



**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation to the 54th
Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference**

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

**Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
August 1-10, 2008**

and

**Bilateral Visit to Singapore
August 10-14, 2008**

Report

The delegation of the Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association which attended the 54th Annual Conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia from August 1 to 10, 2008, and which participated in a bilateral visit to Singapore from August 10 to 14, 2008 has the honour to present its report.

54th CPA Conference, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

More than 650 parliamentarians and parliamentary officials from approximately 170 member national, state, provincial and territorial Parliaments and Legislatures around the Commonwealth attended the meetings in Kuala Lumpur as guests of the Parliament, government and peoples of Malaysia from August 1 to 10, 2008. The Canadian Branch was represented by the following delegates:

Hon. Raynell **Andreychuk**, Senator

Hon. David **Smith**, Senator

Russ **Hiebert**, M.P., Chair of the Canadian Branch, Leader of the delegation and Regional Representative

Michel **Guimond**, M.P.

Irene **Mathysen**, M.P.

Joe **Preston**, M.P.

Yasmin **Ratansi**, M.P.

The members of the Canadian Branch delegation were part of a 35 member Canadian Region delegation to the Conference, representing the provincial and territorial legislative bodies of the Canadian Region.

The official start date for the Conference was August 4th, however as in previous years, several delegates from the Canadian Region arrived in time to participate as either delegates or observers at the Small Countries Conference and as delegates at the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Business Session which were held from August 1st to 4th. As the Chair of the Canadian Branch delegation was unable to arrive in Kuala Lumpur in time to attend the meeting of the International Executive Committee, he was represented by the **Hon. Raynell Andreychuk**. These meetings are traditionally held in advance of the official arrival date for the Conference delegates.

As a result of the Annual General Meeting held in New Delhi, India in September 2007 to reduce the length of the Conference schedule, the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) did not have a full day of debate on issues of importance to the women parliamentary delegates. **Ms. Charlotte L'Écuyer**, MNA (Québec), International Vice-president of the CWP, participated in several meetings of the Steering Committee.

Thursday, August 7th, the CWP held its Business Meeting with the participation of all women parliamentarians present at the Conference. This event provided the only opportunity for full debate of the topic *Role of Parliamentarians in the Elimination of Violence Against Women With Particular Reference to Domestic Violence*. Along with their provincial counterparts, **Ms. Ratansi** and **Ms. Mathysen** actively participated in this debate citing several reports and changes to the legislation in Canada. This was followed later in the week by a Workshop session on *Mechanisms to Ensure Adequate Recognition of Women's Issues in Budgetary Processes*.

Deputy Prime Minister **Dato' Seri Mohd Najib Tun Razak**, addressed the delegates at the Official Opening Ceremonies on Tuesday, August 5th. Following the reading of the Queen's Message to the delegates, he delivered the speech originally prepared for the Prime Minister which focussed on the theme of the 54th Conference "*Expanding the Role of Parliament in Global Society: Environment, Development and Security*". After welcoming the delegates to Malaysia and noting that Malaysia has hosted the Annual Conference twice in the past, in 1963 and again in 1996, he went on to speak of the importance of all parliamentarians to recognize the need to "...adopt an integrated policy framework to ensure that the benefits of globalisation reach all parts of the world and all social groups." The speech also paid particular attention to the increasing rates of urbanization and its impact on food security and the widening gap in incomes between the urban and rural communities in all countries. This issue is already gaining the attention of parliamentarians and governments around the Commonwealth.

As is the usual practice at the Annual Conference, the Secretary General of the Commonwealth, **Mr. Kamalesh Sharma** and the Secretary General of the Commonwealth Secretariat, **Dr. William F. Shija** addressed the delegates following the official ceremonies. Both concentrated their remarks on the general themes of the Conference and the years of close cooperation between the CPA and the Commonwealth Secretariat on issues of mutual interest and concern.

The host Branch traditionally provides a day of social activities designed to showcase their country's heritage and cultural history at the Annual Commonwealth Parliamentary Conferences. In Malaysia, delegates were taken to Taman Mini Malaysia Park – a venue where the many cultures of Malaysia are demonstrated through architecture, dance and food. Following lunch, the delegates were taken to Malacca to visit the historic city's port and examples of the many different cultures and historic periods which have been preserved for both Malaysians and tourists to the country.

Thursday, August 7th, female delegates, staff and observers participated in the CWP Business Meeting and Workshop on *The Role of Parliamentarians in the Elimination of Violence Against Women with a Particular Reference to Domestic Violence*. As Chair of Canadian Region CWP Steering Committee and Vice-Chair of the CWP International, Ms. **Charlotte L'Écuyer**, MNA (Quebec) was one of the panellists on this topic. All female members of the Canadian Region delegation were in attendance and participated in the discussions.

The **Hon. Dato' Dr Ng Yen Yen**, M.P., (Malaysia) was the lead speaker and emphasized the need for parliamentarians "...to be engaged in the issue that is not confined to any nation, society or race and recognizes that violent acts on women are

found in every economy and at every strata of the society.” After describing the situation and legislation in place in Malaysia, the Minister noted that “...*Members should take the lead role in ensuring that violence against women and the need to end it is on the policy agenda at all local, provincial and national levels, and not just an agenda in women (sic) organizations.*”

Former Chair of the CWP, the **Hon. Lindiwe Maseko**, MPL (Gauteng) reported on the situation in South Africa in the post apartheid era. She noted with sadness that the country continues to be plagued by violence against women, particularly domestic violence. She stated that despite the adoption of strong legislation to eliminate violence against women in South Africa – there is a real need for “...*sound implementation and monitoring*” of the legislation to ensure effectiveness and that it is having the desired impact in lessening the number of violent assaults against women. In concluding her remarks, the Hon. Maseko said “...*the public has a right to hold the state accountable for implementation of these Acts. As part of the oversight, parliamentarians must ensure that these Acts are satisfactorily accomplished.*”

The next presenter was the **Hon. Dame Jennifer Smith**, J.P., M.P., Deputy Speaker (Bermuda). While recognizing that in the majority of cases of spousal abuse, the victims are women, Bermuda has also recognized that there are a significant number of cases where the victim is male and has drafted its legislation to remove gender bias wherever possible. Bermuda has also expanded the application of the laws against sexual and physical abuse to include abuse against seniors. Adoption of *The Seniors Abuse Register Act 2008* “...*provides for the protection of seniors by making it an offence to physically abuse (including neglect), sexually abuse, psychologically abuse or financially exploit a senior,*” and in addition to sentences for these offences, gives the Court the power to order the name of anyone convicted of such an offence to be entered in the Senior Abuse Register.

