



**Report of the Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth
Parliamentary Association (CPA) respecting its participation
in the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP)
Working Group**

**Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary
Association (CPA)**

**Steypning, West Sussex, United Kingdom
February 24 - 27, 2017**

Report

The delegation of the Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) attending the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Working Group at Wilton Park in Steyning, West Sussex, United Kingdom from February 24 to 27, 2017 has the honour to present its Report.

The conference was attended by representatives of every CPA regions belonging to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA).

The Canadian Region was represented by 2 delegates and Yasmin Ratansi, M.P., was the representative of the Canadian Branch. The participants to this meeting were:

The participants to this meeting were:

CWP Chairperson:

Hon Noraini Ahmad MP – Malaysia

CWP President:

Hon Sagufta Yasmin MP – Bangladesh

Africa Region:

Hon Thoko Didiza MP (Steering Committee Member) – South Africa; Hon Deveena Boygah MP – Mauritius

Asia Region:

Hon Vijyakala Maheswaran MP (Steering Committee Member) – Sri Lanka; Hon Aliya Kamran MNA – Pakistan Australia Region: Hon Michelle O'Byrne MP (Steering Committee Member) – Tasmania; Hon Jenny Aithchison MLA – New South Wales

British Islands and Mediterranean Region:

Ms Joyce Watson AM (Steering Committee Member) – Wales; Ms Margaret Mitchell MSP – Scotland

Caribbean, Atlantic and Americas Region:

Hon Shirley Osborne MLA (Steering Committee Member) – Montserrat; Hon Annette Ferguson MP – Guyana

Canada Region:

Ms. Laura Ross MLA – Saskatchewan; Ms. Yasmin Ratansi MP – Canada Federal Parliament

India Region:

Hon Meenakshi Lekhi MP (Steering Committee Member) – Lok Sabha; Hon Kavitha Kalvakuntla MP - Lok Sabha

Pacific Region:

Hon Poto Williams MP (Steering Committee Member and Vice-Chair of the CWP) – New Zealand; Hon Gatoloaifaana Alesana-Gidlow MP - Samoa

South East Asia Region:

Hon Norliza Abdul Rahim MP - Malaysia

Speakers (Non-Participants)

Hon Lechesa Tsenoli MP, Deputy Speaker of the Parliament of South Africa and male

champion of gender equality; Hon Hanna Birna Kristjánsdóttir – Chair of the Women in Parliament Executive Board, Former Minister of Interior and Member of Parliament in Iceland, and Mayor of Reykjavik; Ms Begoña Lasagabaster – Chief of Leadership and Governance at UN Women and former MP from Spain; Ms Amelia Kinahoi Siamomua – Head of the Gender Section, Commonwealth Secretariat Dr David Donat-Cattin – Secretary-General of Parliamentarians for Global Action

CPA Secretariat:

Mr Akbar Khan, Secretary-General; Ms Meenakshi Dhar, Director of Programmes; Ms Lucy Pickles, Assistant Director of Programmes/Assistant Private Secretary to the Secretary-General; Mr Jeffrey Hyland – Editor; Mr James Pinnell – Programmes Assistant

Wilton Park:

Ms Alison Hilliard, Programme Director; Ms Nandini Mackay – Business Development Manager

Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Working Group

The Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Working Group was held at Wilton Park, United Kingdom on February 24 to 27, 2017.

The Working Group was convened following the appointment of Hon Dr. Dato Noraini Ahmad MP (Malaysia) as the new CWP Chairperson, as a means to establish a strategic plan for the duration of her three-year tenure. The mission statement of the CWP provides that *‘the CWP as an integral part of the CPA, works for the better representation of women in legislatures and for the furtherance of gender equality across the Commonwealth’*. Whilst the Commonwealth has seen the number of legislatures with at least 30% representation of women increase, with a corresponding decrease in the number of legislatures with no women legislatures, there remains significant gains to be made in this regard. Many women in legislatures face shorter terms than their male counterparts, are often given portfolios typically viewed as ‘soft’ (i.e. social care), and there remains strong regional differences in representation.

