to achieve, that: “The executive must respect and listen to the views of the opposition no matter how small their numbers”.

In the case of Northern Ireland part of the conflict was based on the refusal to listen to and acknowledge the voice and rights of the minority community. This repeated refusal creates tensions that, with the right triggers such as not engaging in power-sharing, can result in terrible, long-drawn out conflicts such as those seen in Northern Ireland, or here in Sri Lanka.

The Northern Ireland Executive is a power-sharing mandatory coalition comprising the five largest parties in the Assembly which encompass 104 of the 108 elected representatives.

Open debates on policy goals and the establishment of effective institutions such as Ombudsman’s offices and human rights commissions can support the role of parliament in providing an inclusive government. These offices and an effective Public Accounts Committee are invaluable to properly investigate grievances and disputes and to stop them ballooning into conflict situations.

Discussion in Vienna identified that states heavily dependent on extractive industries, such as petroleum products and diamonds, have a higher likelihood of suffering from conflict. As the Vienna group noted, there are Commonwealth states such as Malaysia and Botswana have managed these issues for the benefit of their national development; however, for some states this natural resource wealth has been a curse and conflict has arisen through mismanagement and corruption. This, in turn, has led to conflict and, on occasion, secessionist rebellions in the areas where the resources are located.

The workshop at Vienna also looked at the issue of security and endorsed full parliamentary oversight of all security agencies, including private sector security forces, as good governance is vital in this sector.

Security proved a huge issue in Northern Ireland. During the conflict the state security forces were perceived to support the majority community and became targets for paramilitary groups. It has taken us years to reach a stage where the minority community have felt sufficient faith in the police force to join it.

Indeed, it was only in April 2010, more than 10 years after devolved government was returned to Northern Ireland that policing and justice functions were devolved from London to the Assembly in Northern Ireland. I know that faith in policing is an issue for the minority community here in Sri Lanka and it is an issue that needs to be solved as violence can erupt if one community feels that justice and security are the preserve of the “other side”.
Another key message coming out of Vienna was that the integrity of parliaments and parliamentarians must be above reproach. Transparency, through open committees meetings and the appropriate and timely declarations of interests is vital, as is the existence on internal and external bodies to monitor and assess the conduct of parliamentarians. In the Northern Ireland Assembly we have sought to make the conduct of our business as open and transparent as possible.

Often there are huge political, economic and social challenges to be faced and a robust parliament with appropriate processes and willing parliamentarians is often all that stands in the way of a return to violence and conflict. The nature of the old Northern Ireland Parliament up to 1972 (when it was dissolved and direct rule was imposed) meant that the minority community felt that the state did not support its rights. This can be a cause for violence and must be guarded against.

It has been widely acknowledged that the most “successful” democratic and post-conflict transitions have been those where an attempt to been made to deal with the legacy of the past, such as the Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa.

The Vienna group also considered truth commissions. The group highlighted in its report that there should be a parliamentary debate on the desirability and feasibility of establishing a truth commission and if the decision is taken to proceed legislation to this effect must clearly set out:

- the commission’s mandate and objectives;
- its powers and rules of procedure;
- an inclusive and consultative selection process for the commissioners;
- a timeframe for completing its work;
- adequate funding;
- working relationships with other institutions and (transitional) mechanisms; and
- a follow-up mechanism to ensure the implementation of the commission’s recommendations.

However, truth also tends to be the arena in which the competing versions of history and the politics of memory play themselves out. In Northern Ireland we are still exploring the “truth”. We have competing versions of “truth” and we have not yet arrived at a way to deal with the legacy of the past.

The Vienna group also considered the idea of reparations. This has been suggested in Northern Ireland, but it led to intense arguments about who should be classed as a “victim” of the conflict that the idea was not advanced. We struggle with the issue of a “hierarchy of victims”, with each side feeling that their casualties of the conflict have the greatest legitimacy to be classed as “victims”.

The Vienna group report highlighted some key principles in underpinning these processes to rebuild the state, post-conflict:
Make the most of ‘transitional moments’ – generally there is international good will and support for societies coming out of conflict and this can be capitalised on in terms of seeking support, material and logistical, for the establishment of a process for dealing with the past;

Ensure real justice – expediency should not be prioritised over thoroughness and judgments that will stand the test of time;

Create realistic expectations – the public’s expectations must be managed and ‘mob justice’ situations avoided. However the process to deal with the past in constituted it must stand up to scrutiny and have appropriate outcomes; and

Ensure an effective package of transitional justice mechanisms – it is important that courts, truth commissions etc. are compatible and that a properly choreographed timetable is agreed for the process of dealing with the past. This will help to avoid institutional and public confusion over the process.

