



# 68<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference

## Report

### *The Commonwealth – A Global Partner*

**Dates:** Monday 6 October – Friday 10 October

**Location:** Barbados

**Delegates:** 600 from 59 Nations

#### **Monday 6 October**

##### **Arrival and Registration**

Delegates officially arrived and registered for the conference.

#### **Tuesday 7 October**

##### **Small Branches Conference Opening Session – “Shaping the Future for Small Branches”**

Discussions highlighted the significant challenges faced by Small Branches. The importance of leveraging the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) for networking, sharing best practices, and exchanging information was emphasized.

It was noted that legislation should be developed in consultation with the public, who elect representatives to office. Given the scarcity of financial resources, elected politicians must ensure that taxpayers’ money is spent wisely to benefit the community.

Concerns were raised about government expenditure, even on small amounts, especially in light of the real struggles and hardships faced by citizens. There are instances where portfolios allocate funds to areas that do not directly benefit the public, leading to criticism of politicians for perceived wastefulness.

##### **Scrutiny Committees**

The Isle of Man was cited as a model, with rules allowing Scrutiny Committees to monitor spending and business activities in real time—rather than retrospectively, when damage may already be done. They have expressed willingness to share their framework.

##### **Community Resilience**

The new Council has an opportunity to build resilience by streamlining operations to achieve quick wins. This would help demonstrate to the public that governance is working in their favour.

##### **Afternoon Session – Roles and Responsibilities of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC)**

A key role of the PAC is to ensure policy implementation. Small Branches often focus on minor details due to resource constraints, rather than the broader picture.

PACs should examine financial statements to determine whether allocated funds achieved their intended purpose. Setting realistic revenue targets is essential to avoid over-projection and budget misalignment.

Belize will soon table a manual outlining PAC roles and responsibilities and is willing to share it with other Small Nations. Follow-up action is required.

## **Wednesday 8 October**

### **Morning Session – Work-Life Balance, Professional Development, and Mental Health Support for Parliamentarians**

This session underscored the need for balanced work programmes. While some countries plan for a full year, others opt for six-month cycles that incorporate both business and appropriate downtime.

Given that elected members' responsibilities often extend into evenings and weekends, stress and mental health issues can arise. Some countries have introduced mental health drop-in clinics for Parliamentarians.

### **Afternoon Session – Overcoming Barriers for Women with Disabilities in Politics**

Women Parliamentarians with disabilities shared their experiences and challenges in political life. Encouragingly, peer acceptance has improved, although public acceptance remains inconsistent and sometimes difficult.

The Australian Assembly offers funding to Small Branches to support disability-related initiatives.

**Action:** I will contact their Branch to obtain funding criteria and explore the possibility of securing a funded project for St. Helena.

### **Evening Lecture**

Presented by H.E. Hon Mia Mottley, Prime Minister of Barbados, in honour of Emilia Lifaka of Cameroon, former Vice Chairperson of the CPA. I had the privilege of serving with her on the CPA Executive Committee from 2014–2017.

## **Thursday 9 October**

### **Morning Session – Climate Change and Global Health**

Countries are actively preparing for climate change through initiatives such as expanding water catchments, planting trees, and enhancing water supply infrastructure. Health institutions are conducting research that will be shared with Small Nations as projects evolve.

### **Afternoon Session – The Role of the Commonwealth in Good Governance**

Many countries empower their Speakers to require Ministers to provide written responses within 24 hours if oral answers are deemed inadequate.

It was surprising to many that in St. Helena, if a question is not adequately addressed, it cannot be re-asked for six months. Other nations allow the same question to be asked after three months—a practice that supports progress and development. Adopting similar rules should be considered.

## Friday 10 October

### Closing of the General Assembly

- Approval of the minutes from the Annual CPA held in Sydney (2024)
- Endorsement of the CPA Executive Strategy for 2026–2029, which will be shared with member nations
- Noted that ten Branches have long-outstanding subscription arrears
- Subscription fees will increase by 4% next year
- The 2026 Annual CPC will be held in Cape Town

### Project Funding Opportunity

St. Helena has the opportunity to apply for CPA project funding. Funding was previously secured during my tenure on the Executive Committee (2014–2017). It is time to make a renewed case for support.

### Host Country Reflection

The conference was excellently hosted by Barbados. The people were welcoming and helpful. As an independent country, Barbados relies primarily on sugar cane and tourism. It spans 160 square miles and has a population of approximately 290,000.

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