As a network of women Parliamentarians with the strategic *purpose to increase female representation in Parliament and Legislatures in the Commonwealth*, the CWP seeks to encourage women to stand for election by removing the barriers to their participation and to facilitate their professional contribution as Members. Furthermore the CWP seeks to ensure that gender continues to be mainstreamed across all activities to assist legislatures to exceed the CHOGM target of at least 30% women in decision making positions across all representative bodies in the Commonwealth.

Purpose of the Working Group

The arranging of the Working Group allowed for the CWP Chairperson to meet with the CWP Steering Committee Members as well as the wider membership, reinforcing the strong working relationship within the group, developing mutual understanding of the issues faced in different regions of the Commonwealth, identify unique challenges, and highlight instances of overlap.

The Working Group also allowed for discussions around instances of good practice and successes both regionally and in Branches, whilst also acknowledging barriers and disappointments in looking to increase gender representation. Through these discussions, pathways and potential hurdles to success were to be identified, whilst simultaneously identifying what success for CWP in fact looks like.

Finally, the Working Group was convened to agree policy priorities for the organization over the next three years, promoting ideas and objectives to be included in the CWP Strategic Plan.

Programme of the Working Group

The programme was structured over the two days as follows:

Saturday 25 February;

- Plenary session on challenges associated with achieving gender parity in Parliament,
- Breakout sessions on best practices and strategies to increase female representation in Parliament,
- Regional discussions on challenges and priorities in the regions
- Plenary session on sharing of best practices,
- Feedback session on discussions held during breakout and regional discussions.

Sunday 26 February;

- Plenary session on achieving CWP's gender priorities,
- Breakout session on addressing gender priorities,
- Feedback session on substance of breakout session
- Plenary session on networking and knowledge-sharing
- Discussion session on CWP Communications
- Discussion session on next steps

Plenary sessions also provided space for Members to feedback and discuss those points raised by speakers. It should be noted that the final discussion session on the next steps for CWP provided the opportunity for the CWP Chairperson to highlight the draft strategic plan borne out of the prior discussions.

Welcoming Session

Members were asked to consider and discuss how to progress CWP and get to the next level as a network, whilst maintaining focus on the primary aim of pushing for increased female participation in Parliament.

Members then gave their hopes and expectations for the weekend, with the following opportunities being particularly highlighted by participants;

- To listen, learn, and share experiences,
- How to create and continue the value of CWP as a network,

- To develop actionable and ambitious strategies for CWP,
- To acknowledge and understand the power and potential in convening women parliamentarians,
- To strengthen networks and regional cooperation,
- To understand regional differences,
- To provide education to empower women
- To have an international conversation about how to ensure women at the decision-making table,
- To maintain vigilance and commitment to the CWP mission statement,
- To empower women to stand in elections,
- To learn how to inspire future generations of leaders

The Chairperson then invited Members to consider the mission statement of CWP, and whether it could be *strengthened and tightened up*. The need to address inactive regions, increase regional cooperation, improve research functions, and develop a *CWP brand*, were highlighted as priorities for the future of the CWP to bring the opening remarks to a close.

Ms Meenakshi Dhar and Ms Lucy Pickles of the CPA Secretariat, then presented a SWOT analysis, highlighting the following:

Strengths

- Shared values;
- Common goals
- Common challenges;
- Passion for the cause;
- Active regions;
- Inter-regional cooperation;
- Raising awareness

Weaknesses

- Lack of institutional support from parliaments
- Under-utilised network
- Sustainability of network
- Inactive regions

Opportunities:

- Learning from the past
- New CWP Chairperson
- New vision for the CPA from the Secretary-General (including the CWP)
- Greater energy and emphasis on gender equality
- New age of collaboration and cooperation
- Leveraging technologies available to us

Threats:

- Resources – both human and financial
- Continuing barriers to female participation in public office, and at some CPA events
- Lack of sustainability of the network
- Challenges differ across the regions
- Political will to make a difference

As part of this presentation, Members were asked to consider the following during the two day discussions:

1. **Prioritisation** - given the fact that the strategic plan is going to cover the next three years, which themes and issues should be addressed;
2. **Accountability** - how does we genuinely commit and hold each other to account in realising the vision and the potential of the CWP;
3. **Measurability of successes** - how do we demonstrate the impact of the CWP, and how do we show its value?