In Bermuda, the approach to deal with the problems of domestic violence is a multi-pronged one involving the private and public sector, including funding for a Women’s Resource Centre and specially trained units within the police force to respond to such calls.

Ms. Charlotte L’Écuyer, MNA (Quebec) spoke on behalf of the Canadian Region CPA delegates to the CWP Conference on the role played by Canadian parliamentarians on this issue. Based on her experience as a social worker and sitting member of the Quebec National Assembly, she “...*advocated the need for parliamentarians to first understand the root causes in order to develop appropriate responses towards domestic abuse and violence against women.*” She noted that violence is often rooted in cultural, economic, legal and political realities facing women and used the example of a belief by some of the inherent superiority of men over women often resulting in men having control over all the economic resources in a relationship. This can then have negative impact on the woman’s economic ability to leave an abusive relationship.

She also noted that the subject of violence against women has been the subject of study and legislation in Canada since the late 1980s and has also resulted in legislation being adopted at both the federal and provincial levels. Recently Canadian

parliamentarians have been working towards the promotion of best practices among law enforcement agencies with respect to spousal abuse.

During the discussions which followed the presentations, **Ms. Yasmin Ratansi**, M.P. (Canada) and Chairperson of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women in the 39th Parliament, said “...*the issue of violence against women was one of the great concerns to Canadians. Assisted by the work of the Committee, the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women has made the reduction of violence directed towards women, particularly Aboriginal women a key priority.*” She concluded her remarks by noting that members of Parliament can make a real contribution towards helping handle the issue of violence towards women.

In concluding the discussions, Minister Yen Yen noted that over the years, there have been many examples of legislation and policy initiatives implemented around the Commonwealth and she expressed her encouragement at the number of male parliamentarians who have joined with their female counterparts and embraced the need to reduce the levels of violence and abuse through legislative means. However, she noted that there still exist member countries where this subject remains unmentionable and that it is crucial for parliamentarians of both genders to continue raising the issue and working towards adopting legislation to end the practices of violence and abuse.

Following this workshop, the delegates participated in the other workshops:

- Workshop A – Democracy and Global Peace – An International Order
- Workshop B – Sustainable Development in the Context of Rapid Urbanization and Rural Decline
- Workshop C – Credible Elections for a More Representative Parliament, Free and Fair Participation, Greater Diversity and Access to a Free Media
- Workshop D – Reforming the Budget Process: Parliamentary Budget Offices and Effective Parliamentary Oversight
- Workshop E – Collaboration among Large and Small States Through International Organisations to Respond to Climate Change
- Workshop F – Parliament and the Civil Society Engagement for Better Policy-Making
- Workshop G – The Role of Parliament in Conflict Prevention and Resolution
- Workshop H – Mechanisms to Ensure Adequate Recognition of Women’s Issues in Budgetary Processes

Workshop A was moderated by the **Hon. Senator Dato’ Ir. Wong Foon Meng** (Malaysia) and four presenters who were joined by approximately 100 delegates and observers, an indication of the seriousness with which the delegates view this particular topic and their role as parliamentarians in achieving Democracy and Global Peace.

Among the points raised by the presenters and the delegates present were the need to build legitimacy both within parliamentary institutions and among neighbouring parliaments. This can be accomplished by *“...designing a parliament that reflects all citizens, passes laws that reflects the interest of all groups and ensure that economic and social disparities between groups are addressed.”*

Several delegates raised points about the linkages between the environment, lack of transparency in the Executive; the perceived lack of action by parliamentarians in alleviating hunger, poverty and diseases and, the increasing levels of conflict on a local, national and international level.

In concluding the Workshop, the Moderator noted the number of references to the need for trust, dialogue, opportunity and legitimacy as prerequisites for global peace. It remains understood that parliamentarians must also demonstrate respect for minority views and engage civil society in lessening the number and severity of conflict situations.

Workshop B was moderated by the **Hon. Delroy Chuck, M.P.** (Jamaica) and three presenters representing: UN-HABITAT, Nigeria and New South Wales. All three presenters emphasized rapid urban growth and its impact on rural life, noting that this is leading to the dominance of urban populations over rural populations in many underdeveloped countries.

