



**STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS IN THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS**

GENEVA

12-13 NOVEMBER 2012

“Keynote Address by CPA”

12 NOVEMBER 2012

09.30- 09.45

Honourable Members of Parliament

Invited Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to say a few words on behalf of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and add some words of welcome to all visitors to Geneva for this Workshop on Strengthening the Role of Parliamentarians in the Implementation of Universal Periodic Review Recommendations.

Distinguished participants, I bring greetings from the Chairperson of the Executive Committee, the Rt. Hon Sir Alan Haselhurst, MP of the United Kingdom House of Commons; Members of the CPA Executive Committee and the Secretary-General Dr. William F. Shija and the entire CPA family.

The Secretary-General, Dr. Shija, congratulates our partners at the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Inter Parliamentary Union for conceiving and organising this important and timely Workshop. The Executive Committee of the CPA and the Secretary-General wish to thank the Commonwealth Secretariat for initiating this programme for Parliamentarians and to our Members present for giving up their time to be here, despite the pressures of parliamentary work. Dr. Shija, wishes to stress the importance for such cooperation, to continue to work together and support each other in this Commonwealth family.

The CPA, founded in 1911, is an Association of Commonwealth Parliamentarians who, irrespective of gender, race, religion or culture, are united by community of interest, respect for the rule of law and individual rights and freedoms, and by pursuit of the positive ideals of parliamentary democracy. The Association's

mission is to promote the advancement of parliamentary democracy by enhancing knowledge and understanding of democratic governance. It seeks to build an informed parliamentary community able to deepen the Commonwealth's democratic commitment and to further co-operation among its Parliaments and Legislatures. This mission is achieved through a Strategic Plan which ensures CPA activities continue to meet the changing needs of today's Parliamentarians. CPA programmes provide the sole means of regular consultation among Commonwealth Members, fostering co-operation and understanding and promoting the study of and respect for good parliamentary practice. This role is endorsed by Commonwealth Parliaments and Heads of Government.

This Workshop adds to the long standing partnership between the CPA (the 'parliamentary arm' of the Commonwealth) and the Commonwealth Secretariat (the 'governmental arm' of the Commonwealth) on strengthening Parliamentary oversight and scrutiny, recognising that effectiveness is dependent upon an active and transparent system within Parliament that allows Members to enquire into government administration and realise accountability. The role of Parliament and Parliamentarians in the promotion and protection of human rights is vital as a marker of good governance and in the evolution of human rights. The ideals of human rights inform and deepen democracy. They are also a means of creating a fairer and more equitable world order.

In 2006, the CPA collaborated with the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, to produce a Human Rights Module for Parliamentarians which illustrated practical ways by which law makers can make human rights a realistic, living reality for all, both domestically and internationally. The units of the Module explained relevant concepts and show cased real examples of their application across the Commonwealth. They were also intended to assist parliamentarians in their efforts to fulfil their

mandate of promoting, protecting and realising human rights. The Module also provided information on the many ways that human rights can be brought home – through a variety of mechanisms, policies, legislation, processes and structures.

Since that time, we have seen the introduction of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process under which the human rights records of states are reviewed and assessed by the United Nations Human Rights Council with the aim of improving the human rights situation in all countries and to address human rights violations wherever they occur. It is our belief at the CPA that Workshops such as this will inform and connect Members of Parliament and provide them with tools to successfully engage with the UPR.

There are a number of parliamentary processes and tools that parliamentarians can employ to advance human rights issues, including written or oral parliamentary questions to the government, calling for and participating in parliamentary debates, introducing draft bills to highlight key areas of law that need reforming, and tabling amendments to draft government legislation to further a human rights issue.

Parliamentarians can collectively work together on human rights issues in groups either formally or informally constituted. The formal parliamentary Committees may have a range of powers and functions including conducting inquiries into specific issues, taking evidence from the government and public, and producing reports with recommendations. In addition to the formal Committees, many parliaments also have cross party groups that are a forum for discussion and action in relation to particular issues without a political agenda.

It is our hope at the CPA that today's initiative in Geneva will help to identify the key steps that parliaments, parliamentarians and the other key stakeholders can take to improve

parliamentary processes and tools to implement UPR recommendations and advance human rights issues.

Our hope is that over the next two days we will learn much from the experience of participating parliaments which will help us in turn to identify practical examples of good practice and provide direction on new avenues for inquiry.

In closing, I wish to express thanks on behalf of Dr Shija to the Members present for giving up time from their busy schedules to participate in this Workshop.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, with these remarks on behalf of the Executive Committee and the Secretary-General of the CPA, once again, I welcome all of you to Geneva and to this Workshop and look forward to your fruitful participation and deliberations.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.