The Vienna group also highlighted the vital role of parliaments and parliamentarians in the transitional process:

Parliament is the national debating chamber – hear the views of different groups and interests can be aired. Grievances and disputes can be highlighted and solutions discussed and agreed. Parliamentarians must engage with their constituencies so that the public’s views can be represented in the parliament. Parliamentarians also have a key role to play as opinion formers and leaders within the communities that elected them. However, in fragile societies parliamentarians play the partisan card at their peril; and

Parliament’s membership should truly reflective of society – solutions to issues are most likely to be endorsed by the public if they feel that their views were represented in the debate leading to the solution. This will not be the case if the parliament is not truly reflective of all components of the society. A sense of grievance can arise and the state can head back towards conflict and violence.

Sri Lanka too suffered from decades of inter-communal strife and violence. When the conflict ended in 2009 the government here set up a Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission, or LLRC. The Commission’s key areas of interest were:

How to prevent a conflict such as this happening again;

Whether any people, group or institution bears any responsibilities for the conflict; and

Restorative justice – the steps that need to be taken to compensate or restore losses, whatever nature or form they may take.

The LLRC had made 285 recommendations; however, it has been criticised by international human rights groups due its limited mandate, alleged lack of independence and its failure to meet minimum international standards or offer protection to witnesses. Most of its members were retired senior government employees.
The experience in Northern Ireland is that such a body will only carry legitimacy and be listened to by the parties to the conflict if its membership is international and agreed by the former combatants. We frequently used Canadians in these roles, or high profile figures from other countries.

This is one way that we, as parliamentarians, can help build lasting peace in post-conflict societies.

Without parliamentarians stepping up to the mark and creating a peace process, Northern Ireland would remain in conflict.

Thank you.
GENERAL ASSEMBLY MEETING

Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall (BMICH)
Colombo, Sri Lanka

14 September 2012

AGENDA

(Documents numbered to match agenda items)

1. Welcome and opening remarks by the President
2. Apologies for Absence
3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting GA3
4. Matters arising GA4
5. Reports of the Executive Committee – to receive
   i) Annual Report for 2011 (as printed) GA5(i)
   ii) Interim Report for the period 1 January to 30 June 2012 GA5(ii)
   iii) Annual Statement and Update GA5(iii)
6. Membership Report GA6
7. Audited Accounts and Balance Sheet for the year ended 31 December 2011 - to receive GA7
8. Draft Budgets and Financial Management Reports:
   i) Headquarters Secretariat Budget 2012 (updated) – to receive. GA8(i)
   ii) Secretariat Financial Management Report for the
period ended June 2012 – to receive.  
GA8(ii)  

GA8(iii)  

GA8(iv)  

GA8(v)  

vi) Conference Assistance Fund Annual Accounts for the year ended June 2012 – to note.  
GA8(vi)  

GA8(vii)  

GA8(viii)  

9. Appointment of External Auditors  
GA9  

GA10  

11. Strategic Plan  
   i) Review of Strategic Plan 2007 – 2012  
      GA11(i)  
   ii) Draft Strategic Plan 2013 - 2017  
      GA12(ii)  

12. Recommendations from the Executive Committee to the General Assembly  
GA12  

13. Matters Submitted by Branches  
   GA13  
   (i) Gauteng Submission  
      GA13(i)  

14. Report of the 32nd Conference of Members from Small Branches Oral  


16. Elections due at the General Assembly  
GA16  

17. Future Meetings  
GA17  

18. Presentation of Plaques to Retiring Members of the Executive Committee  
   Oral
19. Any Other Business
I attended the conference as an observer as part of the delegation with Parliamentary colleagues Tavish Scott MSP, Margaret Neal Secretary CPA Scotland Branch and Alison Walker Parliamentary clerk.

I am confident I can speak on behalf of colleagues who were attending conference for the first time, that all of the assistance given by Margaret Neal and her team from travel arrangements to briefing support and advice, ensured we had a full and rewarding experience attending a wide range of events, as well as participating fully in the conference plenary sessions and workshops.