Delegates expressed concern with the increasing problems related to this development in the form of environmental, economic, social and cultural demands on the world's limited natural resources. It was noted that presenters and participants in the Workshop were unanimous in their assessment that dealing with the crises arising from this shift in population densities cannot be left to governments alone, but would require a partnership between *“...all nations and move beyond arguments about urban versus rural, recognizing the reality of urban growth and migration among human settlements and focuses on effective management of the process. - ...public partnerships should be pursued to ensure the provision of facilities particularly in rural areas to slow down migration.”*

The representative from UN-HABITAT emphasized that the challenges to sustainable urbanization lies in the overall lack of planning, implementation and management capabilities on the part of local governments and their partners. He also noted that the rapid growth of urban areas has a wide spread impact on the environment and this in turn was leading to negative impacts on local rural areas. He called upon the parliamentary delegates to pay particular attention to the need for a *“... coherent overall framework involving governments, local authorities, private sectors, NGOs and professional groups.”*

Other delegates noted that with the increasing impact of rapid urbanization and the resulting degradation of local environments, rural areas were experiencing a lack of adequate, safe local sources of water and basic sanitation leading to more poverty and increasing levels of malnutrition and diseases. The continuing impact of rapid urbanization is *“... a key factor responsible for climate change which causes droughts, floods and natural disasters. The interaction between urbanization and climate change is of vital importance to the future well-being of the human population.”*

The presenters were united in their concern that rapid urbanization in the underdeveloped world is also having a detrimental impact on food production as a result of the decreasing populations in rural food producing areas. One of the delegates from India noted that unless there is improved infrastructure and perceived benefits in the rural areas, the current food shortages will pale in comparison to what is likely to come in the future when a country's youth are flooding into urbanized areas where they feel there is an opportunity for jobs with a better standard of living.

In concluding the workshop, the moderator noted the general consensus of the comments of the delegates and presenters that sustainable development is vital in improving the life of citizens in both the urban and rural areas and will require coordinated planning between governments, private partners and NGOs which are sensitive to the varying needs of the populations' religious and cultural mores. He also reiterated the necessity for parliamentarians to be aware of the need to ensure a sustainable quality of life for those individuals who opt to remain in a rural setting while ensuring that urban development is cognizant of its environmental and economic impacts.

Workshop C was moderated by the **Hon. E.M. Britto**, M.P. (Gibraltar) with three presenters representing Zambia, India and Jersey. Elections and electoral reform have been a topic of interest to the Association membership for several years, particularly as it relates to the decreasing voter turnout in many countries with a concurrent perception of electoral fraud in some of the countries and states represented within the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

All the presenters agreed that free and fair elections are the basis for strong democratic government and then proceeded to put forward a variety of mechanisms to ensure credible elections. The **Hon. Request Muntanga**, M.P. (Zambia) emphasized that the choice of electoral system as crucial to establishing the credibility of the process and acceptance of the electoral results. He noted that there are four electoral systems in effect: the first past the post system; the proportional representation system, the single member majority system and, the mixed member proportionality system. In simple terms, he stated that the first past the post system tends to result in two party states with few minority parties represented in the parliament. Contrarily, the proportional representation system tends to result in unstable coalition parliaments where independent candidates are unlikely to succeed in winning a seat.

The **Hon. Shri T. Baddur**, M.P., Speaker (Assam, India) argued the need for an accurate electoral roll for elections to prevent opportunities for electoral fraud to occur along with a requirement for all voters to present photographic identity cards for voting and the establishment of an arms-length electoral commission to run the electoral process. He noted that India has also implemented a Code of Conduct for all candidates at both the federal and state level.

The **Hon. David Smith, Senator** (Canada) was an active participant in this particular workshop – noting “...it was not possible for electoral traditions instantly to be manufactured and that these had to evolve over time”. He added that “...this process was hampered by those politicians who once they had gained office believed themselves to be there for life. This attitude had recently been encapsulated by a

certain longstanding Head of State who had stated 'God had put him in office and only God could remove him.' Senator Smith also reiterated the need for a free press, noting that it is an essential component to free and fair elections. In his remarks, Senator Smith emphasized the need for election monitoring and praised the role of the CPA in continuing in its efforts to ensure that qualified election monitors are available to aid in the strengthening the development of free and fair elections.

Several of the delegates noted the need for a proper arms-length elections infrastructure to ensure that parties are not unduly influencing the outcomes of elections. Part of this infrastructure should include proper voter identification and education of the electorate on the process of voting.

Some delegates suggested that in addition to lowering the voting age to 16, the right to vote should be extended to anyone who pays taxes in the jurisdiction. These proposals were contested by other delegates who expressed their desire to ensure that only citizens of the country hold the entitlement to vote.

The Hon. Kenneth Marewe, M.P. (Kenya) recommended the need to move away from the "winner take all" concept in elections with a move towards more proportional representation and then expanded this to include the concept of coalition governments to deal with deadlock engendered by the potential growth in minority governments.

The moderator concluded the session by saying *"...that three important themes had emerged from the debate and that these could be formulated as follows: that the will of the people was the basis of the authority to govern; that all voters were equal but needed to be given equal treatment and, that all parliamentary candidates were equal but needed to be treated equally."*

Workshop D was moderated by **Mrs. Clare Christian**, MLC (Isle of Man) and **Joe Preston**, M.P. (Canada) as one of the three presenters, shared the podium with the **Hon. Eleny Charles Ojok** M.P. (Uganda) and, **Mr. Mitchell O'Brien**, Parliamentary Strengthening Program, World Bank Institute.

Mr. Preston was the lead speaker on this topic and provided a brief background to the creation of the office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer in the Canadian Parliament. The creation of this office was a result of several years of recommendations received from both parliamentarians and outside economic experts concerned about the accuracy of the Department of Finance's projections which were resulting in larger than expected surpluses. Mr. Preston noted *"...the task of forecasting government revenues and expenses is complex in nature and over several years Canadian parliamentarians had been interested in improving the process."*

He elaborated that following years of debate, the Parliament had finally adopted a mandate for the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer as outlined in the Federal Accountability Act. *"it has three components:*

- *Objective analysis to the Senate and the House of Commons about the trends in the economy, the state of the nation's finances and the Estimates of the Government;*

- *Related research when requested by a Committee of the Senate or the House of Commons including the Standing Committee on National Finance in the Senate and the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts;*
- *Estimating the financial costs of proposals introduced by a member of either House (other than as a minister of the Crown) or by a Committee.*

He further noted that this office operates on the basis of the best practice principles of a budget office, including providing value-added analysis in support of its mandate. It was noted that the position of Parliamentary Budget Officer was only filled in March 2008 and that Canadian parliamentarians have not had sufficient time to gauge the effectiveness of the Office.

