

First Reading



News from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

Issue 11/December 2006

ISSN 1743-0453

The Secretary-General's File

On December 31st 2006 I complete my five-year term as Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, so this is my final contribution to *First Reading*. What can I look back on?

We have made significant progress as the professional association of Commonwealth MPs by improving communications with Members and expanding opportunities for them to participate in Association programmes and services.

This newsletter is one small example of our improved communications. As Members gain greater access to electronic communications, we have also invested heavily in providing on our new website more information of a higher quality about our Parliaments. And we have provided much more information about what we do for Members. Descriptions of our programmes and the findings of our working parties and study groups, as well as electronic copies of many of our publications are instantly accessible.

A brief look at the programmes and publications on our website indicates we now have much greater outreach and we work with a much wider network of organizations supporting our Parliaments than ever before. Members may feel nervous about our working with the WTO, World Bank Institute (WBI), UNDP, IPU or individual country development organizations. But a fact of life is that many of these organizations have more resources than we will ever have and one way to influence development of democracy is to work with others in the same business.

To promote better understanding of what we do, the CPA has just published a booklet called "Delivering Development and Democracy – It's Not Just Talk". This publication describes the focus of our programmes across the range of activities agreed by our Executive Committee over the past six or seven years. It makes impressive reading and I urge Members

Please turn to page 2

Benchmarks for democratic parliamentary performance



The CPA Study Group on "Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures" with Members from the Parliament of Bermuda.

Democratic standards which all Commonwealth Parliaments and Legislatures should strive to achieve, including parliamentary control of House budgets and agendas, have been recommended by a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Study Group.

The CPA Study Group on "Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures", which met in Bermuda from 30 October to 3 November, agreed democratic standards for parliamentary practices ranging from the functions and administration of Houses, to the roles of parties and individual Members and guidelines on ethical performance and accountability.

The Study Group was composed of senior Members from six of the CPA's nine

regions, with Australia, India and South-East Asia not able to participate. The Members were advised by CPA Secretary-General Hon. Denis Marshall, QSO, and a team of representatives from the European Parliament, the United States National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank Institute (WBI).

The Bermuda Group, which met with the support of the Parliament of Bermuda, went through the parliamentary process, recommending such representational benchmarks as keeping limitations on eligibility for office to a strictly defined minimum. It acknowledged that "special

Please turn to page 3

In this issue

New CPA Secretary-General	2
CPA Conference	4
New CPA Officers	6
Fijian democracy falls	7
Freedom of Information	8

Published by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Secretariat
Suite 700, Westminster House, 7 Millbank
London SW1P 3JA, United Kingdom
Phone +44 207 799 1460
Fax +44 207 222 6073
Email hq.sec@cpahq.org

The Secretary-General's File Continued

to either obtain a copy from their Branch Secretary or access it on the CPA website.

There are two other publications due out shortly as well. One is a book currently entitled "The Budget Process – and Financial Oversight", edited by David McGee the author of *The Overseers* which is now the standard international text on Public Accounts Committees. This new book will broaden the discussion of opportunities for Members to oversee every aspect of political life – not just PACs. The other publication is "Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures". This report, the result of a collaboration with other organizations developing parliamentary democracy, describes basic standards, "benchmarks", to which a Legislature can aspire.

There are many more publications available to Members on the results of our activities, not the least of which is a joint publication with the WBI on combating corruption which is, I am sad to say, still an ongoing challenge throughout not only the Commonwealth but the whole world.

Finally I would like to thank Members and staff for their support during my time in office. Our small Secretariat team has been delivering up to three programmes a month for Members as well as enhancing communications. We have embarked on a significant modernization process and increased our efficiency significantly. That always produces its own stresses and strains, particularly on staff who have had to cope with new performance requirements and accountabilities in a relatively short period. Change is not often easy to cope with; but the CPA has changed significantly and successfully and is in excellent shape to celebrate its centenary in 2011.

I wish my successor, Dr William Shija, a former Minister in Tanzania, every success in the post. With his experience in communications and human resource management he is well equipped to continue to strengthen the CPA both as an institution and an organization dedicated to advancing parliamentary democracy throughout the Commonwealth.



