



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





Speaker urges Commonwealth parliaments to turn commitments into action

The Speaker of the National Assembly and Chairperson of the Parliamentary Network for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health, Ms Thoko Didiza, has urged Commonwealth parliamentarians to turn commitments into concrete and measurable action that improves the health and well-being of women, children and adolescents.

Speaking on the sidelines of the 69th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Cape Town this week, Ms Didiza called on each participating parliamentarian to identify at least one action they can implement in their legislature over the next 12 months.

The Executive Director of the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, Mr Rajat Khosla, warned that progress in reducing maternal, newborn and child mortality has slowed and, in some contexts, is reversing. He said Africa carries a disproportionate burden, with approximately 70% of maternal, newborn and child deaths occurring on the continent. He also raised concern about declining development assistance, rising out-of-pocket healthcare costs and the closure of health programmes.

The Chairperson of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Dr Christopher Kalila, said the Commonwealth's diversity creates an important opportunity for parliaments to learn from one another and strengthen parliamentary action on health. He noted that health has been added as a new focus area in the Association's strategic plan, opening opportunities for greater collaboration between parliamentary networks, committees and other structures.

The engagement also highlighted practical interventions undertaken by parliaments in different Commonwealth jurisdictions. The Speaker of the Parliament of Botswana, Mr Dithapelo Keorapetse, outlined legislative and policy interventions aimed at addressing challenges affecting women, children and adolescents, including period poverty, parental leave, national health insurance, child marriage and child labour.

The Speaker of the Yukon Legislative Assembly in Canada, Ms Yvonne Clarke, highlighted the importance of listening to communities and creating meaningful opportunities for people to engage with Parliament. She said health outcomes cannot be considered in isolation from housing, childcare, education, safety and economic security, particularly for Indigenous communities and people living in remote areas.

The South African civil society perspective highlighted a critical implementation gap, noting that the challenge is not necessarily a lack of progressive policies and commitments, but the extent to which these are implemented and translated into meaningful improvements in people's lived experiences. Representing the Clinton Health Access Initiative, Dr Gugulethu Ngubane noted that South Africa has a strong policy framework and provides

free primary healthcare for women and children, yet barriers to access and fragmented responses continue to affect outcomes.

The discussion also emphasised the importance of involving young people from the outset in decisions affecting their health and well-being. It considered the role of parliamentarians in strengthening accountability for health expenditure, protecting essential health budget lines and ensuring that communities and civil society can track how commitments and resources translate into services.

Ms Didiza said the discussions should inform concrete parliamentary action and contribute to the outcomes of the 69th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference. She called on parliamentary leaders across the Commonwealth to join the Network and strengthen collective parliamentary action, saying resilient communities begin with healthy individuals and strong democracies safeguard the dignity and well-being of every generation.

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PARLIAMENTARIANS CALL FOR STRONGER PROTECTION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES WITHIN CPA MEMBER COUNTRIES

Delegates to the 69th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) underway in Cape Town on Tuesday called for stronger legal measures to protect the rights and participation of people with disabilities, emphasising the need for inclusive laws, effective implementation and meaningful representation, writes Jabulani Majazi.

This call was made during a meeting of the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) network held on the sidelines of the CPC. The network works within the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) to strengthen the capacity of parliamentarians and parliamentary staff with disabilities to participate effectively in their roles.

Held under the theme, “Legislating for the Rights of People with Disabilities”, the session at Cape Town City Hall explored how lawmakers can promote equality through lawmaking, committee work, oversight and representation. Delegates highlighted the value of lived experiences in shaping policies and laws to respond to the experiences of people with disabilities. They also shared experiences from their respective parliaments on how they were improving accessibility

and supporting members and staff with disabilities.

Chairing the session, Dr Marlene Le Roux, a disability and women’s rights activist, said disability can affect anyone and should therefore be regarded as a matter that concerns society as a whole. “Disability does not ask permission to arrive in a family, a workplace or a Parliament. It can arrive at anybody’s door, and when it does, it touches everyone and every aspect of their life.”