In concluding his remarks, Mr. Preston reiterated the need for the Office to be *“...independent, non-political, objective, (have) access to the Executive Branch, (and be) responsive and transparent.”*

The Ugandan perspective on the issue of a Parliamentary Budget Officer was provided by the **Hon. Oleny Charles Ojok**, M.P. Uganda had taken advantage of amending its constitution in 2006 to establish the office of a Parliamentary Budget Officer in tandem with a Parliamentary Budget Committee. These two elements have provided the Ugandan parliamentarians with an effective interventionist role in the process of developing a budget where any loans negotiated by the government must be approved by Parliament. One of the most essential tools available to Ugandan parliamentarians is the assistance of resident economic and budget experts who work with the various committees to assist the parliamentarians in understanding the process and technical details contained in the budget.

He noted that *“The Budget Office also assists the parliament to balance the competing objectives of the resource mobilization in order to achieve efficiency and effectiveness. It also assists in the analysis on (the) expenditure side and further in the process of macro analysis so as to keep the inflation low and stable, creation of employment, low and stable interest rates to promote investment and stable exchange rates to promote exports.”*

He reported that this new institution has proven to be a valuable tool for the parliamentarians in the Ugandan parliament in effectively managing both the revenue and expenditure sides of the national budget process.

Mitchell O’Brien of the Parliamentary Strengthening Program of the World Bank spoke to the work being done by the World Bank Institute in assisting parliaments to take a larger role in managing their respective budgetary processes. During his remarks he noted that studies of the various forms of Parliamentary Budget Offices have found that their effectiveness is directly related to the mandates established for them by their parliaments – mandates which ensure they are non-partisan, independent, objective, transparent and analytical and designed to serve both the majority and the minority. The mandates should also include the following functions: provision of economic forecasts, baseline estimates, analysis of Executive Budgets and medium term analysis. In addition, it is helpful if other functions are included: analysis of proposals, options for

spending cuts, analysis of mandates (Regulatory Analysis); economic/programmatic analysis, tax analysis, long-term analysis and policy briefs.

It became apparent throughout the discussions that the majority of delegates who participated in the Workshop supported the idea of creating an office within Parliament to serve the role of Parliamentary Budget Officer as all the parliamentarians are discovering their own personal difficulties in understanding the complexities of the budget process in the 21st century. Despite the success stories from several countries, some of the parliamentarians present expressed concern that staffing of the Office might become a point of conflict between the government and opposition parties.

Workshops E, F and G were conducted on Friday, August 8th in the Conference Centre.

Workshop E was moderated by the **Hon. Richard Tobay**, MLA (New South Wales, Australia) with three presenters – the **Hon. Paulsalue Faapo II**, M.P. (Samoa); **Mr. Nigel Evans**, M.P. (United Kingdom) and **Ms. Janet Strachan** (Economic Advisor, Economic Affairs Division, Commonwealth Secretariat). The issue of Climate Change has been one of strong interest within the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association for several years and its presence as the topic of a Workshop at the Annual Conference is a result of lobbying on the part of the members of the Small Countries Conference. The presenters represented the developed world, a small island nation and an international body and provided opinions directly related to their respective viewpoints.

The focus of the discussions was that the time for talking about the problem is past and that the time for action to counteract the negative effects of Climate Change has arrived. It was noted that this issue is of “...*global concern and that solutions to combat its impact can only be achieved through international cooperation between states, large and small.*” Much frustration was expressed at the perceived lack of action by the developed world and international organizations as well as the growing impact of rising sea levels on low-lying countries.

The presenters provided delegates with outlines of the steps they have been taking to move from talking about the problem to developing legislation within their parliaments to taking action to counteract the impact of climate change. Most of the participants who spoke in the workshop represented small countries which are experiencing the negative effects of climate change.

Many of the delegates noted the lack of financial assistance to small, underdeveloped countries to develop action plans to combat and mitigate the impact. Various options were put forth to move legislation forward which would help both developed and underdeveloped countries create a low carbon world economy and establish a shared long term vision of emission reductions. Both Mr. Evans and Ms. Strachan spoke about the actions being taken by parliamentarians and representatives of the Commonwealth Secretariat in bringing together ideas, political will and draft legislation which are open to parliamentarians to move in their respective legislatures.

Irene Mathyssen, M.P. (Canada) spoke about the efforts of the opposition parties in Canada to develop “...*a Bill dealing with climate change such as setting greenhouse gas emissions targets*”. She also urged her parliamentary counterparts in the

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association to influence large nations to adhere to low greenhouse gas emissions and to adopt low carbon economies.”

During the roundtable discussions, a consensus developed for the need to undertake immediate action to combat the negative effects of climate change and that a recommendation be forwarded to the Executive Committee for the creation of a Taskforce within the CPA to deal exclusively with this topic.

Workshop F – Parliament and the Civil Society Engagement for Better Policy Making was moderated by the **Hon. Fatoumata Jajumpa-Ceesay**, M.P. (The Gambia) and the presenters included the **Hon. Dr. Datuk Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar**, M.P. (Malaysia); the **Hon. Dr. Fehmida Mirza**, M.P. (Pakistan); **Mr. Emmanuel Mpanda**, M.P. (Tanzania) and, **Dr. Godfrey H.N. Haantobolo**, M.P. (Zambia).

The parliamentarians who acted as presenters in the workshop in association with those who participated in the ensuing discussions were unanimous in their agreement that Civil Society has an important role to play in planning government policies and in the implementation of these policies. Indeed, they were passionate about the need for parliament to engage civil society in the drafting of policies and in the implementation of these policies, particularly in social policy areas.