The opening ceremony and welcome from the Hon. Chamal Rajapaksa, Speaker and President of the CPA on Tuesday 11\textsuperscript{th} September, was an impressive event attended by over 650 delegates from 53 countries representing 175 Parliaments and Legislatures.

The size and participation of the congress confirms that this is an unprecedented opportunity to engage and network with fellow parliamentarians from different backgrounds and cultures, a point that was reinforced at the opening ceremony by Dr William Shija, Secretary General of the CPA.

I also attended, and observed at the British Island and Mediterranean meetings which highlighted tensions in and around corporate governance of the CPA, and within the Executive Committee of the CPA which will require to be resolved to everyone’s satisfaction to avoid reputational risk and damage to the CPA.

I participated in the following workshops:-

- **Employing future generation’s access to Health, Education and Vocational Training.**

The key speaker at this event was Professor Carlo Fonseka, President of the Sri Lanka Medical Council. Focus on the Sri Lankan experience provided a dramatic example of Sri Lanka a country that has been able, despite very low levels of income, to achieve life quality results through state intervention in support of access to health. The discussion that followed centred on regional experiences and challenges of providing and maintaining health care systems.
Tackling Youth Unemployment

The moderator for this session was Dr Nafessa Shah MNA Pakistan along with discussion leaders David Amis MP UK and Wade Mark MP Trinidad and Tobago, assisted by representatives of the OECD and ILO. During the lively discussion a number of points were made including:-

- Youth unemployment was a global problem
- The importance of skills training investment which needed to be supported by Government encouraging involvement from the private sector.
- The Austrian model where 40% of young people go into industrial training, and the German model of dual education were highlighted as good examples.

There was consensus that policy makers had a duty and responsibility to create employment opportunities in order to overcome youth unemployment.

In conclusion points for discussion.

- Suggest debriefing with delegation, Parliamentary Team and Presiding Officer. To explore fully the opportunities to promote the Scottish Parliament through MSP colleagues participating and presenting fully in plenary and workshop sessions where appropriate.
- To develop a supported strategy to maximise political influence through the British Mediterranean Branch CPA.
- Explore wider engagement through discussions with Parliamentary Business Exchange, Global Scot Network and Scottish Development International.

Duncan McNeil MSP
1. Conference objectives - There is no doubt that a period of concentrated time with Parliamentarians from across the Commonwealth provide a welcome opportunity to share views, thoughts and ideas about one’s own Parliament and the experience of others. Within the overall Conference theme of a Commonwealth for the next century there was a repeated stress on the importance of Parliaments being independent of the executive. That led to the mechanisms for ensuring adequate scrutiny of government were in place, were adequately resourced and constantly refined in light of experience. Supporting women in politics was a further underlying theme of the Conference.

2. Scottish Parliament objectives - Margaret Neal's exemplary briefing paper gave the Scottish delegation clear objectives to attain during the week.

a) Future collaboration - the BMIR small branches provide a rich diversity of views on Parliamentary accountability and scrutiny. Given that many of these legislatures operate on a non-party basis they have particular relevance for my own local authority in Shetland.

b) Scotland has a positive reputation so in many bilateral discussions with delegates from across the Commonwealth the opportunity was taken both to promote Scotland, Glasgow 2014 and Patricia Ferguson's candidature for the CWP.

c) Modern Parliamentary practice was best reinforced by the plenary session on social media. The debate itself was pleasantly predictable in terms of social networking, the mechanics and how advanced Scotland is as a CPA branch and Parliament. Indeed our Branch could easily have made any of the presentations and I hope we might be afforded that opportunity in the future. The telling point was that in many countries the take-up of broadband or adequacy of mobile coverage rendered the debate somewhat academic for many. The growth in mobile phone numbers in Africa was recognised as changing the continents way of doing every kind of business including politics.

d) I participated in a workshop on Parliamentary scrutiny of Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. The points that are relevant to our circumstances apply to any area of policy and are as follows-

- Senator Perry (Australia) explained that the Foreign Minister plus civil servants give evidence three times a year for an entire day and can be and are questioned on any aspect of their work. Joint committees interview Ambassadors from other nations on policy positions so as to understand the overseas perspective. This may be an aspect of
Parliamentary activity appropriate to the Parliament’s externally faced committees.

