

CPA News

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CPA's Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures highlighted as key tool in achieving SDG 16 at Commonwealth Partnership for Democracy panel event in New York

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's **Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures** have been highlighted as an important tool in the pursuit of achieving 'peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development' outlined in Sustainable Development Goal 16 at a Commonwealth Partnership for Democracy (CP4D) panel event in New York, hosted by the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom to the United Nations.

The Commonwealth Partnership for Democracy (CP4D) panel event in New York gave attendees the opportunity to share their experiences of how Parliamentarians have contributed to SDG 16 and to identify the value of the CPA Benchmarks in measuring parliamentary performance and effectiveness. Effective Parliaments are one of the principal institutions of any functioning democracy and they are central to the attainment of SDG 16, the development agenda and all of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals.



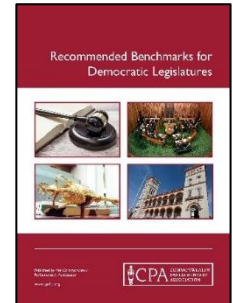
The first of two moderated panel sessions on a *Parliamentarian's View of the CPA Benchmarks* was chaired by Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Mr Akbar Khan who said: *"The pioneering Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures is one of the CPA's most important pieces of parliamentary strengthening work as we seek to further strengthen Parliaments and Legislatures in line with the aspirations of the Commonwealth Charter, the SDGs and the changing demands of our communities. The focus on measuring impact and the need to demonstrate the effectiveness of Legislatures is critical at a time of increased scrutiny of Parliaments and of Parliamentarians and the CPA Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures provide a key tool in assisting Commonwealth Parliaments to demonstrate their performance, increase their self-awareness and prioritise areas for development in the light of SDG 16."*

The panel event gave attendees the opportunity to share their experiences of how Parliamentarians have contributed to SDG 16 and to identify the value of the CPA Benchmarks in measuring parliamentary performance and effectiveness. Panellists included CPA Members from Belize, Canada, Malaysia and the United Kingdom:

- *Hon. Laura Tucker-Longworth, MP*, Speaker of the Parliament of Belize who spoke about the experience utilising the CPA Benchmarks and how the process has assisted with parliamentary reform in Belize. She said: *"The CPA Benchmarks provided us with a structure by which we could evaluate our methods of working in Parliament."*
- *Hon. Alexandra Mendès, MP* (Canada Federal), CPA Vice-Chairperson who gave the Canadian experience of using the original CPA Benchmarks and the important work of the Public Accounts Committee in providing oversight. The CPA Vice-Chairperson said: *"'Servicing citizens' is the guiding mantra to carrying out all oversight work of Public Accounts Committees and Supreme Audit Institutions."*
- *Hon. Wong Chen, MP* (Malaysia) outlined the current state of parliamentary reform in Malaysia and the role that self-assessment against the CPA Benchmarks had assisted the reform process. He said: *"It's not about knowledge or capacity, it's about political will and the separation of powers."*

- *Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods, MP (United Kingdom) explained how the updated CPA Benchmarks could be used in established Parliaments like the UK and the role of the CPA Benchmarks in promoting gender and more inclusive Parliaments. She said: "It's very important that the CPA Benchmarks remain a 'live' document that is used by all our member Parliaments as there is always room for improvement."*

The CPA *Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures* provide Parliaments across the Commonwealth with a set of democratic standards and many of the CPA's 180 Commonwealth Parliaments have undertaken self-assessments using the CPA Benchmarks or have incorporated the CPA Benchmarks into their own parliamentary standards. Covering a comprehensive range of recommendations, the CPA Benchmarks propose guidelines in areas such as elections and candidate eligibility; political parties; parliamentary staff; legislative procedures; financial and budget oversight; transparency and integrity; diversity and gender sensitivity; and freedom of information.



The Commonwealth Partnership for Democracy (CP4D) panel event brought together Speakers and Deputy Speakers of Parliaments, Members of Parliament and parliamentary staff as well as senior academics and representatives of UN and other international bodies. The event was opened by Ambassador James Roscoe, Head of Open Societies and Partnerships at the United Kingdom Mission to the United Nations and Mr Martin Chungong, Secretary-General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

The panel event was held in the margins of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), which held its annual meeting from 9 to 18 July 2019, ahead of the next High-level Political Forum (HLPF) which will be held under the 74th Session of the UN General Assembly and SDG SUMMIT from 24 to 25 September 2019 in New York.

-Ends-

Notes to Editors:

The CPA *Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures* were updated in 2018 to include measurements for Parliaments to support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the recommendations contained in the Commonwealth Charter. The updating of the CPA Benchmarks is part of a wider project, the Commonwealth Partnership for Democracy (CP4D), which is being led by Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) working with partners including the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Headquarters Secretariat, the CPA UK Branch and the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF).

The CP4D project is funded by the UK Government and was launched during the 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in London, UK. CP4D is working to support inclusive and accountable democracies across the Commonwealth. The CP4D programme is working with Parliaments in eighteen Commonwealth Member States across Sub-Saharan Africa and South-Eastern Asia.

The CPA *Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures* were first launched in 2006 and were the outcome of an original Study Group hosted by the Legislature of Bermuda on behalf of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the World Bank Group with support from the United Nations Development Programme, the European Parliament and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. The Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures have been used extensively in parliamentary strengthening across the Commonwealth since 2006. **To access the updated CPA Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures please visit www.cpahq.org/cpahq/benchmarks.**

The **Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)** exists to develop, promote and support Parliamentarians and their staff to identify benchmarks of good governance and to implement the enduring values of the Commonwealth. The CPA is an international community of around 180 Commonwealth Parliaments and Legislatures working together to deepen the Commonwealth's commitment to the highest standards of democratic governance. Visit www.cpahq.org.

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