The **Hon. Dr. Fehmida Mirza**, Speaker of the Pakistan Parliament noted that civil society and parliamentary society complement each other in the development of acceptable and effective policies in a parliamentary democracy. The support of civil society agencies for legislation drafted by parliamentarians encourages acceptance of both the policy and the enabling legislation.

During the discussions, some of the participants cautioned that while civil society may represent the majority of a country’s population, care must be taken by the parliamentarians to ensure that the rights of the minorities are not marginalized.

In summarizing the discussions, the moderator, the Hon. Fatoumata Jajumpa-Ceesay noted “...*the workshop participants unanimously agreed that in a democratic State, there would be no meaningful democracy without the positive engagement of the civil society. Where this relationship does not exist, it is pertinent that member countries provide an enabling environment in which legislation that legalizes the existence of civil society and its attendant rights and freedoms is in place.*”

Workshop G – The Role of Parliament in Conflict Prevention and Resolution was moderated by the **Hon. Beatrice Shellukindo**, M.P. (Tanzania) and the presenters included: **Declan O’Loan**, MLA (Northern Ireland); **the Hon. David Musila**, M.P. (Kenya); **the Hon. Nick Peniai**, M.P. (Papua New Guinea); **Mitchell O’Brien**, Parliamentary Strengthening Program (World Bank Institute) and **Salome Katia**, the Great Lakes Parliamentary Forum of Peace – AMANI Forum.

The presenters and participants in this workshop were consistent in remarking on the perceived degree of stability in their respective parliaments, however, they were also conscious that they were facing increasing expectations from their populations for swift resolutions to their respective problems.

Mr. Declan O’Loan spoke from the viewpoint of a member who had survived several years of violence and a dysfunctional political system in Northern Ireland. He warned

that *“...a parliament dominated by one side that ignored the needs of the minority was not sustainable in the long term, even if that long term was over many years.”*

Resolving of the crisis situation in Northern Ireland took the efforts of the Irish Government working closely with the Government of the United Kingdom with the occasional assistance of international representatives from both Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth countries. He further noted that a political solution to these kinds of problems requires real and meaningful partnership or risk collapsing back into violence. Efforts on the part of all the parties in the Northern Ireland Assembly elected in May of 2007 must be sustained despite the spectre of continuing challenges, community expectations for both social and economic change.

The **Hon. David Musila** (Kenya) provided a viewpoint from his region and the common causes for civil unrest. These include ethnic inequality, historical injustices, human rights issues, perceived and actual electoral manipulation and the use of provocative language by sitting parliamentarians which further inflame the population's sense of injustice. He called for increased protection of the procedural environment regarding the inflammatory language in parliamentary debates, etc. He expressed the view that *“...MPs had a responsibility not to incite people to act unlawfully and in delivery terms formulate policies that were meaningful, responding to real needs for example, fair job distribution, infrastructure development and equal opportunities.”* He further noted that *“...Legislation and the institutions necessary to carry out the functions of the legislation were a vital component in managing post conflict situations.”*

Mr. Mitchell O'Brien reported that a survey of conflict situations had resulted in highlighting the fact that 31 of the 161 countries examined were at risk of violence. He noted that violence is often the outcome of conflict situations and the responsibility of parliamentarians through their institutions to introduce legislation and policies which will lead to a reduction in the risk of escalation to violence in these situations. Parliamentarians must be consistent in ensuring that policies are implemented and in managing expectations of their populations to avoid sliding back into a state of increasing conflict.

Mr. Nick Penial, M.P. reported on the elements used to reduce the potential for conflict in Papua New Guinea. These include: legislation focussing on the critical elements leading to potential conflict; political and administrative regime which can re-organize structures to meet the needs of the population; creation of synergies to ensure effective delivery of goods and services and, innovation in changing historical taboos and restrictions which impact on reconciliation and respect for human rights.

During the discussion in the Workshop, the delegates raised several options open to parliamentary institutions regarding their roles in lessening conflict. One option involves the use of external agencies such as the United Nations, however, delegates were quick to note that the success of the participation of these external agencies is directly proportional to whether or not those agencies have been invited to assist in resolving the issues or have determined to participate without the invitation of the players.

Other delegates noted the root cause of conflicts and war are usually the result of a failure of the parliamentary system to eliminate discrimination based on ethnicity, language or cultural differences within the population. In order to avoid these situations

from developing, parliamentarians must work towards democratic institutions and strengthened human rights.

The Hon. Roy Boudreau, MLASpeaker (New Brunswick) emphasized the need for *“parliamentarians to consider the impact of their policies on society as a whole and not just focus on the issues of the day. Education of our young people has a key role to play in changing mindsets and the promotion and teaching of tolerance could steer society away from the notion that violence was acceptable in any shape of form. Parliamentarians must accept responsibility for their own actions, showing hatred or open hostility to fellow parliamentarians sent out the wrong message.”*

Dr. Shija addressed some of the concerns raised by the participants by outlining several activities of the CPA’s parliamentary capacity building program which has been growing over the past few years. In concluding his remarks he urged parliamentarians to take advantage of the opportunities to participate in these activities and to bring back to their respective parliaments the tools they have acquired in the realm of capacity building.

Workshop H – Mechanisms to Ensure Adequate Recognition of Women’s Issues in the Budgetary Process. The **Hon. Dato’ Dr. Ng Yen Yen**, MP, Minister of Women, Family and Community Development (Malaysia) moderated the workshop. The presenters included the **Hon. Kumari Selja**, MP, Minister of State for Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation (India); the **Hon. Dr. Rosmarie Husbands-Mathurin**, President of the Senate (St. Lucia) and the **Hon. Lindiwe Maseko**, MPL, Chairperson of Portfolio Committees Chairpersons (Gautang, South Africa).