Dr Le Roux said the discussion was particularly relevant to South Africa. “For South Africa, this conversation is not an academic exercise. It is urgent. Our country is, at this very moment, consulting on a Disability Rights Bill. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to move beyond the language of charity and welfare and to enshrine disability rights,” she said.



Disability does not ask permission to arrive in a family, a workplace or a Parliament.

To turn disability inclusion from policy into action, the government is finalising an overarching Disability Rights Bill to consolidate protections into a single, comprehensive law aligned with the Constitution and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Dr Le Roux called for greater cooperation among Commonwealth legislatures to strengthen protection and access, noting that countries have different legal frameworks and approaches to promoting equality for persons with disabilities. Dr Le Roux urged delegates to consider how parliaments can support rights-based laws through consultation and oversight. She also encouraged members to compare approaches across the Commonwealth and learn from successful practices.

She cautioned that policies promoting equal participation would have limited impact without adequate funding and effective implementation. "Inclusion without budgets means nothing," Dr Le Roux said, highlighting the importance of political will, cooperation and informed decision-making.

The CPwD network encourages Parliamentarians to consider the perspectives of people with disabilities across all areas of their work, including law-making, oversight and representation. This approach can help build more accessible and responsive institutions. The network operates within the CPA and represents almost 180 Parliaments and legislatures in 53 of the 56 Commonwealth member countries.



Commonwealth Parliamentarians Call for Trade to Deliver Inclusive Growth and Jobs



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Parliamentarians from across the Commonwealth on Tuesday called on member parliaments to ensure that trade translates into inclusive economic growth, job creation and tangible improvements in people's lives.

This call was made during a Host Branch Workshop of the 69th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC), hosted by the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa in Cape Town under the theme: "Promoting inter-parliamentary dialogue for inclusive, fair trade in diverse economies, addressing inequality and underdevelopment in the Commonwealth and beyond."

The Deputy Speaker of the South African Parliament's National Assembly, Dr Annelie Lotriet, chaired the workshop, noting that the discussions are taking place amid persistent inequality, poverty, unemployment and uneven development across the Commonwealth.

South African parliamentarians Ms Sonja Boshoff, Chairperson of the Select Committee on Economic Development and Trade; Ms Jane Mananiso, Chairperson of the Select Committee on Security and Justice and Mr Mzwandile Masina, Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Trade, Industry and Competition, participated as panellists.

Ms Boshoff told delegates that fair trade must recognise that countries do not enter the global trading system from equal starting positions.

She said developing countries may require support to strengthen their economies and competitiveness, but such support should ultimately contribute to self-reliance rather than permanent dependence.

She also stressed that parliamentarians' responsibility does not end when a trade agreement is signed, or legislation is passed but that, through lawmaking, oversight and budget scrutiny, parliaments must ensure that commitments are implemented and deliver measurable results.

Also addressing the workshop, Ms Mananiso highlighted the importance of parliamentary diplomacy in advancing inclusive economic development. She said parliamentarians must use their oversight and public participation responsibilities to ensure that trade policies benefit women-owned enterprises, youth-led businesses, township and rural enterprises, and other historically excluded groups.

Mr Masina emphasised Parliament's role throughout the trade agreement process, including lawmaking, oversight and public participation. He called for stronger monitoring of trade outcomes, including job creation, support for small and medium-sized enterprises and the participation of women and youth.

The workshop also highlighted practical barriers

to inclusive trade, including access to finance, costly cross-border payments, digital connectivity, regulatory barriers and limited access to markets. Participants called for greater cooperation between Commonwealth parliaments, financial regulators and other institutions to simplify cross-border trade and strengthen digital and financial connectivity.

They also stressed the need for developing economies to move beyond exporting raw materials and invest in local value addition, manufacturing and skills development.

The discussions further emphasised that fair trade must reach rural and underserved communities and that infrastructure such as roads, ports, electricity and broadband is essential to enabling meaningful economic participation.