African appointed as CPA Secretary-General

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's first African Secretary-General, Dr William F. Shija of Tanzania, arrived in London in December to prepare to assume the post to which he was appointed by the CPA General Assembly.

Dr Shija, a Member of the Tanzanian Parliament from 1990 to 2005 who held four ministerial portfolios between 1990 and 1998, was appointed to a five-year term by the General Assembly at its September meeting in Abuja, Nigeria. He was to formally assume the CPA post on 1 January following the conclusion of the five-year term of Hon. Denis Marshall, QSO, of New Zealand.

The Tanzanian, who was also a Member of the Pan-African Parliament in 2004 and 2005, was nominated by the CPA Executive Committee which conducted a Commonwealth-wide selection process. He takes over a Secretariat which runs programmes and services for the 177 Parliaments and Legislatures in the nations, states, provinces and territories of the Commonwealth. More than 350 representatives of those Assemblies constituted the General Assembly in Nigeria. They accepted Dr Shija's nomination from the 35-Member Executive Committee which represents all Commonwealth regions.

Dr Shija becomes the fourth former Parliamentarian to hold the CPA post. Previous former Members who held the post were: Mr Marshall, a former New Zealand Minister; Mr Arthur Donahoe, QC, a former Speaker of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly, and the late Hon. David Tonkin, a former South Australian Premier. Two previous CPA Secretaries-General, Sir Robin Vanderfelt and the late Sir Howard D'Egville, came from United Kingdom administrative backgrounds.

Hon. Hashim Abdul Halim, MLA, Chairman of the CPA Executive Committee and Speaker of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly in India, said Dr Shija has the parliamentary and international experience to direct Commonwealth programmes to assist Parliamentarians to become better



Dr William F. Shija.

representatives of their people.

In accepting the appointment in Abuja, Dr Shija said it was encouraging that Commonwealth Parliamentarians present in Nigeria were committed to resolving the major challenges facing the world, including the reduction of poverty and the elimination of gender inequities. Sharing ideas and experiences through CPA meetings enable Parliamentarians to improve their efforts to bring good governance to all Commonwealth citizens and to deepen public understanding of democratic government.

Born in 1947, Dr Shija was a Tanzanian civil servant and teacher who qualified in mass communications and journalism in India and the United States before going on to teach communications in Tanzania. After his election to Tanzania's Parliament in 1990, he became Minister for Science, Technology and Higher Education. He later held the ministerial portfolios of Information and Broadcasting, Energy and Minerals, and Industries and Trade and also served as a Regional Commissioner.

After leaving cabinet, he chaired Parliament's Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs from 1999 to 2005. At the Pan-African Parliament, he chaired the Committee on Education, Culture, Tourism and Human Resources.

Dr Shija is married and has five children, two of whom have joined him in London.

measures” may at times be necessary to encourage the political participation of certain groups; but it concluded that any positive discrimination measures should be “narrowly drawn to accomplish precisely defined, and time-limited, objectives”. The Group called for Houses to provide appropriate remuneration and staff support to enable Members to perform their duties. It also backed the recommendation of a previous CPA Study Group when it endorsed the concept of Parliament controlling its own budget and particularly retaining parliamentary control over its own staff.

In examining the organization of legislative time, the Group concluded that Parliament should have procedures to call itself into regular or special sessions, and that the executive should also have a procedure to call a special session. The Group also took the position that a House should be able to amend its own agenda.

Turning to committees, it was recommended that government and opposition parties should be allocated seats on committees in proportion to their representation in the House, and that there should be a clearly defined and transparent process for electing Members to chair committees, including the election of an opposition Member to chair the Public Accounts Committee. The Group also held that committees should meet in public and that provisions for closed meetings should be precisely defined. Committees should be able to employ expert advisors, and witnesses appearing before them should have statutory protection for their testimony.

The Group advocated House funding for the parliamentary work of political parties and further recommended that the funding formula should not unduly favour the majority party.

In the area of oversight, the Group called for time, opportunities and procedures to ensure meaningful parliamentary oversight of all areas of government, including the security services and state-owned enterprises, and full oversight of government expenditure.

