



NEWS RELEASE

CPA to Support Developing Parliaments

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hamilton, Bermuda – A new support programme to assist developing Parliaments has been established by the Executive Committee of the Commonwealth's oldest organization, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA).

The programme, set by the committee at its meeting from 13 to 18 April in Hamilton, Bermuda, will provide more than £100,000 in seed funding to assist developing Parliaments to improve services and train Parliamentarians and staff to strengthen democracy. The Association will actively encourage major international businesses to provide funds for parliamentary development projects to augment CPA support.

The committee, composed of 35 Members representing the Commonwealth's more than 175 Parliaments and Legislatures, launched the new programme to offer direct support to parliamentary development projects such as: providing technical assistance to the Bougainville House of Representatives, financing a staff organizational review for the Parliament of Namibia and supporting the Parliaments of Saint Lucia, Zanzibar and Nigeria's Kwara state in making improvements to their research services.

Support will also go to: a Parliament and the Media Workshop for Seychelles, an Asia/India Financial Scrutiny Workshop, a workshop for women Parliamentarians on HIV/AIDS and a programme to develop Pacific Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures.

In announcing the programme, the Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee, Hon. Dato' Seri Mohd Shafie Apdal, MP, Malaysia's Minister of Rural and Regional Development, said the CPA is helping Parliaments, especially those in developing countries, to continue strengthening their democracies in the face of the economic stresses and uncertainties of today's global financial crisis.

"The CPA will support projects to bring tangible benefits on the ground to emerging Parliaments," said Dato' Shafie.

"Parliamentary democracy is the best way to achieve development and ensure long-term peace and security for all Commonwealth people. The current economic crisis will put great pressure on all our Parliaments and on the gains we have made in development and in advancing democratic governance, so the Commonwealth parliamentary community will rally round to help all our Assemblies," said the Malaysian Minister.

"We will also use our contacts with international businesses to urge them to support development projects so our Parliaments continue to improve the lives of our people and we maintain the social stability which international businesses need to survive," he said.

The committee added this new initiative to an extensive programme of CPA events and services for the Commonwealth's 17,000 Members of national, state, provincial and territorial Parliaments and Legislatures. Other components of the CPA's democracy support programmes, developed over nearly a century since its founding in 1911 as the Empire Parliamentary Association, were also approved during the Bermuda meeting.

Principal among the committee's other decisions was its determination of the issues to be debated at the Commonwealth's largest annual political gathering, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference. This year's conference will bring approximately 700 Parliamentarians and officials to Arusha, Tanzania, at the end of September to discuss "The Commonwealth and the CPA: Meeting Future Global Challenges". Parliamentarians will compare policies in a number of key areas, including programmes to solve the current global financial crisis. The agenda for the Small Branches Conference, which was also set by the committee, will enable Parliamentarians from approximately 35 Commonwealth jurisdictions with populations of under 500,000 people to debate the responses of small states to the global financial and other challenges. The full agendas for both conferences are attached.

The committee also accepted a motion from the newly elected Parliament of Bangladesh to resume active membership in the CPA. The Bangladeshi Parliament was placed in abeyance after the 2007 suspension of parliamentary government. The CPA will also offer support programmes to help this newly revived Parliament resume full operations.

The committee meeting was formally opened at a ceremony in the Parliament of Bermuda, the oldest Commonwealth Parliament outside the British Isles, attended by the Premier of Bermuda, Dr the Hon. Ewart F. Brown, and Opposition Leader Mr H. Kim Swan.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association is composed of the Parliaments and Legislatures in 52 of the 53 Commonwealth nations and their overseas territories. It has a membership of more than 16,000 Members of national, state, provincial and territorial Assemblies. The Fiji Islands Branch of the CPA remains in abeyance as it does not currently have a functioning Parliament. The only Commonwealth country not currently in the CPA is Brunei, which does not have an elected Parliament.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THE CPA, PLEASE CONTACT:

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55th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference

Arusha, Tanzania

28 September – 6 October 2009

The Commonwealth and the CPA: Meeting Future Global Challenges.

Opening Plenary

The Commonwealth and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

Workshops

- A. Coalition Governments: Parliamentary Democracy in Dilemma?
- B. Policy Responses to the Global Financial Crisis
- C. Role of Commonwealth Parliaments in Combating Terrorism
- D. The Role of Parliament in Shaping the Information Society
- E. The Role of Parliamentarians in the Elimination of Violence Against Women with Particular Reference to Domestic Violence
- F. Climate Change – Are Policy Solutions Working?
- G. Developing Mechanisms to Remedy Root Causes of Political, Economic and Social Conflicts
- H. The Commonwealth and Youth – How to Engage Future Generations in Representative Democracy.

Final Plenary

Can Trade Liberalization Benefit the Commonwealth in the Current Economic Climate?

29th Small Branches Conference

Arusha, Tanzania

30 September – 1 October 2009

1st Plenary Session

Policy Responses to the Global Financial Crisis in Small Economies

2nd Plenary Session

Utilizing Committees in Small Parliaments

3rd Plenary Session

Machinery of Government in Small States: Issues and Challenges

4th Plenary Session

The Vulnerability of Small States: What Technical and Practical Advice Can the Commonwealth Offer?