



69TH COMMONWEALTH
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CPC BULLETIN

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

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“Parliamentary leaders
and practitioners
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PARLIAMENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA





PARLIAMENTS URGED TO EMBRACE AI WITHOUT LOSING HUMAN JUDGEMENT

*Artificial intelligence (AI) is no longer a distant prospect for parliaments; it has become an institutional priority across the world. This was the central theme of a discussion held at the 69th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, currently taking place in Cape Town hosted by the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, **writes Tebatso Mabilisa.***

In a workshop on AI, parliamentary leaders and practitioners reflected on how AI can strengthen legislative work while protecting the values, judgement and accountability on which democratic institutions depend.

The workshop Chairperson, Yeo Wan Ling, a delegate from the Parliament of Singapore, and Co-Chairperson James Pinnel, CPA Deputy Head of Programmes, guided a discussion that placed both opportunity and risk at the centre of parliamentary innovation. Senator Rosemary Moodie of Ontario, Canada, emphasised that AI can help institutions become more efficient, effective, responsive and accessible. Its role includes rapidly summarising large volumes of information, translating content across multiple languages, supporting communication with citizens, simplifying bills, assisting with speeches and identifying trends emerging from constituency data.

However, Senator Moodie also warned that without safeguards AI can expose sensitive information, obscure important decisions and weaken public trust. She stressed that AI must be governed by clear principles, including transparency, accountability, protection of parliamentary privilege and disclosure



when AI assistance is used. The strongest message was that AI should assist parliamentary work, not replace human judgement. Accountability must remain with people, not machines.

A Brazilian delegate, Luis Kimiad, who is also an Executive Director of Bussola Tech in Brazil, described AI as a practical set of tools that can improve internal services, transparency, citizen participation and institutional resilience. He encouraged parliaments not to attempt wholesale transformation at once, but to break implementation into smaller, modular projects. Early wins can justify investment, respond to specific parliamentary business needs and allow systems to be adapted as models, data and uses evolve.

He noted that successful AI pilots must demonstrate not only what could work, but how institutional capability can be sustained. Political support, administrative coordination and financial governance are essential if technology is to strengthen the mandate of parliament rather than become a barrier to it. Examples already emerging include support for Hansard, parliamentary broadcasting, procedural advice, social participation, legislative drafting and access to archives. Tools such as Caminar in the Chile Senate, Apoia in the Brazil Senate and Archbot in the European Parliament show how AI can assist with Hansard, constitutional support, bills, committee reports, clear language and historical legislative records.

An Australian delegate from the New South Wales Legislative Assembly, Ms Linda Burney, reflected on the practical challenges facing Members of Parliament as AI tools become more available. She highlighted the importance of guidance, noting that limited access to AI tools had contributed to misunderstanding. Peer-to-peer guidelines, inspired in part by work in the UK Parliament, were developed to help MPs understand what AI is, how it can support research, summarising documents, Hansard and legislative history, and why it must be used carefully.

Ms Burney underlined that AI may produce incorrect information, omit critical content or provide incomplete results. She said for that reason, checking facts, verifying sources and applying human oversight remains essential. As several speakers observed, no single Parliament has all the answers. What is clear is that AI governance must be treated as an evolving responsibility, shaped by accountability, transparency and public trust.

Across the session, a common position emerged that AI can help parliaments work better, but only when it is used within clear ethical and institutional safeguards. It should support people to communicate more clearly, analyse information more efficiently and serve citizens more effectively. It must not substitute the judgement, responsibility and democratic accountability that remain at the heart of parliamentary work.



AI must be governed by clear principles, including transparency, accountability



MP'S MUST ENSURE THEIR COUNTRIES ARE READY TO RESPOND TO CLIMATE CHANGE

*Parliamentarians have a critical role to play in ensuring that their countries and communities are prepared to respond to the growing effects of climate change, this was emphasised in one of the workshops that are taking place as part of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (PC) at the Cape Town International Convention Centre. **Reports Jabulani Majozi.***

The workshop which focused on Leadership in Promoting Climate Adaptation and Resilience and which was chaired by the Speaker of Jamaica's House of Representatives, the Ms Juliet Holness, examined how Parliaments can strengthen their role in responding to the increasing climate threats facing communities across the Commonwealth.

Delegates described climate change as a "wicked problem" that requires strong political leadership, effective planning and cooperation across countries. The discussions highlighted that climate adaptation is not only an environmental matter but also a democratic challenge. Delegates questioned who is most affected by climate change, who has access to resources to respond to its effects, and how governments can ensure that vulnerable communities are not left behind.