In dealing with the accountability of Parliament to the people, the Group called for full media access to parliamentary proceedings and the provision of assistance to the media to understand parliamentary developments and the process in general.

It also advocated codes of conduct, including rules on conflicts of interest and the acceptance of gifts, and the full and public disclosure of Members’ private financial interests.

International organizations, particularly donor agencies, have been pressing for standards for democratic governance to guide them in creating programmes to improve the performance and effectiveness of Parliaments and Legislatures throughout the world. At the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Canada in 2004, delegates argued that Parliamentarians must be involved in any such drafting process to ensure standards conform to the needs and experiences of Members. The CPA and the WBI then hosted a meeting of 15 national and international agencies in Washington, D.C., to discuss the development of benchmarks for parliamentary performance and the CPA and the WBI agreed to bring a select group of MPs together to draft them.

International guidelines have been developed for election administration, but the Bermuda Study Group recognized that credible elections alone do not ensure that a Parliament will fulfil its oversight, legislative and representative functions.

In developing the Commonwealth benchmarks, the Group looked at USAID’s *Handbook on Legislative Strengthening*, the Inter-Parliamentary Union’s *Parliament and Democracy in the Twenty-First Century – A Guide to Good Practice* and especially NDI’s *Towards the Development of International Minimum Standards for Democratic Legislatures*. It also looked at recommendations from the CPA’s Study Group on “The Financing and Administration of Parliament”, held in Zanzibar, Tanzania, in May 2005 and at best-practice guidelines on budget presentations drafted in 2001 by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.

The Bermuda Group’s benchmarks were subsequently assessed by a Clerk and a former Clerk with many years of experience in two different Parliaments.

The benchmarks have been published in booklet form by the UNDP and the CPA and are available on the CPA website at www.cpahq.org. They will also be published in full in Issue One/2007 of **The Parliamentarian**.

Parliamentary management

Commonwealth Parliaments should establish their own corporate bodies to manage their Houses, agreed participants at the CPA African Regional Workshop on “The Administration and Financing of Parliament” held in September in Mauritius.

The workshop, hosted by the Parliament of Mauritius from 18 to 22 September and held in partnership with the World Bank Institute, endorsed the 2005 report of the CPA Zanzibar Study Group on the subject which recommended that Parliaments remove their finances and their administration from executive control. [See “*Caymanian Legislature*” on page 6.] The Mauritius follow-up workshop heard that Parliaments managed by their own corporate bodies are better able to provide adequate resources to meet parliamentary priorities.

The workshop urged the CPA to promote parliamentary financial autonomy and improve executive understanding of its proper relationship with Parliament. Eleven Members and five Clerks from eight African Branches attended.

Participants said the importance of corporate bodies and the proper discharge of their responsibilities should be stressed to Members. Parliaments must use their autonomy responsibly and be fully open and accountable. The workshop recommended that the CPA assist Parliaments to set up and operate corporate bodies by providing training and information on suitable management models, especially for human resources, and accountability mechanisms. A CPA manual on parliamentary corporate bodies is being produced.

Hon. Jean Francois Chaumiere, MP, Mauritius’ Deputy Speaker, hosted a dinner for workshop participants. Administrative support for the workshop was provided by Mr Ranjit Dowlutta, Clerk of the National Assembly and his staff, including Deputy Clerk Mrs Safeena Lotun and Mr Bhupen Dwarka, Adviser to the Speaker and former Deputy Clerk.

The African workshop will be followed in 2007 by an Asian Regional Workshop.



Parliamentary partnerships for development

Improved policies to tackle gender inequality, poverty, corruption, HIV/AIDS and other global problems can best be developed by Parliamentarians working in partnership with civil society, non-governmental organizations and governments, argued delegates at the 52nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

More than 350 Members participating in a week of discussions in September in Abuja, hosted by the National Assembly of Nigeria, agreed Parliamentarians are well placed to mobilize their communities to help identify the sources of and solutions to the obstacles impeding development for the 30 per cent of the world's people who live in the Commonwealth.