Female representation in Parliament – overcoming the challenges

Members were invited to discuss the progress made in seeking greater gender parity over the last ten years, the regional variations in this progress, and the future challenges and obstacles. The session served to set the scene and provide context on a Commonwealth level going forward

Pointing to the decline in New Zealand from 38% women elected to Parliament in 1996, to the current rate of 33.9%, Hon. Poto Williams highlighted the need to avoid complacency in efforts to maintain gender parity. Constitutionally mandated party lists were also highlighted as an example of disappointment in falling below targets.

1. Hon. Poto Williams MP (PACIFIC- New Zealand)

Pointing to the decline in New Zealand from 38% women elected to Parliament in 1996, to the current rate of 33.9%, Hon. Poto Williams highlighted the need to avoid complacency in efforts to maintain gender parity. Constitutionally mandated party lists were also highlighted as an example of disappointment in falling below targets.

Positive results were noted from Bougainville, Papua New Guinea, where four electoral spaces were set aside for women candidates, and in Samoa where temporary special measures were introduced to ensure that 10% of parliamentary seats were filled by women candidates.

Several pertinent challenges and barriers were highlighted, including arguments of meritocracy, women not voting for women, low rates of women being selected to contest safe winnable seats, and the process of early selection which often denies women candidates the time to run an effective campaign.

The need to build structures which assist women candidates was highlighted as a priority in addressing questions of economic power and of the status of women. Regarding the economic power it is often men who hold positions in the strongest economic sectors in New Zealand. As regards the status of women in society, the importance of issues such as violence against women, women's ownership of their own bodies, equity of pay and women in leadership across political structures were highlighted.

2. Hon. Annette Ferguson MP (CAA- Guyana)

Hon. Annette Ferguson highlighted the promising trends of women in Parliament doubling over the twenty year period from 1995 to 2015, with many regions across the world seeing increase in women participation in single, lower and upper houses. Large differences in levels of gender parity were, however, highlighted in the Caribbean, with lower levels of 3.1% female participation and higher levels of 33.3%.

The reasons behind improving levels of participation in the Region were revealed as including changes in cultural perceptions, increased participation of women in education and legislation stipulating women participation in the legislative process.

Challenges including the low rate of women in positions of power, economic exclusion, limited access to finance, and limited participation in public life. Where there is participation in public life, Hon. Ferguson highlighted the need to ask whether this inclusion is for convenience or empowerment, and whether participation was legalistic or idealistic.

Solutions to these challenges were listed as legislative changes, cultural changes to mind-sets regarding women's roles in society, and changes to the institutional frameworks to ensure that women play meaningful roles in traditionally male-oriented sectors.

3. Hon. Meenakashi Lekhi MP (INDIA- Lok Sabha)

Hon. Meenakashi Lekhi began by asking whether cultural and social considerations were improving women's participation, or whether it was in fact the other way around. Hon. Lekhi also highlighted the high rate of women in local politics in India, with approximately half of the 2.8 million locally elected officials being women. The increase in women at local levels in India was partly influenced by the Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act 1992, requiring *reservation of not less than one-third of the seats for women*.

Several questions regarding increased women's participation and representation were highlighted as being particularly pertinent. Firstly the question of who holds the purse strings, in both economic and social terms. Whether women are actually aware of the politics that affect them, and for the need to increase this awareness. Whether any increases in women's participation was for convenience or empowerment, was it looking to satisfy a quota rather than holistic considerations of the role women can play in representing society in legislatures.

The need to question societal views on gender and suitability was then highlighted, asking why it is that women need to prove their merit so much more than men, and why it is that one gender has maintained control of power despite these questions being asked for so long. The session concluded with the suggestion that capacity building is needed before we can push through gender inclusion and gender participation in Parliament.

Strategies to Increase Female Representation in Parliament and Replicating Good Practice

Members, having selected their area of interest during the previous day's welcoming sessions, allocated themselves to one of three breakout groups on; formal mechanisms,

informal mechanisms, and male champions, respectively. These groups allowed for in depth discussions on one of these subject areas, with a facilitating Member guiding the discussions. During the evening feedback session, participants were invited to provide feedback from their respective breakout groups and subsequent regional discussions. Participants were asked to provide examples of what had worked in their jurisdictions, challenges going forward, priorities, how CWP as a network could provide assistance, and what success ultimately looks like. This feedback is detailed below.

