

Speaker's Report on Commons and Overseas Territories Speakers Conference 2022

Dear Honourable Members and Legislative Council Office Staff

I am always encouraging, following your return from visits overseas where you have participated in various meetings on behalf of the St Helena Legislative Council, to make reports letting your colleagues know how you were able to represent them and St Helena. It is now high time that I too made a report reflecting my experiences.

Speakers' Conference

My visit was to the Commons and Overseas Territories Speakers' Conference 2022 (COTSC2022) held 4th - 6th May. This was the first face to face meeting between the Speaker of the House of Commons Rt Hon Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP and Speakers of the Overseas Territories (OTs). Sir Lindsay said it is important for him during his term as Speaker that we engage with and learn from all of the overseas territories. Sir Lindsay is colourful and I believe he is very passionate about the OTs.

There was representation from Anguilla, Bermuda, Cayman Islands, Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, Montserrat, Saint Helena, Turks and Caicos Islands and United Kingdom. On this occasion there was no representation from British Virgin Islands. As I was not supported by a Clerk from our own legislature the UK St Helena Representative Mrs Kedell Worboys MBE accompanied me throughout. Kedell knows her way around Westminster; I was very grateful for her assistance.

This was my first meeting with Speaker Hoyle but I had met some of the OT Speakers when previously they were Ministers. Several Clerks who are integral parts of our legislatures were also invited. The list of delegates included UK Parliament staff and UK Representatives from Bermuda, Cayman Islands and Montserrat.

The COTSC2022 was held at the Palace of Westminster in Speaker's House, the official residence of the Speaker of the House of Commons. The venue epitomises the status of the Speaker. The whole experience at Westminster was very rewarding.

The opening session for welcoming everyone and introductions took place on Wednesday, 4th May in the State Dining Room. Speaker Hoyle outlined the aims and ambitions of this first in-person conference and gave an overview of the conference sessions. In the evening there was a reception for Speakers, their spouses, Clerks and other invited guests in the Crimson and Corner Rooms. This was followed by a welcome dinner in the State Dining Room.

The sessions for Thursday, 5th May were: Effective Parliamentary Representation within an Overseas Territory and The Voice of the Overseas Territories at the UK Parliament.

During the break for lunch a reception for the Speakers Conference was hosted by His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales at Clarence House. A photo was taken honouring the occasion. We found conversing with Prince Charles very easy. For my part it helped being knowledgeable about visits of the Royal Family in 1947, Prince Phillip in 1957, Prince Andrew in 1984 and Princess Anne in 2002 when on that occasion the foundation stone for the Princess Anne Community Care Centre at Ladder Hill was unveiled on 15th November.

For Friday, 6th May the sessions were: Parliaments the Environment and Climate Change and Developing Strong Parliaments.

At each of the sessions, expert panellists said a few words of introduction as an icebreaker and then the session moved into general discussion with the OT Speakers as a group, and panellists who were there to help add oversight, knowledge or answer questions as the conversation unfolds. In our opening remarks Speakers were asked to give an overview on the topic from the perspective of our respective territory.

The closing session took place in the State Dining Room. Following opening words from Speaker Hoyle with input from Dr John Benger, Clerk of the House, each Speaker reflected on the conference including hopes for the year ahead. They agreed a declaration and to meet again in 2023.

Thereafter the conference concluded and last requirement for the Speakers was to draft a Communiqué of the COTSC2022. Colleagues should have received a detailed communiqué which is self explanatory. I will however be happy to discuss anything that requires further elucidation. Colleagues should also have received a summary of points of action to be completed. I will be glad to make copies of the communiqué and points of action available if required.

State Opening of Parliament

On Tuesday, 10th May the State Opening of Parliament took place at the Palace of Westminster in the House of Lords chamber. I was able to witness this from the Strangers Gallery seats. This ceremony marked the formal start of the parliamentary year and set out the government's agenda for the 2022-23 session outlining proposed policies and legislation for the new parliamentary session. This year Parliament was opened by HRH Prince Charles, the Prince of Wales, and HRH Prince William, the Duke of Cambridge, as Counsellors of State. They opened the third session of the 58th Parliament on behalf of Queen Elizabeth II with the traditional Queen's Speech. The speech was read by the Prince of Wales.

Meetings with CPA UK Staff and Baroness D'Souza

Following on from the Speakers Conference I took opportunity to meet with staff from the CPA UK. CPA UK is very important to the overseas territories supporting democracy and good governance. We benefit enormously from projects and meetings they arrange that help us engage with and learn from the wider CPA community.

I wanted a better understanding of how we are supported and am therefore grateful to CPA UK for organizing a one-day programme in Westminster, UK Parliament. This included meeting staff from the UK Overseas Territories Project team to discuss how the Project can best meet the needs of St Helena. You will recall that one of the successful virtual deliveries by CPA UK has been the Post-Election Seminar. Currently we are being assisted with reviews of Standing Orders and Code of Conduct.

In particular I was searching for guidance from peers on how to best develop my role as Speaker so that the Speaker's Office in St Helena can be as effective and efficient as it can be within our limited resources. Much was learned from experiences shared in this regard.

But my visit to Westminster also involved a meeting with Baroness D'Souza, former Lord Speaker of the House of Lords in the UK Parliament. Firstly the Baroness spoke to the origins of the Lord Speaker explaining that the first Lord Speaker, Baroness Hayman, carved out the role as a figure of impartiality and non-interference with the procedures of the House. But Baroness D'Souza and I agreed on the importance of public engagement as part of the role of the Speaker, especially among young people.

As I commented earlier the whole experience at Westminster was very rewarding. And in terms of my role as Speaker I now have a better foundation to build on.

Hon Cyril Gunnell,

Speaker of the Legislative Council of Saint Helena