The conference, the main event in the CPA's annual calendar, ran from 1 to 10 September in Abuja, in the geographic centre of Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation. It included a visit to Zaria, north of the Nigerian capital in the state of Kaduna, where participants saw a little of the vibrant politics of Nigeria when they were the special guests at a Durbar, a spectacular display of Hausa horsemanship and culture for the Emir of Zazzau, His Highness Alhaji Shehu Idris. This flamboyant pageant was presented before both the



52nd Commonwealth Parliame

Emir, the traditional ruler of the town founded in the sixteenth century, and its current political ruler, Kaduna state executive Governor, H.E. Mohammed Ahmed Makarfi, who hosted a lunch for the visitors.

The conference discussions, chaired by Hon. Aminu Bello Masari, MP, Speaker of Nigeria's House of Representatives, called for Commonwealth nations to take steps to reduce gender-based inequities and increase the representation of women in political, social and economic decision-making. Women already in Parliaments should work with leading women in their communities and serve as role models to increase the number of women in Commonwealth Parliaments and Legislatures, said delegates.

At a meeting of the CPA Executive Committee at the beginning of the conference, the Committee supported gender equity by recommending that all Parliaments and Legislatures use gender-neutral language. The Committee also decided to recommend amending the CPA Constitution in 2007 to change the title of its Chairman to Chairperson.

In plenary and workshop debates, Parliamentarians agreed that partnerships with civil society groups would be particularly valuable in helping them contribute to combating poverty and corruption. Working with civil society groups would ensure Members are fully aware of programmes which are not working, policies which are not prioritized to combat poverty, and government service delivery which is undermined by corruption.

The conference was preceded by the 26th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference of Members from Small Countries and a meeting of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Steering Committee. The CPA General Assembly, the Association's supreme governing body, met during the conference and a meeting of the Society of Clerks-at-the-Table ran alongside some conference sessions.

Conference discussions began with addresses by CPA Secretary-General Hon.

Denis Marshall, QSO, and Commonwealth Secretary-General Rt Hon. Don McKinnon on current issues facing the CPA and the Commonwealth respectively. They also answered a series of questions from Members

In officially opening the conference, H.E. Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, President of Nigeria and the 2006 Vice-Patron of the CPA, said his country had moved from being a pariah state to become a responsible member of the international community in seven years of democratic government because all Nigerians and Nigerian institutions, including its National Assembly, are working together to develop Africa's most populous country. He urged Parliamentarians attending the conference from Commonwealth national, state, provincial and territorial Assemblies to help each other find effective ways to deepen the democratic ethos in Nigeria and around the world.

As well as discussing gender inequality, poverty and corruption, the conference also examined ways to curb domestic violence, deal with security threats posed by unregulated migration, reduce the detrimental effects of climate change, reform parliamentary democracy and improve accountability for public spending.

A two-day conference of about 70 Members from the Commonwealth's smallest jurisdictions, those with fewer than 400,000 people, discussed climate change and three other subjects. The conference called on Parliamentarians throughout the Commonwealth to press the major world powers to implement policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and thereby begin to reverse the negative effects of climate change, especially the threat to several small states posed by rising sea levels.

The Small Countries Conference also called for small states to be treated more fairly in terms of the globalization policies of such intergovernmental organizations as the World Trade Organization. In their own discussion of the threats posed by unregulated migration, the small countries agreed that they need to develop legislative and

CPA Conference – Nigeria



CPA 2006 President Hon. Aminu Bello Masari, MP, Speaker of the Nigerian House of Representatives.

administrative controls to secure their borders while still respecting the human rights of irregular migrants. A discussion of the effects of youth crime on small communities led to proposals to curb anti-social behaviour by developing effective community services, including the provision of good education, to attract young people away from a life of crime.

Reports of both conferences were published in Issue Four/2006 of *The Parliamentarian* and posted on the CPA website.

Commonwealth Parliamentarians in Abuja commended the government, National Assembly and people of Nigeria for the great strides Nigeria has made since ending military rule in 1999. Members noted Nigeria is now enjoying its longest period of democratic rule since independence. On the trip to Zaria, Members noted that campaign posters and wall murals had already started to appear in preparation for national and state elections throughout Nigeria in mid 2007.

