COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION
(SCOTLAND BRANCH)

7th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Wednesday 18 June 2008

DRAFT MINUTES

The Annual General Meeting (“AGM”) opened in the Debating Chamber at 12.46 pm and was chaired by Mr Alex Fergusson MSP, President of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Scotland Branch (“The President”).

Attendance

The following Members of the Branch were in attendance: Bashir Ahmad MSP; Bill Aitken MSP; Ted Brocklebank MSP; Sarah Boyack MSP; Roseanna Cunningham MSP; Alex Fergusson MSP (in the Chair); Kenneth Gibson MSP; Karen Gillon MSP; Jamie McGrigor MSP; Ian McKee MSP; Tricia Marwick MSP; Margaret Mitchell MSP; Alasdair Morgan MSP; Hugh O'Donnell MSP; Peter Peacock MSP; Mike Pringle MSP; Dr Richard Simpson MSP; Iain Smith MSP; Mr Jamie Stone MSP; David Stewart MSP and Andrew Welsh MSP.

The President welcomed the Members and noted that the quorum for the AGM of one twelfth of the membership of the CPA Scotland Branch (“the Branch”) had been met.

Agenda Item 1 – Apologies

Apologies were received from Brian Adam MSP; Jackie Baillie MSP; Claire Baker MSP; Gavin Brown MSP; George Foulkes MSP; Margo MacDonald MSP; Rt Hon Jack McConnell MSP; Alison McInnes MSP; Alex Neil MSP; Irene Oldfather MSP and Cathie Peattie MSP.

Agenda Item 2 – Minutes from the 2007 AGM

The Minutes of the Branch’s sixth AGM, which took place on 13 June 2007, were proposed by Mr Jamie Stone MSP and seconded by Roseanna Cunningham MSP.

The Minutes were agreed to.

Margaret Neal, ELU 18 June 2008
Agenda Item 3 – The Report and Accounts for 2007/08

The Reports and Accounts for 2007/08 were proposed by Ted Brocklebank MSP and seconded by Roseanna Cunningham MSP.

The President opened the debate on the Report and Accounts.

Mr Ted Brocklebank MSP spoke of the difficulty in securing the attendance of Members of the Branch at CPA events and conferences given the current political situation in the Scottish Parliament and the requirement for Members to be in attendance for voting. Mr Brocklebank went on to refer to the aims of the CPA Scotland Branch as outlined in the draft 2008 to 2011 forward work programme.

Mr Brocklebank pointed out that the draft forward work programme aimed to ensure that the activities reflected, wherever possible, the CPA’s aims and objectives such as to promote parliamentary democracy across the Commonwealth, the objectives and priorities of the Scottish Parliament’s external activity and add value to the Scottish Government’s external engagement.

Roseanna Cunningham MSP pointed out the “two equally important sides of the coin” in relation to Members engagement in CPA activities, namely the opportunity provided to Members by participation in CPA events overseas and how much hard work is required by Members. The importance of Members making themselves available to attend events organised for CPA delegations visiting the Scottish Parliament was highlighted. While accepting Members are always busy, Ms Cunningham urged Members to make time to attend such events and to recognise that the courtesy and time extended to Members who travel abroad on CPA visits by colleagues in other parliaments is a two way process.

Karen Gillon MSP spoke about the success in hosting the 19th CPA Seminar in October 2007 by the Scottish Parliament. This event brought much praise for the CPA Scotland Branch from other branches and further enhanced the Scottish Parliament’s growing international reputation. During the last year the CPA Scotland Branch also carried out its third outward visit to Malawi. Ms Gillon, who participated on the visit, along with Alasdair Morgan MSP and Sarah Boyack MSP, highlighted the good progress made in Malawi since the last visit by a Branch delegation. This was especially true in areas such as Chikwawa in the southern region where, thanks to international development funding from Scotland, Scottish volunteers were tackling the spread of diseases such as cholera. Scottish funding had also made a difference to the maternal mortality rates, as better training for midwives and traditional birth attendants had resulted in early referrals to hospital for expectant mothers. This was a sign of the positive role Scotland is playing in supporting and developing good initiatives to improve conditions in Malawi.

Ms Gillon also welcomed the plan to develop a direct ‘twinning project’ between Members of the Scottish Parliament and Members of the National Assembly of Malawi. This would further allow the Parliament to directly assist in the development of strong parliamentary democracy in Malawi, building on work already done under the technical assistance project.
Jamie Stone MSP referred to the position held by the CPA Scotland Branch on gaining the senior BIMR place on the CPA International Executive Committee during 2007. The place, which was first occupied by the late Margaret Ewing MSP and then by Sylvia Jackson MSP, had been occupied by Mr Stone since the last Scottish elections in May 2007. Mr Stone referred to his attendance at the last Executive Committee meeting during the CPA General Assembly in Delhi, India in September 2007, which he attended along with Margaret Mitchell MSP and the Secretary to the Branch, Margaret Neal. Mr Stone referred to the difficult issues raised at that meeting, especially in relation to the terms and conditions of CPA staff domiciled in the UK by virtue of their employment at CPA headquarters in London, and the application of UK employment and taxation law to these staff. Mr Stone also paid tribute to Lord Paul,\(^1\) a UK Peer, for his positive influence and contribution at the Conference. Mr Stone went on to refer to the “ambassadorial” role provided to the CPA Scotland Branch by its membership of the International Executive Committee, saying that this was a role which brought great credit to the Branch and to Scotland.