Kenyan Senator Mr Moses Kajwang noted that many Commonwealth countries contribute relatively little to global greenhouse gas emissions but

endure severe climate impacts. Another delegate agreed, adding that many countries and territories represented at the conference face disproportionate climate risks despite their limited contribution to global emissions.

He said Kenya was facing three major climate-related threats; El Niño, drought and rising water levels. He noted that droughts, which previously occurred after longer periods, were becoming more frequent, with some now occurring every three years. Mr Kajwang said the effects of El Niño had significant economic consequences for Kenya, with the country losing part of its gross domestic product whenever it experienced severe El Niño-related impacts.

The discussions further emphasised the importance of international cooperation in addressing climate change. One delegate called for a return to multilateralism, arguing that countries that have committed to international climate agreements must work together to address the global climate crisis.

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South Africa's Ms Nomafrrench Mbombo, a former Western Cape Provincial Minister of Health said climate change should be recognised as both an environmental crisis and a social issue. She noted that women often carry a disproportionate burden when communities experience the effects of climate change. She further said policy responses should therefore combine environmental measures with social protection initiatives that support women and other vulnerable groups.

The Environmental Democracy Practice Lead at the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), Mr Rafael Jimenez Aybar, highlighted the importance of locally led adaptation. He outlined eight principles that should guide such approaches, including participation, representation, accountability and subsidiarity.

In closing, Hon Holness reminded delegates that Parliamentarians must focus not only on what governments should do, but also on what legislators themselves can do to address climate change.

"Ultimately, we are parliamentarians, legislators and many of us are not Speakers or part of the executive. Most of us discussed what the executive needs to do regarding climate adaptation, but we need to pull the discussions back to what we can do as Parliamentarians," she said.

She said the mechanisms for parliamentary action may differ from one jurisdiction to another. While Parliamentarians cannot control global temperatures, they can ensure that public funds allocated to climate responses are properly scrutinised, including through questions to Ministers and other parliamentary oversight mechanisms.

"This makes climate justice internationally essential, and parliamentary accountability at home is equally essential," she said.



CPC DIALOGUE HIGHLIGHTS PARLIAMENTS' ROLE AS GUARDIANS OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND PEACE

The 69th Commonwealth Parliamentary Congress (CPC) in Cape Town on Wednesday, underscored the importance of parliaments in building safe and just societies where every person is treated with dignity and respect as well as protecting vulnerable groups in conflict areas, writes Rajaa Azzakani.



This formed part of the crucial discussion on the role of parliaments in promoting human rights and peace. Ms Kate Osamour, Head of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in the UK and chairperson of the session on human rights stressed the importance of confronting difficult issues and strengthening collective parliamentary efforts to uphold human rights and peace.

Panellist, Ms Megan Van Schalkwyk of the International Committee of the Red Cross, highlighted parliamentarians' responsibility to hold governments accountable for compliance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL). She noted that there are currently 130 active conflicts worldwide and pointed to the gap between international law and its implementation.

Ms Van Schalkwyk called on parliaments to use their constitutional powers, including budget oversight and law-making, to criminalise war crimes and protect vulnerable populations. She also urged parliamentarians to encourage their governments to support international initiatives aimed at protecting civilians affected by conflict.

South African delegate, Mr Supra Mahumaphelo who is also the Chairperson of the National Assembly's Portfolio Committee on International Relations and Cooperation, highlighted the country's commitment to working with Commonwealth members to promote peace and human rights. He referred to South Africa's international efforts concerning the conflict in Gaza and called for greater consistency in the actions of the United Nations Security Council. He also highlighted South Africa's engagement through BRICS on peace and human rights.

Parliamentarians' responsibility to hold governments accountable for compliance with International Humanitarian Law

Senator Salma Ataullahjan, a delegate from Canada raised concerns about xenophobia and racism, stressing the responsibility of parliamentarians to enact and enforce legislation protecting vulnerable communities. She also emphasised direct engagement with government ministers – especially when it comes to the introduction of legislation, as an important mechanism for accountability.

Ms Samar Haroon Bilour, a delegate from Pakistan, gave a personal account of the impact of conflict on civilians, highlighting displacement, the destruction of infrastructure in Gaza and the need for stronger IHL protections. Drawing from her personal experience of losing her husband and mother-in-law in a suicide attack, she stressed the lasting trauma suffered by survivors and the need to protect women, children, older people and medical personnel in conflict zones.

The discussion emphasised that international commitments require effective parliamentary oversight and implementation. Participants also considered the challenges posed to multilateralism, sovereignty and human rights, and stressed the importance of transparency and accountability.