The 2007 Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference will be held in New Delhi hosted by the Parliament of India, while the 54th Conference in 2008 will be in Kuala Lumpur hosted by the Parliament of Malaysia.

CPA practices to be reviewed

A complete reassessment of certain CPA practices, including the funding of travel to the annual Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference and the costs of hosting it, is to be conducted by a panel of Members representing all Commonwealth regions.

Accepting a proposal from the Chairman of the Executive Committee, Hon. Hashim Abdul Halim, MLA, Speaker of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly, the Committee agreed at its September meeting in Abuja, Nigeria, to set up a Working Party of Committee Members to review the format, length and costs of the conference. The practices of having Host Branches finance the local costs and the CPA contribute to the cost of travel to the conference for all official delegates and secretaries are both to be reviewed.

The new Working Party will look at proposals to introduce a registration fee payable by each Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference delegate and secretary. The review of travel costs will consider whether the CPA should continue to use Branch membership fees to pay the cost of flying delegations to the conference from each member Parliament and Legislature.

The Working Party, which is to meet in Cyprus in April 2007 before the CPA Executive Committee meeting there, will also review the CPA Strategic Plan, the international status of the Association and the recruitment process for hiring Secretaries-General. The current five-year Strategic Plan expires at the end of 2007.

The Working Party is to be composed of Shri Halim, Treasurer Mr David Marshall, MP, of the United Kingdom, Hon. Lindiwe Maseko, MPL, of Gauteng as Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians and 10 Regional Representatives, one from each CPA region except Africa which as a large region will have two.

The last similar review of CPA practices was conducted in 2003.

At its Abuja meeting, the Executive

Committee also reviewed programmes to support Members and Commonwealth Assemblies, including: Post-Election Seminars in Uganda, Fiji Islands and Montserrat; workshops with such intergovernmental organizations as the World Trade Organization, the World Bank Institute and UNIFEM; a Caribbean Freedom of Information Workshop partly funded by the Canadian International Development Agency; a Study Group on "Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures" to be held in Bermuda, and a Technical Assistance Programme to provide common Standing Orders to the Parliaments of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States.

The Committee agreed to fund part of the cost of an exceptional meeting of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Steering Committee. The meeting would be held in early 2007 in Johannesburg, South Africa, in partnership with the Gauteng Provincial Legislature, the House of which the CWP Chairperson, Hon. Lindiwe Maseko, MPL, is a Member.

Funding for these other CPA projects and services was approved for 2007, with spending for the coming year set to exceed £2.6 million, approximately £230,000 more than income as the Association continues to spend reserves accumulated over several years. The General Assembly approved a fee increase of 2.2 per cent for 2008 when the Association is projected to resume accumulating small annual surpluses.

The General Assembly also approved the appointment of Deloitte & Touche to audit the CPA accounts.

Two new Legislatures were admitted to the CPA, both of them Nigerian states. The Executive Committee and the General Assembly welcomed the Legislative Assemblies in Adamawa and Ebonyi to the CPA. Thirty-one of the 36 Nigerian state Legislatures now have active CPA memberships. The other five were suspended for failure to pay their fees. Some Nigerian state Legislatures have experienced difficulties obtaining funds from their state governments. Nigeria's national and state governments are not composed of Members of their respective Assemblies in the country's congressional system.

The General Assembly appointed a new CPA Secretary-General (see page 2) and elected new Executive Committee Members.

New CPA Officers elected

Senior Members of the Parliaments of India, Malaysia, the United Kingdom and Lesotho have been elected as the CPA's President, Vice-President, Treasurer and Vice-Chairperson respectively.

Hon. Somnath Chatterjee, MP, Speaker of the Lok Sabha of India, was elected as President of the Association for the coming year as his Parliament will host the 53rd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference



Mr David Marshall, MP.

in September 2007. He had been CPA Vice-President. The new Vice-President is Hon. Tan Sri Dato' Seri Di Raja Ramli Ngah Talib. MP, Speaker of the Dewan Rakyat, Malaysia's lower House. Malaysia will host the Association's conference in 2008. Mr David Marshall, MP, who has represented a Glasgow constituency in the U.K. House of Commons since 1979, was elected as the CPA's Treasurer on the nomination of the



Hon. Somnath Chatterjee, MP.