1. Formal mechanisms to increase female representation in legislatures
Facilitator: Ms Joyce Watson AM (BIM- Wales)

Examples of what worked:

- Formal structures within parties that put forward women as candidates (i.e. lists);
- Legislative/constitutional changes, as well as the need to engage male colleagues in these changes;
- Structures providing training for women candidates to know what to expect from campaigning and parliamentary life

Challenges:

- Parties with no positive action toward increased female candidatures;
- The threat of complacency, and losing momentum;
- Negative perspectives in society and across media of women in Parliaments

Priorities:

- Awareness of the issues;
- Capacity building;
- Easy-to-replicate changes;
- Building of database/resources;
- Promotion of affirmative action procedures

Role of CWP:

- Putting forward positive messages as a network;
- Engaging men in talking about these issues in mainstream politics
- To look at all legislation coming out in mainstream politics

Success:

- Better representation of women in politics;
- Mainstreaming of gender issues;
- Broader range of roles being undertaken by women/upgrading of roles;
- More women in power helping other women

2. Informal mechanisms to increase female representation in legislatures
Facilitator: Hon. Laura Ross MLA (CANADA- Saskatchewan)

Examples of what worked:

- Reaching out to women in communities;
- Educational programmes to highlight what is expected in parliamentary roles;
- Use of media when meeting with women in society (i.e. CWP videos)

Challenges

- Stereotyping of women;
- Relationships with the media

Priorities

- Improve outreach;
- Spread CWP's message;
- Intergenerational work;

Role of CWP:

- Working with like-minded partners;
- Create video to raise awareness of CWP and the importance of women at the decision-making table

Success:

- More women in office, including on the ground representation;
- More women valuing their own qualifications

3. How to engage male champions in the campaign to increase female representation in legislatures

Facilitator: Hon Lechesa Tsenoli (AFRICA- South Africa)

Examples of what worked:

- Identifying male champions for gender budgeting in all departments;
- Outreach programmes to both male and female parliamentarians;
- Gender caucus including women and men, with funding from Parliament

Challenges

- Portrayals of women parliamentarians in the media;
- For women to remain assertive and not become complacent

Priorities

- Regional male champions;
- Focus on outreach programmes, where men and women share a platform advocating for gender equality;
- Improved media relations

Role of CWP

- Male and female members to conduct a CPA Roadshow and focus on female representation in Parliament;
- Invite men to lead on the White Ribbon Campaign (25 November);
- Develop relationships with key stakeholders- e.g NGOs/CSOs/academic institutions

Success

- More male champions, engaging through pride rather than obligation

Following the feedback, participants discussed the issues raised, with the following key observations.

Members highlighted the need for improved media training of women parliamentarians and women candidates, taking into account their unique position. This training should look to mitigate the effects of online abuse aimed at women Parliamentarians, specifically through social media. Members also suggested that CWP should leverage its position as a network to challenge media outlets over false and inaccurate information distributed about women Parliamentarians. Similarly, it was suggested that, through improved research functions and by leveraging the network, CWP could become a provider of information, with Members becoming the *experts* and *investigative journalists*.

The issue of male champions of gender equality was supported. Some Members argued that men must take a leading role in educating peers and colleagues, and challenging society's perceptions of women in politics. It was agreed that male champions should lead on certain aspects, such as the *International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women*. Other Members, however, voiced concern about inviting male Members into the CWP space, as it was felt by some Members that the safe environment of the CWP as a forum for discussion would be compromised by the presence of male parliamentarians.

The need to expand the CWP network was a further highlighted issue, with the need to engage powerbrokers and other institutions, such as universities emphasised. Similarly the need for assistance, both in finance and resources, was highlighted as a prerequisite for improved interaction with regions. Measurement and evaluation was highlighted as an overarching necessity in ensuring the success of these endeavours.