The CPC continues Wednesday.





Commonwealth Parliaments Urged to Address Migration Through Development and Regional Cooperation

The Minister in the Presidency responsible for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, Ms Maropene Ramokgopa, on Monday called for the root causes of migration to be addressed through peace, economic opportunity, job creation, youth empowerment and stronger regional integration. Abel Mputing reports.

The Minister delivered the keynote address at the Opening of the 69th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) to over 900 Commonwealth parliamentarians at the Cape Town International Convention Centre.

Minister Ramokgopa told delegates that across Africa and beyond, millions of people are on the move because of conflict, economic hardship, climate pressures and the search for opportunity. She said the sustainable response to this socio-economic phenomenon lies in addressing its root causes.

Ms Ramokgopa said that to resolve current global challenges, institutions of global governance must evolve to become more inclusive, representative and responsive to the needs of both developed and developing countries.

In keeping with the spirit of this year's conference theme, she urged the CPA to defend international law consistently, strengthen parliaments as institutions of oversight and participation, deepen inclusion for women, young people, persons with disabilities and marginalised communities and use parliamentary diplomacy for peace.

The CPC is convened under the theme, "Strengthening Parliamentary Action for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health: Commonwealth Leadership for Resilient Communities in a Changing World Order."

As the conference unfolds in the coming days, she pointed out, "delegates should not be satisfied with another successful conference measured only by the quality of our discussions". Instead, this year's CPC should be remembered for "the commitments we make and the action we take". "I, therefore, propose that we defend international law consistently and universally, regardless of the identity, power or geopolitical influence of the state concerned."

Minister Ramokgopa also implored delegates to strengthen their parliaments as institutions of representation, oversight, accountability and public participation. By doing this, they make our democracies more inclusive by expanding the meaningful participation of women, young people, persons with disabilities and marginalised communities. To use parliamentary diplomacy more deliberately as an instrument for international cooperation. To also ensure that the rules and institutions of the emerging digital age, including Artificial Intelligence, are shaped by democratic values, human rights and the public interest. These commitments must be accompanied by action, she told delegates.

The Minister further noted that Commonwealth parliamentarians are gathering following the CPA's transition from its former UK charitable status towards a new international legal status as an inter-parliamentary organisation. As the CPA's new legal status takes centre stage, delegates are expected to help shape its standing in global affairs. She urged delegates to bring the transformation agenda of the CPA to fruition. "We encourage delegates to work collectively towards bringing this process to a conclusion. Doing so would strengthen the Association's capacity to contribute more effectively to global democratic governance through the work of its member parliaments."

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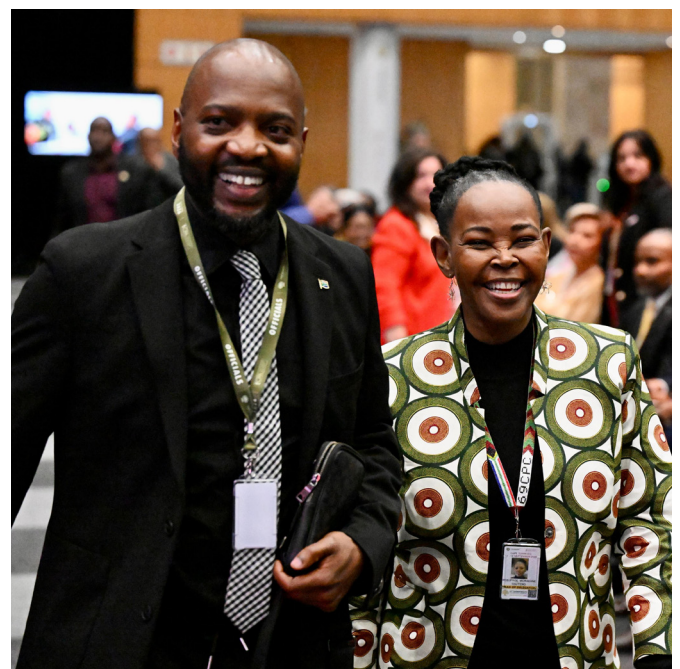
CPC Reception Dinner Sets Tone for Week of Dialogue and Connection

Delegates to the 69th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) gathered on Monday evening for a reception dinner that offered more than a formal welcome. Following the official opening ceremony, the dinner marked the start of a week expected to be shaped by robust dialogue, spirited debates and renewed commitment to the ideals of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), writes Abel Mputing.