Executive Committee. The elections took place at the CPA General Assembly on 9 September in Abuja. Shri Chatterjee succeeded Hon. Aminu Bello Masari, MP, Speaker of the Nigerian House of Representatives.

The President and Vice-President serve one-year terms while Mr Marshall's term is three years. The terms began at the conclusion of the General Assembly, which was composed of approximately 350 Members of Commonwealth Parliaments and Legislatures.

Hon. Hashim Abdul Halim, MLA, Speaker of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly, continues as Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee. The Committee also elected Hon. Ntlhoi A. Motsamai, MP, Speaker of the Lesotho National Assembly, as its Vice-Chairperson for the coming year. She is also an African Regional Representative.



Hon. Ntlhoi Motsamai, MP.

Independence for Caymanian Legislature

The Legislative Assembly of the Cayman Islands moved in November to separate itself from the executive by agreeing that a commission chaired by the Speaker should control its finances and administration.

Noting that a CPA Study Group on "The Financing and Administration of Parliament" had recommended Parliaments and Legislatures should be independent of executive control, Members of the Assembly voted on 6 November for a motion to remove the Assembly from the portfolio of Internal Affairs and the Civil Service. The portfolio is held by the Chief Secretary, an Official Member of the Assembly and of cabinet who is appointed by the British overseas dependency's Governor. Once the move is approved by cabinet, the Assembly's budget and administration will be controlled by a new Legislative Assembly Management Commission composed of government and opposition Members and chaired by the Assembly's Speaker.

Chief Secretary George McCarthy said in the Assembly that the House now "is very much dependent on forces outside the

realm of the Legislative Assembly with respect to decisions made affecting its human resource, finance and information technology needs".

"The new commission's constitution will guarantee that the best interests of both sides of the House are taken into consideration when decisions are made, as well as assure that such decision-making is not swayed by external influences," he said, adding the move has the support of Speaker Hon. Edna Moyle and that it will follow a 1990 model set by Barbados.

The CPA Study Group, which had World Bank Institute support, was sited in arguments for the separation of the legislative and executive arms of government, a principle recommendation of the Group which met in Zanzibar in 2005.

"Such separation will give credence to the integrity of Parliament as an independent body," said Mr McCarthy.

Autonomy would allow the Assembly to draw on improved staff, information technology and financial resources.

Reviving a historic Indian name

The Parliament of India has finally legislated to return the union territory of Pondicherry to its original name, Puducherry.

The Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha both approved the Bill in late August to give effect to a resolution passed by the territory's Legislative Assembly in 1980.

Introduced by the Union Minister of State for Home, Shri S. Regupathy, the Pondicherry (Alteration of Name) Bill, 2006, was passed without opposition.

The discussion, which took place in the Tamil language of southern India, also saw some Members seeking full statehood for the territory. The lone Member of the Lok Sabha from Pondicherry, Shri M. Ramadass, MP, of the Pattali Makkal Katchi, said the territory had waited far too long to revert to its old name. Shri Santosh Gangwar, MP, of the Bharatiya Janata Party urged the Indian government to introduce legislation to return all Indian places to their historic names.

Involving Pacific islands in world trade

Commonwealth Pacific islands could seek observer status at the World Trade Organization if full membership is too expensive, agreed Parliamentarians attending a CPA/WTO Regional Trade Workshop held in Fiji Islands in October.

Fijian democracy falls again

Fiji Islands lost its elected government and Parliament in a 5 December military coup as the Pacific island nation's military Chief of Staff intervened in politics for the second time in six years.

Troops removed the government of Prime Minister Hon. Laisenia Qarase, the man installed to head the interim government when Commodore Frank Bainimarama intervened in politics in 2000. The Commodore later accused the government of corruption, unfairly favouring Melanesian over Indian Fijians and planning to pardon those involved in the 2000 uprising.