Best Practice: Lessons to Learn and How to Share Them

Members were invited to discuss the ways in which CWP can support women once in Parliament, and how best to provide that support.

Hon. Thoko Didiza MP (AFRICA- South Africa)

Hon. Thoko Didiza began by highlighting the need for continuous engagement at the civil society level and for dialogues both within and between parties to ensure continued commitment to the cause. Additionally it was stressed that the space of Parliament can be used to address the problems of Parliament itself, highlighting how the change in the physical space meant Parliament became more inclusive in the eyes of society.

The importance of language was stressed, specifically the need to use homogenous language in law-making to accommodate diverse backgrounds and differing education levels. The presumption that all incoming Parliamentarians will know how to operate in a parliamentary setting, and therefore support networks through multiparty caucuses, and support in leveraging capacity-building were highlighted as key to ensuring smooth transitions into parliamentary life. CWP funds were highlighted as one of the resources that has helped women in parliamentary roles, and in navigating parliamentary duties. Equally advocacy was raised as a *goodirritation, helping* make progress in gender parity.

Further successes through work done by CWP together with multilateral organizations were also highlighted, with the need to continue with these successes emphasised. More pertinently it was suggested that CWP's work with CHOGM could be better, with CHOGM being seen by many as primarily a discussion organisation, with limited actions.

Hon. Shirley Osborne MLA (CAA- Montserrat)

Hon. Shirley Osborne highlighted the key challenges in the Caribbean as the constant rotation of parliamentary personnel, a patriarchal society, and the difficulty of communications in the region. The problems of connecting and establishing support networks was highlighted as a particular concern for the region.

Hon. Osborne highlighted four ways in which the CWP can support women entering Parliament. Firstly, by providing financial support to Regions and Branches. By connecting regions with regional bodies, for example CAA with CARICOM and the Caribbean Regional Bank, and maintaining these connections as the willingness to cooperate is there, but the means often are not. By helping women Parliamentarians to find ways to hold onto power, through diversity of portfolios for female ministers, and by enabling women to hand over power to a new generation of women leaders. And by CWP looking at itself as an entity to be promoted.

Hon. Noraini Ahmad MP (SEA- Malaysia)

Hon. Noraini Ahmad highlighted the need to acknowledge networking as an interplay of connection, cooperation, collaboration, participation and inspiration. The Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity was highlighted as an example of good practice in increasing connectivity. The important role that youth can play in the digital connectivity and entrepreneurship space was also highlighted, with an emphasis on the need to engage in connectivity through technology.

The interplay between Ministries and Agencies and supporting organisations, such as NGOs was also highlighted, with the example of KWPKM as an information facilitation and knowledge sharing institution, who should be looked at as an example of best practice.

Hon. Michelle O'Byrne (AUSTRALIA- Tasmania)

Hon. Michelle O'Byrne highlighted the transition out of parliament for many women Parliamentarians as part of wider capacity building. Often women do not transition out of Parliament in the same way as men do, with men often taking positions on large corporate boards, whilst women traditionally return to the role they had prior to entering

Parliament. Language was highlighted as a big part of this, as women often fail to sell themselves, using we in place of I.

CWP can help in this regard by providing a requirement of gender equality on the CPA Fundamentals Programme, teaching the skill of self-promotion in this context, offering highly valuable and transferable skills as a tangible result. Also, by helping to establish a CWP Alumni, this network can provide mentoring, networking opportunities, and a database of transferable skills. The development of such a network was highlighted as being undertaken currently in Australia.

Establishing the CWP's Gender Policy Priorities and How to Achieve Them

Members were invited to consider key policy areas affecting women's social and economic welfare, and what CWP's gender policy priorities should be looking ahead to the next three years.

Ms Amelia Kinahoi Siamomua (Commonwealth Secretariat)

Ms Siamomua began by reaffirming the Commonwealth Secretariat's commitment to the issue of gender equality, highlighting the 2013 Commonwealth Charter section on equality and women's empowerment, the 2015 CHOGM Mandate, and the 2012 Commonwealth Secretariat Gender Policy. The 4 priority areas for the Commonwealth Secretariat were highlighted as; women's economic empowerment, women in leadership, ending violence against women and girls, and gender and climate change, with gender mainstreaming across all activities a key part of their strategic plan. These four priority areas were also referred to as *strategic areas for investment*, albeit conscious of finite resources with which investment could be made.