- Ian Gorst, Jersey's Chief Minister, questioned the nature of international agreements in the context of devolved institutions. Who scrutinises the outcomes of the G20, BRIX nation policy, World Health Organisation, International Criminal Court and others in the context of their impact on devolved issues within Scotland?

- This debate also included the potential for Intra-parliamentary scrutiny on the role and future of the Commonwealth. Thus if the Foreign Affairs Committee at Westminster is undertaking such work, consideration should be given to joint work with the appropriate Scottish Parliamentary Committee as the Scottish Branch and UK CPA Branch will and do have different perspectives on some matters.

- Senator Rayner Andrechuk (Canada) was particularly strong in analysing the role of provincial legislatures on a forthcoming EU-Canadian trade deal. The Federal government must reach an agreed position with the provinces in respect of the impact the trade agreement will have.

- Hon Peart (Jamaica) suggested that as globalisation impacts on everyday life and the political pressures are direct, immediate and real so political scrutiny needs to adapt. SPICE could be asked for regular briefings on international agreements and negotiations that affect Scotland's devolved responsibilities. Members in short need to be better supported and knowledgeable.

3. Briefing from John Rankin, British High Commissioner

The UK delegation had arranged a useful and comprehensive briefing with the High Commissioner and his staff. I attended with the Welsh and Northern Ireland teams. This gave a useful background to the politics and economic circumstances and a guide to the main government players highlighting for example the close family ties at the top of the Sri Lankan government. We then joined a reception at the Residency with British businessmen and women which gave a highly beneficial insight into the country.

4. BIMR

The BIMR agenda was overtaken by the internal politics of the CPA given the Executive Chairperson is a UK MP. We therefore discussed at length the CPA Working Party recommendations and possible amendments and the focus on the internal governance of the CPA secretariat. The working relationship between the Secretary General and the Executive Committee (EXCO) Chairperson has not improved since the Branch hosted the Regional Conference in June.
5. CPA General Assembly

At the General Assembly, an Australian sponsored motion to facilitate a rigorous and independent audit function on the Secretariat was tactically withdrawn after the Executive Committee Treasurer indicated that these matters would be tabled at the ExCo. It will be for future Scottish Branch delegations to observe this work, but had this matter been voted on we were minded to support the Australian position.

Sir Alan Haselhurst, EXCO Chairperson, was successful in ensuring that the status of the CPA was clarified in a manner which most delegations at least accepted. The CPA Working Party's conclusions on this were accepted, as was their report. In terms of the collegiate nature of the CPA, in the future, it can be hoped that these recommendations will now be enacted by EXCO with the full and appropriate support of the Secretariat.

On a more consensual note, a motion by UK delegate, Lord Foulkes - to ask the Commonwealth Heads of Government when they meet in 2013 in Colombo to consider how best the excellence of the Paralympics could be translated into the Commonwealth Games in future was accepted by acclamation.

6. Observations

It was a pleasure to share 5 intensive days with Duncan McNeil, Alison Walker who attended Parliamentary clerk sessions, and our own Margaret Neal. Margaret always knows what is going on and I would wish to thank her, Alison and Duncan for the experience and knowledge we all gained by comprising this delegation.

Additional points –

- The Scotland CPA branch should promote its members as potential contributors to specialist and plenary sessions where Scotland and the Scottish Parliament has a particular contribution to make.
- When in the company of Westminster delegations it is always useful to ensure knowledge of their programme. They invariably set up a visit to the British High Commissioner which is useful to attend.
- The BMIR region must have properly tabled agendas and be chaired according to the agenda with an AOB to cover issues not raised elsewhere. That was not apparent in Colombo and would be an improvement at future meetings.
- The General Assembly was on the final day of the Conference yet papers were not available until the night before. It would assist delegates to have papers in more time for future meetings. That also applies to the booklet of delegates which was only available on the last day.

Tavish Scott
27/9/12
58th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, 
Sri Lanka, 10 – 14 September 2012

Report by Rebecca Evans AM

Introduction
I am very grateful to the Wales Branch of the CPA for giving me the opportunity to attend the 58th CPA Conference in Colombo, Sri Lanka, as a delegate. Particular thanks to Al Davies for providing me with comprehensive briefings before the conference, and making all of the necessary arrangements.

I am also very grateful to the Sri Lanka branch for the warm welcome and generous hospitality I received throughout the conference.

Thanks also to Margaret Neal of the Scottish Parliament who did an excellent job as Secretary to the devolved nations’ delegations at the conference.