This was a well attended workshop and the delegates took advantage of the opportunity to elaborate on best practices from Canada, Australia, South Africa and India. It was noted that throughout the presentations and discussions one element appeared to be common to all countries – the need to sensitize and strengthen the political will of both male and female parliamentarians to the need for a gender balanced budgets. This type of budgeting will bring equality to both the urban and rural women in the developing countries. During the discussions, it was noted that *“...gender budgets were imperative in achieving gender equality in the allocation of resources.”* Without achieving success in this area, women and girls, particularly in rural areas will continue to be disadvantaged in terms of education, economic stability and in their ability to ensure a safe and healthy life for their country’s future.

“Participants were unanimous in the view that public education was necessary to sensitize the entire population on gender issues.” Care needs to be taken to ensure that the budgetary process is not perceived as being beneficial for women only, but for the population as a whole.

Among the best practices presented at the Workshop were the establishment of objective gender audits; continuous monitoring; evaluation of both the programs’ transparency and effectiveness; creation of gender budget cells within government and ministries and, improved financial accountability in both the legislative and executive arms of government.

The delegate from Singapore noted that in her country, *“...specific budget requests must be accompanied by concrete proposals with identifiable outcomes, and she endorsed*

the need for collaboration with the labour movement to promote employment programs for women.”

In concluding the discussions, the moderator noted that a common thread heard around the table was the need for an attitudinal change among men and the important role women parliamentarians need to play to ensure that progress is ongoing in developing and implementing gender sensitive budgets.

The Second Plenary session was held on August 8th in the afternoon and the topic *The Global Food Crisis* generated a great deal of interest among the delegates as many represented countries where the impact of a combination of global warming and the diversion of food crops into alternative fuels has resulted in a rapid increase in the cost of basic food supplies with shortages in many regions.

Many of the delegates expressed serious concerns about the continuing diversion of arable land formerly used for the production of food crops into land now used to produce alternative fuel crops. The increasing cost of basic foods combined with the increasing scarcity of these foods in the marketplace is having a negative impact on the peoples of southern Africa and in large parts of the Indian sub-continent and Asia. Delegates from those regions noted the potential for serious civil unrest if food supplies cannot be increased.

Other delegates outlined other factors affecting the cost of basic foods in the marketplace and the need for parliamentarians to become involved in identifying legislation and regulation governing the use of arable land for urban development; lifestyle choices; the role of speculators and in many of the developing nations – the migration of youth to cities reducing the numbers of people producing food crops in the rural areas.

Several of the African delegates expressed the opinion that many of the causes of increased costs for basic foods are directly related to wars being fought in oil producing countries which in turn are resulting in speculation in the food crops market as alternate sources of energy. One delegate noted that if there was a moratorium on war for the next five years, enough money would be saved to solve the food problem.

One of the delegates from Pakistan also noted that there has also been an increase in the fertilizers and other agricultural chemicals, which when combined with the low farm gate prices for basic foods, results in the local farmers not being able to survive so they leave their fields empty leading to even less food production.

In conclusion, it was noted that parliamentarians have a role to play in both the developed and developing world to solve the crisis in global food production.

Saturday, August 9th was the date of the General Assembly of the CPA which included the election of a new Chair of the International Executive Committee. The post is a three year term and there were two strong candidates: one representing Malaysia, the host country, and the other from the United Kingdom. Following a somewhat drawn out election process where every delegate had the right to vote, the **Hon. Dato' Seri Mohd Shafie Apdal** (Malaysia) was declared the winner over **Lord Paul of Marlebone** (United Kingdom).

Copies of the Workshop Reports from the 54th CPA Conference, from which quotations have been taken, are available on line at the following web address: <http://www.cpa-conference.org/download.asp?id=33>. In conclusion, the delegates would like to express their appreciation to the Parliamentary Research Branch of the Library of Parliament for the excellent background information they prepared for the use of the delegation during the Conference. Special thanks are offered to David G. Summers, High Commissioner of Canada to Malaysia and the officers and staff of the Canadian High Commission for their extremely professional assistance prior to and during the delegation's time in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Following the Conference, the delegation of the Canadian Branch made a short bilateral visit to Singapore. The report on this visit follows:

Mr. Russ Hiebert, MP, Chair of the Canadian Branch led the delegation. The Participants included the **Honourable Raynell Andreychuk**, the **Honourable David Smith** and, Members of Parliament **Michel Guimond**, **Irene Mathysen**, **Joe Preston** and **Yasmin Ratansi** as well as Carol Chafe, Executive Secretary of the Branch. The delegation of the Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association visited Singapore from August 10 -14, 2008 immediately following the 54th CPA Conference held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia from August 1 – 10, 2008. *Please note that all costs associated with this bilateral visit have been included in the costs of the delegation's participation in the 54th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.*

The CPA constitution encourages visits between member countries with the objective of giving parliamentarians an opportunity to trade views and to discuss matters of common interest both in bilateral relations and on the international Commonwealth scene. Over the past three years, the Executive Committee of the Canadian Branch has been aware of the potential for major changes in the administration, governance and future direction of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and the need to establish and strengthen relations with those Branches which appear to hold similar views. This awareness has resulted in the Branch conducting two bilateral visits to Guyana and Tonga with the aim of assisting their Parliaments in the realm of democratic development.

Singapore plays an important role within the CPA as well as being a major trading partner for Canada in the Asian Region. The Executive Committee felt it advantageous to work with the Singapore Branch towards strengthening the role of both Branches within the International Executive Committee (EXCO) of the CPA and in exchanging ideas for legislation in the areas of narcotics control, border security and trade regulations.

While in Singapore, the delegation was welcomed by the **Honourable Abdullah Tarmugi**, MP, Speaker of Parliament and several members who had also participated in the 54th CPA Annual Conference in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. These meetings provided both sides with the opportunity to discuss decisions taken at the General Assembly, the election of the new Chair of the CPA as well as the variety of possible future directions open to the Association. It also provided the delegates with the opportunity to further strengthen relations with individual members of Parliament established during the Annual Conference.