Mr Qarase was banished to his home island, the Senate was stopped in the middle of a debate condemning the coup and Parliament was dissolved. Several senior civil servants, including the Clerk of Parliament, were removed from office.

The Parliament of Fiji Islands hosted the 51st Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in September 2005 as a demonstration of the country's commitment to parliamentary government. The Fijian government had also hosted a number of Commonwealth and regional events after Fiji returned to elected government in 2001.

Unlike Fiji's first coup in 1987 and the upheaval of 2000, this year's coup was not directed at a government dominated by Fijians of Indian descent. But it was linked to the 2000 unrest as Cmdr Bainimarama had openly criticized the government over reconciliation legislation proposed to



Ousted Prime Minister Qarase.

defuse ethnic tensions. He expressed concern the legislation would be used to grant amnesties to the 2000 coup leaders.

Prime Minister Qarase attacked Cmdr Bainimarama for meddling in politics and tried unsuccessfully to remove him from his post. As coup fears grew, in November the Prime Minister announced the reconciliation legislation would be amended to remove the amnesty provisions, although it was later revealed that amnesties could still be granted under existing legislation.

The military chief also criticized the government for alleged corruption and cronyism and removed Mr Qarase from office, declaring himself President and appointing former army doctor Dr Jona Baravilala Senilagakali, as Prime Minister at the head of an interim government. He promised to ask the Great Council of Chiefs, Fiji's traditional Melanesian leadership, to re-instate President H.E. Ratu Josefa Iloilo and he

promised new elections would come later.

The coup was condemned by Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, United Nations Secretary-General H.E. Kofi Annan and Commonwealth Secretary-General Rt Hon. Don McKinnon.

The membership of the Fijian Parliament in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association went into abeyance.

On 8 December, an emergency meeting of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) "unanimously and unequivocally" condemned the military takeover as a serious violation of the Commonwealth's fundamental principles, as enshrined in the Harare Commonwealth Declaration. It suspended Fiji Islands' military regime from the Councils of the Commonwealth, pending the restoration of democracy and the rule of law. Fiji will not be invited to Commonwealth intergovernmental meetings. Existing technical assistance will continue but the only new aid would be assistance aimed at restoring civilian democratic rule.

CMAG, chaired by Hon. Dr Michael Frendo, MP, Maltese Minister of Foreign Affairs, and composed of eight other Foreign Ministers, called for the immediate restoration of constitutional democratic rule and urged Commonwealth nations to press Fiji to resume democratic governance. Australia and New Zealand imposed travel and other sanctions on the military regime. Mr McKinnon was reportedly using his good offices to press for a return to democracy.

Approximately 30 participants including Parliamentarians from the Pacific region, CPA and WTO staff, guest speakers and invited observer organizations, discussed ways for more Pacific Forum Island Countries (FICs) to participate in the world multilateral trading system. Fiji Islands, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands are so far the only Commonwealth Pacific island nations to have joined the WTO, while Tonga has still to ratify its membership and Samoa and Vanuatu have applied for full membership. Six other Commonwealth Pacific island states are not connected with the WTO.

Members noted that full membership would give their countries access to all

WTO facilities including its formal dispute settlement provisions and technical assistance. But full membership also entails financial and other obligations.

Members agreed that observer status is a low-cost option that opens some training and technical assistance doors without necessarily committing them to becoming full members.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, CPA Secretary-General Hon. Denis Marshall, QSO, said, "Parliamentarians need to be informed about the role of institutions such as the WTO to appreciate the benefits of liberalization of international trade."

The Workshop also discussed the opportunities of making use of the Pacific

Islands Forum's Geneva Office and the Commonwealth Secretariat "Hubs and Spokes" Project. In the Pacific, the Forum Secretariat in Suva is the "hub" to co-ordinate networks of analysts ("spokes") currently attached to Trade Ministries in PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

Participants also agreed FICs should make use of informal co-ordination with existing WTO members on issues of common concern.

The Workshop agreed that all FIC countries should be aware of WTO rules and principles since trade negotiations with their main export destinations are inevitably conducted in the technical language of the WTO.