The Commonwealth Secretariat is also working on a gender results framework to report on the outcomes of the four priority areas. This framework is designed to look at the organisation's objectives on a double axis, one the one hand viewing changes on an informal/formal scale, and on the other hand on an individual/institutional scale. Through this framework, a change such as legislative changes and policy action would indicate a formal change at the institutional level, whereas changing men and women's mind-sets would be regarded as an informal change at an individual level.

The Commonwealth Secretariat also highlighted increased partnerships as a key priority, with the Commonwealth Foundation mandated to work with CSOs from across the Commonwealth. Engagements with the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women was also highlighted as an underutilised space.

Begoña Lasagabaster (UN Women)

Ms Lasagabaster began by highlighting the implementation gap between the increases in political commitment to gender parity at the highest political levels, and the national policy outcomes. Ms Lasagabaster further highlighted increasing inequalities within countries and the continuing bias against women as significant social problems, facing gender parity.

The need to address complexities of analysing intersectionality were addressed with the following five implementation strategies put forward:

- Laws, policy and strategies;
- Strong institutions and mechanisms to ensure implementation;
- Addressing social norms and gender stereotypes;
- Funding and technology investments to address the investment gap;
- Greater measurability and use of data

These strategies were considered together with the overarching need for increased commitment, acceleration and partnerships in order to be successful.

Following these presentations, Members highlighted that it is necessary in many cases to change mind-sets in wider society not only in the political sphere. Members also made mention of the need to maintain accountability of women leaders to ensure value is created through gender parity at the highest level and it is not merely symbolic and based on numbers alone. The need to keep regional differences in mind, when discussing proposals and strategies, was also emphasised by Members.

Following this session, Members were asked to identify three key priority areas for CWP. Members' recommendations were then distilled into three topics; violence against women and girls, women in leadership, and economic empowerment of women. These three topics were agreed upon by the Members, who were then assigned to three breakout groups, each tasked with the following questions in order to address the role of CWP going forward:

- What are the key challenges/priorities for CWP in your region?
- What support do you need to overcome these?
- What does success look like for CWP in your region?
- How can we measure success and gather feedback?

How Can the CWP Best Address Key Gender Priorities

During this feedback session, Members were invited to present on the best practices, strategies and recommendations discussed in the morning's breakout groups. The subject for the three groups were violence against women and girls, women in leadership and economic empowerment, respectively. The feedback received was as follows.

1. Violence against women and girls

Facilitator: Ms Margaret Mitchell MSP (BIM- Scotland)

Members identified the need to acknowledge the various forms of violence which exists such as physical, emotional, sexual and psychological, as well as the various contexts and societies in which it takes place, such as during times of conflict. The need for CWP to send a clear message of *zero tolerance* was highlighted.

The need to research the social and economic impact of violence against women, and for an impact assessment around that funding was raised, as was the need to collect and analyse *appropriate* data. This data and research should then be shared between Members to highlight instances of best practice, and to compare the costs, both social and economic, of violence against women in their jurisdictions.

Outreach campaigns, aimed at men and social media users was also suggested as a tool in these endeavours, for example asking *what if it was your daughter?*

2. Women in leadership **Facilitator: Hon Jenny Aitchison MLA (AUSTRALIA- New South Wales)**

Addressing girls from an early age about their potential as future leaders was highlighted as a necessity, whilst also recognising and addressing restrictions that discourage female participation.

Specifically training of young women was addressed, with the need to spread awareness of their social media presence and the associated pitfalls. The dangers of the internet more broadly, such as trolling, gender stereotyping and political violence should also be communicated through this training.

Greater usage of CWP as a network across regions should be seen to share good practice and knowledge, including serving ministers and former women parliamentarians. The positives gained from the network should also be communicated more effectively to spread the message and promote greater involvement. This suggestion was put forward as part of a clearing house model.