Margaret Mitchell MSP spoke about the high levels of goodwill expressed for the CPA Scotland Branch from its fellow branches. This was another example of the high regard with which the Branch is held. During the plenary in Delhi, which Ms Mitchell attended, the Indian Minister for Health addressed a full meeting of the CWP\(^2\) and spoke of the problems for employment and low pay for women in Indian society. Much of the income of women in India is spent on providing food and health care for their children and this was an example of challenges facing women in the developing world. A plenary session on Human Trafficking also took place for all delegates at the Annual Conference. Ms Mitchell explained that this was now a growing problem which affected most of the Commonwealth countries in one way or another and reported that the CPA deemed Human Trafficking to be a priority area which must be addressed by all parliamentarians.

In May 2008 Ms Mitchell attended the Annual Conference of the BIMR\(^3\) in Gibraltar along with Ian McKee MSP, Hugh O’Donnell MSP and David Stewart MSP. During the conference, further informal meetings and discussions also took place about the issue of the impact of people trafficking and its impact on women in CPA countries. This important and growing problem would likely be the subject of a forthcoming conference, primarily for parliamentarians, to be held in London.

Ms Mitchell also paid tribute to the education system in Gibraltar, pointing out that Gibraltarian students studying at universities in the UK not only have their fees paid for them by the Gibraltarian government but also have their travel and flight costs paid as well.

Hugh O’Donnell MSP spoke of his attendance at the BIMR conference in Gibraltar, his first CPA event outwith the UK. He noted the huge commitment of delegates who attend such events, and that the level of work required in participating in such events, and that the level of work required in participating in such events, and that the level of work required in participating in such

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\(^1\) Swraj Paul was created Baron Paul of Marylebone in 1996 and is a Labour Party Life Peer in the House of Lords

\(^2\) CWP – Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians

\(^3\) BIMR – British Islands and Mediterranean Region is a regional grouping of CPA branches from parliaments in the British Islands and the Mediterranean.
meetings meant they were not the commonly perceived ‘jollies’ that some might think.

The main theme of the BIMR conference was climate change and the problems climate change poses for CPA countries. Mr O’Donnell was interested to learn of steps being taken by jurisdictions with limited water resources, such as Cyprus, to conserve the resources in the face of the impact of climate change. Mr O’Donnell pointed out that, while tourism is an important part of the economy of a country such as Cyprus, the impact it has is often not visible to visitors.

Ian McKee MSP referred to the fact that his participation in the BIMR conference in Gibraltar was also his first time abroad on a CPA visit. He supported the comments by Margaret Mitchell in praising the Gibraltarian education system. Mr McKee also spoke of the benefit of such a conference in bringing together parliamentarians from different countries on a specific issue. He noted that during the conference, delegates from Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man hoped to collaborate and share information in the area of renewable energy as administrations in all three countries were working with the same consultancy company to explore options to utilise renewable energy in the future.

David Stewart MSP also stated he learned much on the issue of climate change and the problems it presents when he attended the BIMR conference. While at the conference he spoke to a colleague from Australia about the recent, and welcome, ratification of the Kyoto Protocol by the Government of Australia.

Sarah Boyack MSP supported the comments of Karen Gillon MSP on the progress made in Malawi on a variety of issues such as tackling disease; however she pointed out that living conditions in Malawi are still very poor when compared to a developed economy like Scotland. Problems such as the lack of shelter for people, the limited and poor supply of electricity and the underdevelopment of necessary infrastructure continue to pose major difficulties. Ms Boyack also expressed strong support for the proposed twinning project between MSPs and Members of the National Assembly of Malawi. Ms Boyack expressed her feeling that direct email contact between ‘twinned’ members not only meant that MSPs could have a direct relationship with their counterparts without the need for travel to Malawi, but that it would also greatly assist in supporting politicians in Malawi in overcoming the difficulties in developing a stronger parliamentary system which could scrutinise the government more effectively and hold ministers to account.

Iain Smith MSP stated that he recently represented the CPA Scotland Branch at the CPA International Governance Seminar in Belfast, Brussels and London and hoped to make a report to the Branch Executive Committee on his participation shortly.

In his closing remarks Jamie Stone MSP thanked the Secretary of the Branch, Margaret Neal, and the staff of the External Liaison Unit for their work and support to the Branch over the last year.

The President of the Branch also extended his thanks to the Secretariat and highlighted the importance of close working arrangements between the various offices in the Scottish Parliament which also support the work of the Branch.
The Reports and Accounts for 2007/08 were agreed to.

**Agenda item 4 – Election of the Executive Committee for the year 2008/09**

The President informed the Members that, as only four valid nominations had been received for election to the four positions available on the Executive Committee of Branch, there was no need therefore to proceed to a vote. As such, Members agreed that those Members nominated, namely Ted Brocklebank MSP; Roseanna Cunningham MSP, Karen Gillon MSP and Mr Jamie Stone MSP, be elected as Members of the Executive Committee for 2008/09.

The President congratulated the newly elected Members.

**Agenda Item 5 – Any Other Business**

No other business was raised.

The AGM closed at 1.13pm

**CPA Scotland Branch Secretariat**

**June 2008**