



69TH COMMONWEALTH
PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE

SOUTH AFRICA | 2026

CPC BULLETIN

*"Strengthening International Law and Parliamentary Democracy in a
Changing World Order: Commonwealth Leadership"*

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PARLIAMENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



CPA COMMONWEALTH
PARLIAMENTARY
ASSOCIATION



Commonwealth Parliaments Gather in Cape Town to Strengthen Multilateralism and Defend Democracy

*As more than 900 delegates gathered in Cape Town for the opening ceremony of the 69th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, CPA President and NCOP Chairperson Ms Refilwe Mtshweni-Tsipane placed South Africa's role in advancing parliamentary democracy and multilateral cooperation at the centre of the conference, **writes Abel Mputing.***

Ms Mtshweni-Tsipane, who serves as President of the CPA and Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces of the South African Parliament, welcomed the CPA's transition into an international inter-parliamentary organisation with proper diplomatic recognition, privileges and immunities. She said the milestone carried particular significance because the debate that shaped the organisation's new status began in South Africa at the Sandton Convention Centre in Johannesburg during the 59th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in 2013.

Hosted by the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa under the theme, "Uniting to protect multilateralism, observing international law for equality and development in the Commonwealth and beyond: The Role of Parliaments", the CPC is underway at the Cape Town International Convention Centre and runs until 19 September.

The opening ceremony, held on Monday, 15 September, was described as the best-attended CPC in the conference's history, drawing delegates from CPA member parliaments across the Commonwealth.

The Secretary-General of the CPA, Mr Stephen Twigg, said this year's conference is taking place amid geopolitical uncertainty and pressure on

the rules-based international norms and laws that mediate global affairs. He said the theme asks parliaments not only to debate, but to defend democracy, uphold the rule of law and rebuild trust across borders.

Mr Twigg said the CPA's new legal status will strengthen partnerships among member parliaments and give the body a united, stronger voice at the United Nations. He commended the CPA Africa Region for rallying behind the Sandton recommendation to transform the CPA's status and said similar formations should be granted special observer status in international fora.

He added that, in a dangerous and fractured world, partnerships and collective efforts are needed to strengthen multilateralism and advance the ideals of democracy and the rule of law. The CPA, he said, is entering a new phase in its century-old journey.

Chairperson of the CPA, Dr Christopher Kalila, also addressed delegates, saying South Africa's democratic journey continues to inspire many because it shows how democratic institutions can serve the will of the people. He said parliaments have a duty to protect democratic values and to hold the executive accountable.



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*Democracies
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inclusive.*

COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARIANS CONVENE IN CAPE TOWN TO TACKLE SHARED GLOBAL CHALLENGES

As hundreds of Commonwealth parliamentarians gather in Cape Town for the 69th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC), legislators will discuss urgent global challenges and exchange ideas and best practices on issues relating to youth, women, climate change and artificial intelligence. This is an extract from the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), Mr Stephen Twigg's opinion piece explaining the significance of the Conference.

The Conference comes at a critical time. As conflicts increase and mediation and peace-building efforts stall, global cooperation is vital. In response, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) has established a Committee on Human Rights and Peace, bringing together representatives from its nine regions to debate these issues and act collectively. Parliamentarians have a particular responsibility to defend international law, which makes this year's conference theme, "Strengthening International Law and Parliamentary Democracy in a Changing World Order: Commonwealth Leadership", especially timely.

Democracies worldwide also face economic uncertainty, geopolitical tensions, technological disruption, disinformation and declining public trust. Parliamentarians must ensure that their governments act by scrutinising their work, safeguarding public funds, protecting democratic principles and providing a platform for citizens' voices.

International cooperation is essential because many of these challenges transcend national borders. Climate change, migration, economic insecurity, cyber threats and artificial intelligence affect countries across continents, and no Parliament can address them alone. The Commonwealth provides a unique platform where countries of different sizes and circumstances can learn from one another and strengthen democratic institutions.

Democracies must also become genuinely inclusive. The CPA's work includes advancing disability rights, supporting legislatures to enshrine those rights in law and ensuring that persons with disabilities can participate fully in public life. Enabling women to play their full part in public life is another priority, while the CPA's networks work to ensure that political institutions better reflect the communities they serve. Young people must also be actively involved in decisions shaping their lives, and that is why they are involved in this week's discussions. Around 60% of the Commonwealth's 2.7 billion

people are under 30, and they expect democratic institutions to respond to concerns about jobs, education, housing, technological change and climate resilience.

South Africa's constitutional commitment to equality, human dignity and representation makes the country and Cape Town a fitting venue. Three decades into constitutional democracy, South Africa remains an important democratic voice in the Global South. Its Parliament stands as a symbol of national transformation and of the belief that democratic institutions can confront difficult histories while helping societies build a more inclusive future together.

I hope delegates leave the 69th CPC with fresh ideas, stronger relationships and renewed determination to serve the people who elected them.

**Read the Secretary-General's full opinion piece here:*
<https://www.cpahq.org/69-cpc/cpc-news/>



SPEAKER DIDIZA CALLS FOR MEASURABLE ACTION ON WOMEN'S, CHILDREN'S AND ADOLESCENTS' HEALTH COMMITMENTS

*The Speaker of the National Assembly of the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, Ms Thoko Didiza, on Monday challenged parliamentarians from across the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) to ensure that political commitments on the health of women, children and adolescents have measurable outcomes, writes **Rajaa Azzakani**.*

Ms Didiza addressed a gathering of the Parliamentary Network for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health (WCAH) on the sidelines of the 69th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) underway in Cape Town this week.