In addition to the discussions on the future direction of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the delegation was also interested in the following topics: drafting of legislation on the budget process and economic questions; trade issues between Canada and Singapore and market restrictions in both countries; law enforcement with an emphasis on border security, drug law enforcement and the role of parliamentarians in drafting policy and laws governing trafficking and, electoral reforms as initiated by Singapore including the question of dedicated seats for minority groups and their assessment of the successes and weaknesses of their current electoral system.

The program was designed to ensure that the delegates had sufficient opportunity to meet with both parliamentary and bureaucratic representatives who are very knowledgeable in these areas.

During the meeting with Speaker Tarmugi, the delegates discussed developments from the recent 54th CPA Conference in Kuala Lumpur and the future directions being proposed for the Association. The Speaker also discussed the current relations between Singapore and the Peoples' Republic of China and the growing influence of China in Southeast Asia and the Pacific Region. He also noted that Singapore was developing greater ties with ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) and that the general feeling is that this organisation provides more intensive relations and cooperation between nations through its structure than is currently provided through the CPA.

In response to questions from the delegates, the Speaker noted that women compose 22 per cent of the elected members of the Singapore Parliament; however, they ask 80 per cent of all questions, this can cause problems with some of the male parliamentarians as they feel they do not get sufficient number of questions. With the Chamber, the questions from the women parliamentarians usually focus on family, social and health care issues with several on education, but in recent months, the female representatives are also raising questions on finance and trade issues. The responses of the Speaker to questions concerning climate change, violence towards women and the impact of increasing demands for child care would appear to indicate that these are not as important within the Singapore context as in Canada.

Following the meeting and lunch with Speaker Tarmugi and representatives of the other political parties represented in the Singapore Parliament, the delegates met with **Mr. Tio Ming Kian**, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Finance and several senior officials for a briefing on the budgetary process in Singapore. One of the more important points presented by the officials, and which created much interest on the part of the delegates was legislation dealing with the handling of budget surpluses in Singapore. In effect, this legislation requires any budget surpluses at the end of a Parliamentary term to be locked into a Reserve Account that can only be accessed in times of emergency with the approval and signature of the President.

The government and parliament of Singapore has been able to put away a substantial amount into the Reserve Account over the past few years and this has been accomplished through a system wide policy of excellence in the Public Service, attention to detail in the budget process, a growth in the GDP for Singapore and an

increasing trade surplus. As in Canada, Singapore has a GST of five per cent on all items and services; however, there are no plans to decrease the amount of the tax in the foreseeable future.

During the meeting, the officials noted that Singapore is facing some potential problems in the future: an aging demographic; projected global slowdown in light of the problems being encountered in the United States and the direct and indirect impact of rising oil prices which will influence the costs of production and transportation of goods abroad. Should the financial situation worsen more than anticipated, the President can draw down on funds in the Reserve Account to lessen the impact.

The government of Singapore is looking at various approaches to resolve the problems associated with their aging population in the form of tax incentives for couples to have children and increased use of foreign workers, primarily from Malaysia.

It was also noted that unlike Canada, there is no system of employment insurance in Singapore as the economy is such that it is felt there are sufficient jobs for the population and a system of top up payments are made for those workers who have to take jobs which pay less than their previous employment. This system works on a sliding scale of payments dependent on the differential between the original job and the new job.

On the Tuesday morning, the delegation had the opportunity to meet with **Mr. Bhopinder Singh**, Director of Operation, Ministry of Immigration and Checkpoints Authority and other senior officials of the department to discuss immigration control and border security issues. This meeting followed closely on one of the points raised during the discussions with the representatives of the Ministry of Finance on the Monday afternoon, specifically the approach of using more foreign workers to fill positions going vacant within the Singapore labour market. The increase volume of two way traffic at the main land crossing point, the Woodlands Checkpoint, has led to the implementation of high tech procedures for rapidly and effectively clearing people through the checkpoint from the immigration perspective. The Woodlands Checkpoint is also responsible for the clearance of goods and collection of any customs duties into Singapore. Both functions are handled through the leveraged use of technology and continuous training of the border personnel. The use of the EECUS system (similar to the NEXUS system between Canada and the US) along with pre-clearance of goods; a specialized gate for motorcycles, photo recognition systems, etc, helps to speed the border clearance process enabling foreign workers to clear the immigration system quickly. Border personnel have been trained in the use of technology used for fingerprinting and biometric systems. Cargo is also handled through the use of pre-clearance and gamma ray scanning of each container and vehicle, which is then followed up by physical checks where necessary.

As part of the program to improve both the efficiencies and effectiveness of these programs, all Singapore citizens who are 18 years of age and older are required by law to provide biometric information and to carry a national identity card. In response to a question from the delegates, it was also noted that this information is not shared with other countries or their representative agencies.

The delegates received a tour of the Woodlands Checkpoint facility and were able to observe the technology in use as well as the physical arrangements in place to help speed the processing of the large volume of cars, motorcycles and trucks passing through the checkpoint.

Tuesday afternoon, the delegation met with **Vijakumar Sethuraj**, Deputy Director and senior officials of the Central Narcotics Bureau. Singapore has an international reputation for reduced illegal drug use and drug trafficking within its borders and the delegates had wanted an opportunity to meet with officials and examine both the legislation dealing with this issue and its successful implementation.

The officials provided an overview of the legislation in place to help reduce and eventually eradicate illegal drugs use and trafficking within the borders of Singapore. Two pieces of legislation, the *Misuse of Drugs Act* and the *Corruption, Drug Trafficking and Other Serious Crimes (Confiscation of Benefits) Act* provide the police and the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority with the powers to act on suspected illegal drug trafficking and drug use. These Acts, in conjunction with a wide spread public education program and strict application of penalties are showing an impact on the prevalence of drug use and illegal drug trafficking within Singapore. Of note for the delegates is the use of mandatory drug rehabilitation programs ranging from 3 months to 6 months in length. The length of these programs provides a better chance of recovery than the shorter 28 day programs currently available in Canada.