Closing the session, Ms Osamour urged parliaments to uphold constitutional democracy and human rights, emphasising that difficult conversations are necessary to strengthen parliamentary action in defence of peace, dignity and justice.





ANNUAL LIFAKA MEMORIAL LECTURE CALLS FOR STRONGER PARLIAMENTS AND DEEPER DEMOCRACY

*Commonwealth parliamentarians should honour the legacy of the late Ms Emilia Monjowa Lifaka by defending democratic institutions and championing women's political participation, delegates at the 69th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) underway in Cape Town heard on Tuesday. **Abel Mputing reports.***

Mr Marwick Khumalo, a Member of Parliament of the Kingdom of Eswatini, reminded the more than 900 delegates as he delivered the fourth Emilia Monjowa Lifaka Memorial Lecture. The lecture formed part of the 69th CPC, hosted by the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa under the theme: "Strengthening International Law and Parliamentary Democracy in a Changing World Order: Commonwealth Leadership."

Ms Lifaka served as Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Cameroon. She became the first

African woman to be elected as Chairperson of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's International Executive Committee. The annual memorial lecture commemorates Ms Lifaka's contribution to parliamentary democracy. It also reminds and encourages her peers in Commonwealth parliaments to carry forward the principles she stood for.

Mr Khumalo highlighted her work championing women's issues, including advancing the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) network and promoting greater representation and

This year's CPC should be remembered for "the commitments we make and the action we take".

participation of women in political and parliamentary leadership.

Referring to Ms Lifaka's contribution to the CWP Women's Anthem, which is sung at CPA gatherings across its regions, Mr Khumalo said the anthem is not just a ceremonial song. He said the message it carries reflects a continuing commitment to gender equality and women's freedom.

Honouring Ms Lifaka's legacy required more than commemorating her life, Mr Khumalo told delegates. "The best memorial we can build is not of stone but of practice." By putting her principles into practice, legislators could build stronger parliaments, deepen democracy and ensure that her values continue to influence debates and discussions across Commonwealth parliaments.

Mr Khumalo also highlighted Ms Lifaka's sustained advocacy for changing the CPA's legal status. This, he said, remains an important part of her legacy. She had consistently kept this issue on the agenda and had mobilised support across the nine regions for the CPA to become a global interparliamentary organisation. Completing the CPA's institutional transformation, he said, would help realise her vision of an association that was global not only in reach, but also in character and influence.

According to Mr Khumalo, completing this transition would put the CPA in a stronger position to engage

international institutions, including the United Nations. It will also be better positioned to contribute more effectively to responses to climate change, geopolitical instability, economic hardship and the risks presented by artificial intelligence. He said the transition would also strengthen the CPA's role in promoting parliamentary democracy, the rule of law and cooperation among Commonwealth legislatures.

Mr Khumalo reminded delegates that parliaments are key to sustaining democracy and play an important role in upholding a rules-based international order through lawmaking, oversight and parliamentary diplomacy. This responsibility was particularly important in a period of geopolitical uncertainty, and when respect for international law and stronger multilateral cooperation was needed, he said.



Global Views #CPC69



Mr Ahmad Karim Kundi, a Member of Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Assembly, chaired a workshop on accessible parliaments and disability inclusion. He said accessibility must extend beyond parliamentarians and staff, enabling all citizens, including persons with disabilities, to access Parliament and engage with their representatives. He added that delegates were particularly concerned about enforcing and implementing laws that protect the rights of persons with disabilities.



Mr Phillip Borge McCarthy, Clerk of the Gibraltar Parliament, outlined innovative measures introduced in their Parliament to make it more accessible to the public. He said the legislature had made significant progress in ensuring that its facilities are physically accessible to all citizens, while also using digital platforms to livestream House sittings. These measures have expanded opportunities for the public to follow parliamentary proceedings and participate in the work of the legislature.



Ms Namita Mundada, Member of the Legislative Assembly from the State of Maharashtra in India: I am very happy with the intriguing topics, especially Commonwealth Women's Parliamentarians. I will participate in the Youth Parliament Roundtable, and I am sure I will take many ideas back to my country to share with Parliamentarians there.



Mr Ryan Straughn, Minister of Finance of Barbados: We have been a leading voice on climate change and the concession of financing for vulnerable countries. I think it's important that we connect with other Parliaments. As small states, we have to make our voices heard, and we also have to be included. So, as we press for inclusion for persons with disabilities and other vulnerable communities, it is also important that, in the context of the global economy, vulnerable countries and small states like Barbados have their voices heard.



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