CPA British Isles and Mediterranean Region Branch Meeting
The majority of the meeting was spent discussing matters relating to the status of the CPA, particularly with regard to the auditing and governance arrangements. These issues have been a source of debate within the CPA for some time, and remain contentious and potentially divisive.

The Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians group is gaining prominence. There was concern that the BIMR did not have a representative at the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Steering Committee meeting on the Saturday of conference. It was reported that there are four or five candidates from the BIMR who have expressed an interest in taking the Chair at the upcoming election. The BIMR Secretariat will contact branches regarding the election in due course.
I was pleased to offer Wales’ support for the following motion, proposed by Lord George Foulkes of the UK delegation:

The 58th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, recognising the unprecedented success of the London 2012 Paralympic Games, asks the Commonwealth Heads of Government and the Commonwealth Games Federation to consider how this experience can be incorporated into the organisation of future Commonwealth Games.

The motion was agreed unanimously by the General Assembly.

Business Meeting of CWP and Session

I was only able to attend part of the CWP meeting as an additional BIMR meeting had been called in order to further discuss the issues relating to the auditing and governance arrangements of the CPA.

As a general observation, a good deal of time was spent discussing the minutes of the previous meeting, and the financial arrangements of the CWP, possibly at the expense of discussing issues affecting women in Parliament and women in the Commonwealth.

Workshops

I attended the host-branch workshop on ‘empowering future generations through access to health, education and vocational training,’ where there were a series of presentations from the Sri Lankan government, and the opportunity to ask questions of them.

I also attended a workshop on ‘tackling youth unemployment,’ where I took the opportunity to highlight Wales’ approach to meeting the challenge. I made the following points:

- Youth unemployment is a global epidemic
- Countries in the CPA are very different, but youth unemployment is a challenge that unites us
- Young people didn’t cause the global economic crisis, but they are paying heavily for it
- In Wales, we are investing in Jobs Growth Wales, creating 4,000 work placements for young unemployed people every year for the next three years.
- Jobs Growth Wales shows young people in Wales that they have a government which believes in them
- We also recognise that many young people with disabilities find it even harder than their non-disabled counterparts to find employment
- We have appointed an Autism Employment Ambassador, and part of his role is to promote the benefit of employing people with autism

My contribution was well received, and delegates from a number of countries sought me out to discuss Wales’ approach in greater detail.
General Assembly

Business was carried out as per the agenda. All matters were passed, and there were no split votes. An amendment to the motion to appoint external auditor was put forward and agreed. I have passed a hard copy to the Acting Secretary of the Branch.

The General Assembly unanimously supported the BIMR motion on the London 2012 Olympics and the Commonwealth Games.

It unanimously supported a call to endorse the applications of the Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia Legislatures for World Heritage Site status for their parliamentary buildings, and encouraged all Branches to consider applying to their national governments for World Heritage Site status for their current or former parliamentary buildings. *This is something that the Wales Branch may wish to consider taking forward.*

Further Observations

The Branch should give consideration as to how devolution should best be reflected in terms of delegates’ contributions to conference. There were occasions, for example, when UK delegates made contributions regarding approaches being taken forward by the UK Government relating only to England, without making that explicit. I would suggest that a memorandum of understanding be agreed between devolved nations and the UK Branch.

In addition to the scheduled conference meetings, I also attended an additional eve-of-conference briefing at the British High Commission, which provided useful background on the government, UK-Sri Lanka relations, trade and the economy, and the conflict and post-conflict issues. I took the opportunity to ask questions about workers’ rights and conditions in Sri Lanka, given the growing trade links with the UK.

Amongst delegates from across the Commonwealth I encountered a good degree of awareness about Wales, and a great deal of interest in Wales. Wales was well known as a sporting nation, and delegates were especially keen to hear about our historic good representation of women.

I made a real point of speaking to as many people as I could, from as many Branches as possible, from right across the Commonwealth. Following the conference, I am keen to maintain the relationships I have made with people in each of the Commonwealth regions.

I think there are real opportunities for Wales to use the CPA to raise the profile of Wales, and an opportunity to share our good practice. I would urge the Branch to seek out opportunities to take part on platforms and make presentations at future CPA conferences.

It was a real privilege to attend the conference, and I personally gained a great deal from the experience. I would be very keen to take part in CPA activities in future, and would recommend attendance at CPA conference to other Members.