It should also be noted that Singapore's zero tolerance for drug trafficking and the use of the death penalty is also having a major impact on the reducing the growth of illegal drug trafficking.

On Wednesday, the delegates met with **Mr. Inderjit Singh**, MP, Chair of the Government Finance, Trade and Industry Committee, **Mr. Minn Naing Oo**, Director, World Trade Organization and International Trade Negotiations and other senior officials of the Ministry of Trade and Industry.

Singapore has a thriving economy based on international trade in goods and services, however, it was noted that future growth is at risk due to a decreasing birthrate, aging population and the physical limitations of being an island and lacking space to expand. During the discussions, it was noted that Singapore is dealing with its decreasing birth rate by engaging more immigrant workers. At this point, 15 to 20 per cent of the workforce is composed of immigrant workers, most of who live in Malaysia just across the border. This number is one of the main concerns with the capacity of the Woodlands Checkpoint to process the numbers crossing the border on a daily basis. This solution to the issue of a decreasing local workforce is creating some problems within the Singapore society who are concerned by or objecting to the increasing number of immigrant workers living in the city.

In order to meet the increasing demands on available land for development, Singapore is involved in a major undertaking to increase its land by creating more through dredging its harbours and coastline. The end result of this terra-forming exercise is that housing costs are increasing rapidly and putting pressure on the cost of living for most citizens of Singapore.

The delegates were able to continue their discussions over lunch, where the topic of bilateral trade relations between Singapore and China and other Pacific countries were examined in detail. During the conversations, the topics of current developments in the WTO and the failure of the Doha Round of negotiations were discussed as well as a variety of future bilateral trade agreements within the Pacific Region, the impact of China as a major player in the region and the possibility of increased bilateral trade ties between Canada and Singapore. The impact of the growth of China's trade with North America and Europe were discussed frankly with the Singapore parliamentarians who attended the lunch and who also sit on the Finance and Trade and Industry Committee.

The delegates were then briefed by the Head of Elections, **Mr. Lee Seng Lup** and officials of the Elections Department for Singapore. It was noted during the briefing that, unlike Canada, the Elections Department falls under the auspices of the Prime Minister's Office. It has a permanent staff of 17, however during an election, the Department calls upon approximately 25,000 public servants to assist with the running of the elections. The large number is required as the electoral process requires approximately 20 officials per polling station.

This is explained in large part by the kind of parliamentary system in place in Singapore – this 84 member body is composed of three different kinds of MPs – those who are elected directly; a second group who are non-constituency members and those members who are nominated by the President and the Prime Minister.

The 84 elected members of parliament are elected on a plurality voting basis and represent either single-member constituencies or group representation constituencies. In this latter group, the political parties field a team of between three to six candidates, at least one candidate in the team must belong to a minority race. In order to guarantee that there is some opposition present in the legislative body, changes to the electoral legislation permits the top opposition loser in a general election to have a seat in parliament, if fewer than three opposition MPs are elected and these would be the members nominated by the President and Prime Minister.

The delegates were interested to note that in accordance with the Constitution, the Nominated MPs are citizens of Singapore qualified to be candidates but do not stand for election and are not empowered to vote on Bills pertaining to financial and constitutional matters.

The delegates were impressed by the fact approximately 90 per cent of the eligible voters actually vote. This is a result of legislation requiring compulsory voting with severe penalties for not voting. Those voters who do not vote have their names expunged from the voters' list and must go through an appeal process to have their names reinstated on the list. Despite the compulsory nature of voting in Singapore, spoiled ballots make up only 5 per cent of the total votes cast. Voter turnout in the last general election in 2006 was 94 per cent with a 5 per cent rate of spoiled ballots. The voting age is still 21 years of age and despite some discussion of lowering the age no decision has yet been taken in this area. The 2006 election was also the first time that overseas Singaporeans were entitled to vote and the future of this innovation is being studied based on the problems and successes experienced. Another innovation in the electoral legislation is electronic voting; however, this has yet to be implemented.

Singapore also has fixed election dates with the next parliamentary election scheduled to take place in 2011.

Elections are taken very seriously in Singapore and every candidate must also deposit \$13,500 on filing his or her nomination papers – this amount is refundable should the candidate receive 12.5 per cent of the votes cast. The large deposit discourages smaller parties from fielding a complete slate of candidates. It was also noted that political donations are not tax deductible.

The delegation wishes to extend its gratitude to the Speaker, parliamentarians, parliamentary staff and people of Singapore for their warm welcome and generosity throughout its visit. Everyone worked hard to ensure that the delegates had the opportunity to learn as much as possible about this island nation, its history, legislature, society and economy. We would also like to thank **Mr. David Sevigny**, High Commissioner Designate, Canadian High Commission to Singapore, and his staff for their unstinting assistance provided to the delegation prior to and during its time in Singapore.

Respectfully submitted

Russ Hiebert, M.P., Chair, Canadian Branch
of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)
ACTIVITY	54th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference and Bilateral Visit
DESTINATION	Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and Singapore
DATES	August 1-14, 2008
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Raynell Andreychuk Hon. David Smith
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Russ Hiebert, M.P. Michel Guimond, M.P. Irene Mathysen, M.P. Joe Preston, M.P. Yasmin Ratansi, M.P.
STAFF	Carol Chafe
TRANSPORTATION	\$27,946.17
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 386.08
HOSPITALITY	\$ 2,250.48
PER DIEMS	\$ 3,624.49
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 962.25
MISCELLANEOUS/REG. FEES	\$ 1,039.33
TOTAL	\$ 36,208.80