

64TH COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE
KAMPALA, UGANDA 22 – 29 SEPTEMBER 2019

REPORT BY COUNCILLOR GAVIN ELLICK

On my arrival in Uganda, at first I felt a little apprehensive as there were lots of people with guns. However as I entered I was greeted and taken through the natural processes and checking through was quite easy. A taxi was on hand and after my driver and I left the Airport it was a shock to the system to see the number of cars and other vehicles on the street. Ugandans are simply the most polite people and expert drivers in this great world. We drove to Munyonyo, Kampala only to find we had driven past my hotel Silver Springs but I needed to be registered up so I did that, which took about 2-3 hours as there were so many people, then we made our way back to the Silver Springs hotel. Checking in was quite pleasant, one has never been called Sir in all my life so many times. The next morning travelling back to the main conference hall, Kampala this is when you get to see the poor state these people live in. It is quite unique, with fresh vegetables and bananas in abundance, the dust and smoke from hundreds of vehicles old and new, small fires burning where people had maize corn on coals and other cooking ongoing. This was seen as we travelled back or was stuck in traffic, with Police escorts and Army, we managed but still at times were stuck in traffic, at times what should have taken 40 minutes turned into an hour.

64th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC)

On Monday we met for the briefing on the Small Branches and introductions were made. The workshop started and the headlines were on the empowerment of women, we then had a team photo which I unfortunately missed as another workshop was ongoing on how they audit parts of the small branches.

Tuesday saw another day with three workshops on Climate Change, Youth, and Ted style communication for the branches. I tried to attend the whole three by spending a little time in each place just to get the gist of what was happening. Then came Elections for the Chairpersons of the small branches which were contested by Nikki Rattle of the Cook Islands and Juan Watterson from the Isle of Man - Nikki Rattle won by 25 -13.

We then started on the proposals for the 2019 and 2020 small branches work programme, the paper and discussions were around the strategic plan for 2020 which would be taken to mid-year Executive Committee for the approval of the 2020 budget – the budget was later approved. Workshops followed on Sustainable Economic Development and funded research for promotion of good Governance in the Middle Eastern North African countries..

As the week progressed, we the small branches covered thematic areas Climate Change on how it affects the small islands, Economic Development, Migration, Technical Areas, Parliamentary Practice and Procedures, Alleviating resources

constraints, Improving access to information, Working on public accounts for the small branches, Youth Engagement, Information sharing and Learning amongst small branches (CPA).

The Small Branches master class included Gender equality - empowerment of women throughout the Commonwealth, this was an eye opener as although St Helena does now experience all the major issues which affect a lot of women, I would like to say that we still need to improve a lot things for our women, but compared to others we are leaps and bounds ahead of most the Commonwealth.

Youth engagement - better mentoring sessions, was one of the other topics that was discussed. Although we have some things in place for our youth, we can do so much better, not just scratching on the surface, whether it is business, economics or sports. Encouraging the youth to be leaders can be done through better educational programmes for 3 -7 years to make sure they do succeed. We can also have other programmes to deal with kids who suffer from lower literacy levels, as they may be skilled with their hands and need not be bogged down with having GSCEs to get a job.

Climate Change

Amongst the small islands we exchanged information on how we are being affected and the CPA introduced a draft Tool kit which could be used to help. We had a debate around living with the change and that funding would be welcomed in hard hit areas but it is not taking care of the major problems, which is being caused by the bigger nations. The Paris Agreement was discussed but a lot of the members were not in agreement with this policy as it doesn't do enough to alleviate the problems that we face. Migration will continue and is a serious concern; sea levels have a big impact on the loss of agricultural land and damaging the marine ecosystems – threatening the livelihood of Islanders.

It was said that 'Climate Change means a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods'. Parliamentarians should convey the issue not as an isolated problem, but rather make targeted audiences understand that climate change adaption & mitigation is closely linked with sustainable development across all sectors of the economy.

Mentoring for first time Parliamentarians – it was said that when we get elected we are thrown in at the deep end and are expected to make decisions with little or no knowledge of what's happening around Elected Members. This is where we should be having some training to help ease people into office so when we are needed to make decisions we would have some knowledge of what is needed, this discussion was a very lively subject and it proved to be to be very helpful for all.

In addition to all what was said and discussed, these workshops were invaluable- Mentoring, Roles of Parliament in Facilitating persons with disabilities as electors, candidates and Legislators, Youth summaries, which should be taken on board, dealing with unemployment or how to incentivise our students when they have accomplished good grades, or business start-ups, Ted Style Innovation in Parliament the possible effect of Brexit (UK) & the effectiveness of have good IT Equipment & data collection to be able to keep people in the small branches abreast of things.

Fostering a culture of respect, fairness & Dignity: Sexual harassment has no place in legislatures and the Role of Parliament in the doctrine of separation of powers: enhancing Transparency and accountability. All of these topics had some good debates and while everyone has different political systems the goals remain the same.

The last topic was the General Assembly Elections for Vice Chairperson which was the re-election of the lady who serves now but the biggest discussion was around the absence of the Secretary General; this was by far the biggest debate as a lot of the delegates were furious to say the least, of this person. What should have taken an hour at the most kept us there for three hours, non-delegates and the media had to leave the room as sanctions were passed down. The Executive Committee had to have a closer look at it as they were the ones who had not taken any action against the gentlemen in the first place.

Overall my experience attending the 64th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference was in-valuable and eye opening. I would like to attend the 65th CPC to be held in Canada but we do need more delegates to attend as these workshops cover a whole range issues and there is some very important information gathering, which is too much for one delegate. When having conversations with other senior officers at the CPC, they see no reason why we can't have some more delegates attend along with our Speaker. At times I felt out of my depth but continued to represent St Helena to the best of my ability. On some of the discussions and topics we are well ahead of everyone else and on other things we are way below par.

Uganda and its people will always hold a place in my heart, as they are the most well- mannered people I have met in my life, even though they have struggles worse than most countries; they have respect for others.

Councillor Gavin Ellick
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