3. Economic empowerment of women

Facilitator: Ms Yasmin Ratansi (CANADA- Canada Federal)

Members pointed to three key issues in the economic empowerment of women; education, elimination of poverty, and women on boards. CWP was called on by members to look to the economic discrimination of women and look to greater inclusion of women on boards and greater scrutiny of corporate social responsibility. Leadership in this regard was identified as needing to bring *cohesion, not division*.

Gender budgeting to as a tool to plan and execute budgets in a gender- sensitive way and as a means to mainstream gender concerns across all parliamentary departments, whilst also recognising that *one size does not fit all*, was highlighted as a means to economically empower women across the Commonwealth. In recognising this, CWP should allow Regions to find their own solutions. Nonetheless inter-regional dialogues on best practices, and leveraging of partnerships with other organizations were highlighted as other priorities.

Strengthening Networks and Sharing Knowledge- Lessons Learned

Members were invited to consider how CWP can leverage its network, and identify new opportunities for advocacy and learning.

Dr David Donat Cattin (Parliamentarians for Global Action)

Dr Donat Cattin began by highlighting the need to gender mainstream across the governance, structure, and campaigns of an organisation, highlighting how mainstreaming has been vital to PGA. Internal rules to ensure mainstreaming was raised as being key in such organisations, for example the requirement that the gender balance within PGA does not deviate beyond a 60%:40% split. Similarly minded organisations, should be sought out as part of growing the network.

Follow-up was identified as being key in knowledge building and networking, as there is a need to move beyond mere discussion as an organisation, and to ensure solid strategic plans with actionable outcomes, to identify priorities and to measure and improve impact. The most active members of any organisation should be relied upon to provide information and design projects, allowing for ownership in a gender-neutral way.

Hanna Birna Kristjánsdóttir (Women in Parliaments Global Forum)

Ms Hanna Birna Kristjánsdóttir opened by discussing the fact that, whilst gender parity is a high global priority, we are still far from achieving the goal itself. The key in this regard was cooperation, specifically across parties as a non-partisan issue. By depoliticising the issue, it allows women to gain and claim ownership over gender equality. The importance of partnerships, in addition to the strong use of campaigns and research was stressed when promoting women's presence in Parliament, and in allowing them to maintain their position.

Women's forums should be used to develop consensus on the issue rather than to debate it, and should be used to promote women parliamentarians as role models for future leaders. The forums and role models should spread the message that girls do not have to change to fit the political sphere, but rather the political sphere needs to evolve and be more gender sensitive.

CWP Communications

Mr Jeffrey Hyland (CPA Secretariat)

Mr Jeffrey Hyland began by addressing the question of how the CWP can better improve its networking opportunities, using traditional and social media to engage the internal network and regional and international audiences. This question was then broken down into three further questions:

- *What do we want to say?***(Message)**
- *Who do we want to communicate with?* **(Target Audience)**
- *How do we want to communicate and what are the most effective ways of communicating with our target audience?* **(Method)**

Regarding the message, the overarching aims of the CWP within the context of continued underrepresentation of women in Parliament, and the work being done by the network to address and highlight gender issues was emphasised. With regards to the various target audiences, it was recommended that both female and male Parliamentarians, potential women Parliamentarians and women wanting to enter Parliament, parliamentary staff and networks, international organisations and the media, all be seen as target audiences which should be taken advantage of to spread the CWP message.

The highlighted methods of communicating the CWP's message included the Parliamentarian, through the regular column by the CWP Chairperson, gender- focused articles, and the dedicated gender themed issues. Similarly, dedicated webpages on the CPA website, links to gender articles and social media accounts were highlighted as the online methods of spreading this message.

In providing feedback, Members highlighted the potential of other social media platforms, notably *Thunderclap*, as a means of not only spreading the CWP's message but also as a call to action for greater gender parity. Furthermore, it was suggested that, if publications such as the *Parliamentarian* were sent to Members in a digitalised format, this could then be forwarded more efficiently to colleagues and peers in a more efficient manner. These considerations were noted for the development of a CWP Communications Strategy.