The CPC brings together parliamentary leaders, civil society, youth representatives and international partners under the theme, *"Strengthening Parliamentary Action for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health: Commonwealth Leadership for Resilient Communities in a Changing World Order."*

The Speaker said escalating conflicts, economic pressures, climate-related shocks and persistent

inequalities were threatening to reverse hard-won developmental gains, with women, children and adolescents often bearing the greatest burden during periods of crisis. She said the strength of any democracy should ultimately be measured by its ability to uphold human dignity and protect vulnerable communities. “This means ensuring that women have access to quality maternal and reproductive healthcare, that children grow up in safe environments and that adolescents transition into adulthood with dignity and hope.”

Ms Didiza further emphasised that health equity is fundamentally linked to governance and human rights, and that this requires parliamentarians to use their legislative, budgetary and oversight mandates to protect these rights. She called on legislators to enact protective laws, support targeted and sustainable health budgets, strengthen committee oversight and ensure that the experiences of frontline workers and vulnerable communities inform decision-making. She also highlighted the importance of domestic resource mobilisation, stating that countries must provide sustainable funding for essential health services from their own budgets rather than relying too heavily on foreign aid.

Reflecting on the development of the WCAH Parliamentary Network, she challenged every delegation participating in the gathering to commit

to at least one concrete and measurable legislative action in its home Parliament within the next 12 months. Among the proposed actions are convening public hearings with civil society, reviewing health sector expenditure and strengthening fiscal transparency around public health allocations.

Following Ms Didiza’s address, Mr Rajat Khosla, Executive Director of the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, provided a global perspective on parliamentary leadership in advancing WCAH. Mr Khosla said the network, which complements the Global Leaders Network chaired by President Cyril Ramaphosa, seeks to place the health of women, children and adolescents and the benefits of investing in it at the centre of parliamentary agendas at national, regional and global levels.

Ms Didiza chairs the network, which includes representatives from Kenya, Botswana, Liberia, Namibia and South Africa, as well as health-focused parliamentary representatives.

The Chairperson of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), Dr Christopher Kalila, said the body had recently expanded its work to include health, creating an opportunity for parliaments to strengthen their contribution to health outcomes.

*Commonwealth
Leadership
for Resilient
Communities in a
Changing World
Order*



CPA SMALL BRANCHES HEAR HOW BUDGET OFFICES CAN STRENGTHEN FISCAL OVERSIGHT

The Small Branches network of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) on Monday heard how parliamentary budget offices (PBOs) can equip legislatures to scrutinise government budgets and expenditure, writes Sakhile Mokoena.

Meeting on the sidelines of the 69th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference currently underway in Cape Town, delegates heard presentations from Mr Geoff Dubrow, a Canadian public financial management consultant, and Dr Nelia Orlandi, Deputy Director: Public Policy in South Africa's Parliamentary Budget Office. The speakers outlined how PBOs can strengthen parliamentary oversight of government budgets, fiscal policy and expenditure.

CPA Small Branches are member parliaments and legislatures from jurisdictions with populations of fewer than one million people.

Mr Dubrow said PBOs helped ensure that Members of Parliament had access to the information needed to interrogate government budgets effectively. He added that, although PBOs did not all enjoy full institutional independence, they could provide objective and credible macroeconomic analysis and fiscal forecasts. "Independent forecasts allow MPs to be more informed and have a better understanding of the budget process. This is very important in their fiscal oversight," Mr Dubrow said.

Dr Orlandi told delegates that the independent, credible and objective analyses provided by PBOs enabled parliaments to move beyond simply approving budgets toward closer scrutiny of the executive's budgeting and expenditure. "PBOs are not for policy decisions but to advise parliaments to

make evidence-based decisions and evaluate fiscal policy decisions by the executive," she said.

Referring to the South African experience, Dr Orlandi said one objective in establishing the PBO was to ensure that Members had access to impartial budget analysis. "The executive has extensive technical and analytical resources to prepare budgets and fiscal policy, and through the establishment of the PBO, MPs wanted to reduce their reliance on information provided only by the executive. They needed independent and objective analysis to oversee better and interrogate these budgets, expenditure and fiscal policy to enable them to make informed decisions."

While delegates recognised PBOs as valuable parliamentary oversight tools, the discussion also highlighted that no single model existed for such offices. Each parliament had to adopt an arrangement suited to its constitutional context and available capacity.

Speakers noted that a conventional PBO might not be feasible in every jurisdiction. In some legislatures, fiscal councils and parliamentary oversight committees could offer less resource-intensive alternatives, particularly where the principal need was to monitor fiscal rules, sustainability and government forecasts.

The conference runs until 19 September.

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*CPC News Bulletin reporter, **Jabulani Majozi**, spoke to some CPC delegates on, among other things, their expectations of the conference*

Asked about his expectations of the conference, **Mr Kirk Cornish**, a delegate from the Bahamas said he is looking forward to a productive and meaningful dialogue with parliamentarians from across the Commonwealth at the 69th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, taking place at the Cape Town International Convention Centre. He said the interesting part of the conference is to discuss with fellow countries challenges and learn from each other, and learn from countries that have been part of the Commonwealth for a long time.

Mr Shri Satyabrata Rout, a delegate from the Odisha Legislative Assembly in India, said he hopes discussions at the 69th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference at the Cape Town International Convention Centre will take place in good spirits, promoting dialogue, cooperation and greater internationalism among Commonwealth countries. He said he was impressed with the organisation of the conference and how it was organised by the host, the Parliament of South Africa.

Ms Faith Muthambi, A Member of the National Assembly, Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, Ms Faith Muthambi, who is also the Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Health, said she hoped for the implementation of the resolutions of the 69th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference to ensure that the conference does not become another talk shop.



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