Freedom of Information in the Caribbean

Caribbean countries should move quickly to enact wide-ranging Freedom of Information (FoI) legislation, a workshop of MPs, government officials and civil society representatives from nine of the states agreed in December in Dominica.

The workshop, sponsored by the CPA and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), urged countries to draft FoI legislation as soon as possible and include broad public consultation in the drafting process as had been done in the Cayman Islands.

Workshop discussions also led some participants to indicate they would draft amendments to improve the legislation their countries already have.

FoI regimes should cover as broad an area as possible: government departments all constitutional or statutory bodies, those which are wholly or partly government funded and bodies which are either performing public functions or providing public utilities in a monopoly. In addition, governments should also press for access to information held by any international organizations to which they belong.

The workshop was attended by 46 participants, including 16 Parliamentarians and representatives from government ministries and public groups. They met in Dominica's House of Assembly from 27 November to 1 December. The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, the Carter Centre, the Organization of American States and the Parliament of Dominica joined with the CPA and CIDA to put on the workshop. As well as Dominicans, participants came from Antigua & Barbuda, Belize, Grenada, Jamaica, Guyana, St Kitts & Nevis, Saint Lucia and St Vincent and the Grenadines.

The Workshop was organized by the CPA as part of its ongoing programme to promote open government through FoI legislation and improvements to Parliament's relations with the media. A 2004 CPA Study Group on "Access to Information" recommended measures to include in FoI legislation and the Commonwealth Human

Commonwealth crime-fighting highlighted in Ottawa

The Commonwealth should pool its experiences to identify successful strategies to combat economic crime and to increase the representation of women in Parliaments, agreed Members attending the 5th Canadian Parliamentary Seminar.

Twenty-two delegates attending the seminar from all Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) regions except the Pacific agreed that corruption and other forms of economic crime undermine development and parliamentary governance. They called on the CPA to work with Parliaments to identify the policies and practices which have worked in this area so all countries are aware of the best ways to protect resources from being siphoned off by illegal activities.

The participants, meeting in Ottawa from 22 to 27 October as guests of the CPA and its Canadian Branch, also noted that many Parliaments are still far short of the Commonwealth goal of having women occupy 30 per cent of their seats, originally by 2005 and now by 2015. Methods in various countries which have moved their Parliaments and Legislatures closer to gender equity should be highlighted to assist all CPA Branches in raising the number of women MPs. The Canadian Parliamentary Seminar and some other CPA events promote gender equity by encouraging



Branches to nominate both male and female Members to attend.

As well as attending 15 sessions, participants observed sittings of the Senate and House of Commons, including Question Period which features questions without notice to the Prime Minister and any Minister. They also were hosted by the Speaker of the Senate, Sen. the Hon. Noel Kinsella, and the Speaker of the House of Commons, Hon. Peter Milliken, MP, and by Canadian Branch Chairman and CPA Regional Representative Mr Russ Hiebert, MP.

The seminar was organized by Ms Carol Chafe, Canadian Branch Secretary, and the staff of the Parliament of Canada.

Rights Initiative has produced a guide to effective FoI regimes.

Commonwealth Law Ministers recommended in 1999 that all member nations enact FoI regimes as part of their Commonwealth commitment to human rights and democratic governance. The workshop also heard that a Caribbean Human Rights Treaty is being discussed throughout the region and it is expected to encourage all states to adopt Freedom of Information as a basic human right.

The workshop agreed 28 measures, posted on the CPA website, which should be covered in FoI legislation in the Caribbean. They also suggested the region's jurisdictions should share expertise to assist each other in establishing

effective information regimes. Noting that the cost of FoI and of the proactive, regular and voluntary disclosure of information is a concern, especially in small jurisdictions with limited resources, the workshop argued that regular disclosure is less costly than disclosures made in response to individual public requests.

The workshop was opened by Dominican Deputy Speaker, Hon. Ian Pinard, MHA, and was attended by Prime Minister Hon. Roosevelt Skerritt, MHA, and his cabinet who postponed a cabinet meeting to attend. The Speaker of the House of Assembly, Hon. Alix Boyd Knights, MHA, the Clerk of the House of Assembly, Mrs Alex Phillip, and the staff of the Dominican Parliament provided local support.