The reception dinner gave Commonwealth parliamentarians and guests a chance to network, reconnect and ease into conversations that will continue in committee rooms, plenary sessions and conference corridors throughout the week. As guests arrived, the occasion carried the warmth of African hospitality. Zolani Mahola, former lead singer of Freshly Ground, brought rhythm and familiarity to the evening with a musical performance. The offering of local and international cuisine reflected the diversity of the Commonwealth member parliaments in the room.

For many guests, breaking bread at the reception dinner was a reminder that conferences of this scale are built not only on formal programmes, resolutions and speeches, but also on building and nurturing relationships that make frank exchange possible. Around the tables, introductions quickly gave way to shared experiences, reflections on common challenges and expectations for the days ahead.

Around the dinner tables, Monday evening became more than a ceremonial opening. It served as a bridge between official responsibility and human connection, setting a tone of mutual respect and collegiality.





INDIGENOUS VOICES MUST BE AT THE TABLE

*CPC News Bulletin writer **Ms Rajaa Azzakani** spoke with CPC delegates about several issues.*

Asked about inclusive governance, the Speaker of Canada's Yukon Legislative Assembly, Ms Yvonne Clarke, said inclusive governance starts with ensuring Indigenous people are part of government decision-making.

"We cannot operate in silos. We have to be partners with Indigenous people, First Nations," she said. Ms Clarke said she believes this approach is particularly important as Yukon confronts serious challenges, including addiction, substance abuse and mental health problems. She said addressing these

issues requires government to work directly with communities and ensure that policies respond to their realities.

Ms Clarke said the 69th CPC provides an important opportunity to learn from how other parliaments are tackling similar challenges. "We get an opportunity to learn what others are doing in their parliaments and vice versa," said Ms Clarke.

She intends to take those lessons back to Yukon, particularly around policies and programmes supporting Indigenous communities, women, youth and adolescents. But translating ideas into action requires political commitment and adequate resources. Ms Clarke stressed that governments must ensure that budgets are available to support programmes aimed at vulnerable communities.

She is also realistic about the pace of government, acknowledging that meaningful change will not happen overnight. However, she believes parliamentarians can help drive progress by identifying policies that need to change or improve.

For Ms Clarke, the value of parliamentary cooperation lies in exchanging practical experience. The challenges facing communities may differ across the Commonwealth, but learning from one another can help Parliaments find better ways to respond. She said governments cannot work in isolation. Lasting solutions require partnership, listening and ensuring that the people most affected have a voice in the decisions that shape their lives.

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*CPC News Bulletin writer, Jabulani Majozi, spoke to Tonga's Minister of Internal Affairs, Employment, Women, Social Protection, Youth and Sport, **Ms Fane Fotu Fituafe**.*



“It was a wonderful opportunity to take part in the panel discussion on the rights of persons with disabilities and to share developments in Tonga. In September 2026, Tonga had ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, nearly two decades after signing it. This marked an important milestone in recognising the rights of persons with disabilities in the country,” she said. Tonga is now working towards introducing a Disability Bill in the legislature. However, she said implementing the Convention remained challenging. She emphasised that persons with disabilities should be treated with dignity, love and respect, and that leaders and politicians must be at the forefront of advancing and protecting their rights.



Ms Christina Mohale of the Limpopo Provincial Legislature: “South Africa’s challenge is not a lack of policies, despite the absence of a dedicated Disability Act. Rather, the key issue is the implementation of existing policies, including the Integrated National Disability Strategy and the Technical Assistance Guidelines on the Employment of Persons with Disabilities.”

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