Conclusions and Next Steps

During the concluding session, Hon Noraini Ahmad presented a proposed model for the CWP Strategic Plan, taking into account the discussions and proposals received from Members over the duration of the retreat. Members were then invited to give feedback on the proposed model. There was broad support for the proposed strategy, with Members highlighting the fact that the map reflected the discussions of the Working Group, as well as the priorities recommended by the Members. The thematic elements of violence against women, women in leadership and economic empowerment, were particularly well-received. Members agreed that capacity building should play a large role and not be aimed solely at CWP Regions, but also *the Members*. Here is the proposed Strategy Map, as shared with Members.

MISSION STATEMENT

“The CWP, as an integral part of the CPA, works for the better representation of furtherance of gender equality across the Commonwealth”

STRATEGIC PURPOSE

“to Increase Female Representation in Parliament & Legislatures”

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES
(To deliver strategic purpose)

Build Capacity of CWP Regions

- Lever up Additional Funds
- Build Capacity (Shared Learning/ Mentoring)



Develop CWP Comms Strategies

- Policy Statements
- Network Cohesion

Research

- Effective Practice in Increasing Women Representative in Parliament
- Focus on Specific Policy Areas*

Mobilize CWP Alumni

- Mentoring
- Coaching
- Advice

Promote Partnership with International Organizations

- UNWomen
- IPU
- ComSec
- WIP

*1/ Violence Against Women 2/ Women in Leadership 3/ Economic Empowerment

In closing proceedings, Members were invited to propose a personal commitment to take back to their jurisdiction, and one desired outcome from CWP. The following are some of the commitments and desired outcomes, from this session.

Commitments

- *To galvanise leadership training in my region with government and NGO partnerships;*
- *To engage with current and former CWP members to become a resource to aspiring MPs and new MPs as a mentor and role model;*
- *To share the key priorities and new directions of CWP with colleagues;*
- *Mentor young women on the positives and negatives of social media;*
- *Collate what is being done and what could be done in my Region, which can then be shared with other Regions;*
- *To promote CWP and engage women caucuses in my region to ensure that gender mainstreaming is in their vocabulary;*
- *Launch and energise the CWP Branch in my region;*
- *Share experiences with members of Parliament to ensure they feel a part of CWP;*
- *Assess policies for gender impact;*

Desires for CWP

- *Design CWP badge and distribute, as a means of raising awareness of CWP;*
- *Focus on teaching gender based budgeting to women parliamentarians;*
- *Provide greater information and resource sharing in an accessible manner;*
- *Share best practice examples with CWP Members and Branch Secretaries to stimulate activity in all Branches;*
- *Maintain a focused aim to promote the number of women Parliamentarians;*
- *Actively promote opportunities for former MPs to mentor and support women MPs to remain in Parliament;*
- *Source ways to step up the Leadership Training*

Following the conclusion of the Working Group, the following immediate next steps have been taken by the CPA Secretariat.

- *A WhatsApp group has been established to allow Working Party Members to maintain contact with each other;*
- *The Press Release on the Working Group has been released and is available to read on the CPA Secretariat's website;*
- *A call for Regions to share data and good practice has been issued;*
- *The CPA has reached out to ComSec to seek collaboration at the CHOGM Women's Forum in 2018;*
- *A communication from the CWP Chairperson has been sent to Ms Cressida Dick, congratulating her on being the first female Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, UK.*

The CPA Secretariat has also begun work on the more long-term goal of developing the new Strategic Plan, to be presented to the Executive Committee, at its meeting in Darwin, Australia in April 2017.

Copies of the complete Working group meeting from which excerpts have been taken in the preparation of this report are available on line at the following address:
<http://www.cpahq.org>

Respectfully submitted,

Yasmin Ratansi, M.P.
Chair of the Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)
ACTIVITY	Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Working Group Meeting
DESTINATION	Steyning, West Sussex, United Kingdom
DATES	February 24 - 27, 2017
DELEGATION	
SENATE	
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Ms. Yasmin Ratansi, M.P.
STAFF	\$0.00
TRANSPORTATION	\$0.00
ACCOMMODATION	\$0.00
HOSPITALITY	\$0.00
PER DIEMS	\$0.00
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$0.00
MISCELLANEOUS	\$0.00
TOTAL	\$0.00

*All expenses reimbursed by the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) - Canadian Region.