Cymdeithas Seneddol y Gymanwlad
Senedd Cymru

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association
Welsh Parliament

Report of the

COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION

69th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference

13-18 September 2026

Cape Town, Republic of South Africa



Photo: Senedd delegates Natasha Asghar MS and Shav Taj MS.

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Photo: Natasha Asghar MS and Shav Taj MS representing the Senedd at the General Assembly.

Background, Summary and Highlights.

1. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) is the annual meeting of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA). It is one of the largest Commonwealth meetings, and this year's conference brought together over 900 Parliamentarians representing over 180 parliamentary Branches, from across the Association's nine Regions.

2. The 69th CPC took place between 13-18 September 2026 in Cape Town, RSA.. The Conference theme was '***Strengthening International Law and Parliamentary Democracy in a Changing World Order: Commonwealth Leadership***'.

3. The CPA Wales (Senedd) Branch, as part of its fee structure, was invited to send one delegate as well as our Representative on the International Executive Committee. It was decided not to take up the option of being represented by additional conference "observer" participants, on this occasion.

   The Senedd delegation consisted of Natasha Asghar MS (Executive Committee),
   Shav Taj MS (Voting Delegate) and Al Davies (CPA Senedd Acting Branch Secretary)

4. Senedd delegates participated fully in the CPC programme, including:
   - the opening and closing ceremonies;
   - the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Conference,
   - thematic Workshops,
   - the General Assembly,
   - the International Executive Committee,
   - BIM Regional governance meetings.

5. The Senedd was grateful for the invitation to a reception hosted by the Acting British High Commissioner, Lisa Weedon, at the High Commission Residence in Cape Town.

6. The Senedd delegation was pleased of the opportunity to engage with the Western Cape Provincial Parliament (WCPP) at a dinner, kindly hosted by Speaker Daylin Mitchell. The meeting provided the occasion to discuss a number of issues, including the development of the WCPP Youth Parliament as well as its plans to increase the number of elected Members. An invitation was issued by the Llywydd for the WCPP to undertake an official visit to the Senedd, as part of its wider programme in Europe, in the Spring of 2027.

Reflections from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference
by Shav Taj MS



Photo: Shav Taj MS addressing Delegates at the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Conference

The 69th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, was hosted by the Parliament of South Africa and the CPA South Africa Branch in Cape Town from 13 to 19 September 2026. A significant gathering, bringing together more than 900 parliamentarians and parliamentary officials from across the Commonwealth.

I was delighted to attend alongside Natasha Asghar MS, who is now one of three representatives from the British Islands and Mediterranean Region on the international CPA Executive Committee, representing Wales. It was great to see Wales represented at that level.

The overarching theme was "*Strengthening International Law and Parliamentary Democracy in a Changing World Order: Commonwealth Leadership*."
Discussions ranged from democracy and accountability to climate resilience, human rights, inclusion and rapidly changing technology.

One of the things I valued most was hearing directly from parliamentarians working within very different political and constitutional systems. It was fascinating to

understand how different parliaments work, the roles parliamentarians undertake and the challenges they face.

There were interesting comparisons with South Africa. It's National Assembly is elected through proportional representation, providing an sound comparison with the proportional system we now have here in the Senedd, although there are important differences between the two.

Some of the informal opportunities were just as valuable. We had dinner with South African parliamentarians, including the Speaker and Deputy Speaker, giving us time to talk more informally and compare our experiences of parliamentary life.
We also attended an evening hosted by the British diplomatic mission in Cape Town, which was another valuable opportunity for relationship-building outside the formal programme.

And I was fortunate to find some time to visit Robben Island. As a Trade Unionist for me, this added another dimension to being in South Africa and reflecting on democracy, political freedom and the country's deep history.

Alongside the main conference, I participated in the 10th Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Conference.

Women parliamentarians came from right across the political spectrum, and what struck me was just how many of our experiences as women in politics were shared.
The theme was "Making Gender Sensitivity an Institutional Mandate: Ethics, accountability and structural change."
But some of the most powerful conversations were about the everyday realities of being a woman in politics.

Childcare and caring responsibilities came up again and again.Women talked about continuing to carry much of the caring responsibility within their families alongside incredibly demanding political careers.

The idea of the "sandwich generation" particularly resonated: women looking after children while taking on increasing responsibility for ageing parents, other relatives and even neighbours.
What struck me was how universal that experience seemed to be. Different countries, cultures and politics, but many of the same pressures.

Another issue that really stayed with me was women's safety in political life. I heard from parliamentarians from a number of countries that, unless they are Ministers, they may have to organise and pay for their own personal security, without a separate parliamentary budget available to them.

It raises a fundamental question: if women cannot participate safely in politics, how can we genuinely achieve equal representation?
There was an especially sobering backdrop while we were in South Africa.

Police were investigating the deaths of nine women whose bodies had been found over approximately two months in Ekurhuleni, in the greater Johannesburg area. There were concerning similarities, although police had not established that the deaths were linked or that a serial killer was responsible.

As we know this isn't something happening somewhere else. In England and Wales, 75 women were victims of domestic homicide in just one year. That is more than one woman every week. That brought a genuine immediacy to our conversations about femicide, violence against women and women's safety.

AI, deepfakes and democracy - Safety increasingly has a digital dimension too.
The main conference included a workshop specifically considering artificial intelligence in parliaments.

Women shared deeply concerning experiences of misinformation and manipulated content, including false information circulating through WhatsApp community groups before spreading more widely online. There was a strong shared feeling that we need appropriate guardrails and regulation, rather than allowing technology to outpace our ability to protect people and our democratic institutions.

Examples were shared from New South Wales, Australia, who have acted by introducing legislation which prohibits the publication or distribution of political deepfakes during an election period. South Australia has also legislated in this area. There were also concerns about AI and the future of the world of work, particularly what technological change will mean for the next generation.

One of my takeaways was the importance of sharing solutions. No parliament has all the answers, but there is enormous value in learning from what others are trying.

What I brought back to Wales
Perhaps my strongest reflection from Cape Town is that getting women elected is only part of achieving equality.

We also need to ask what happens once women get here.
Can women realistically combine political life with caring responsibilities?
Are our institutions designed around the realities of women's lives?
Do women feel safe, physically and online?

And are we keeping pace with the new threats created by technology?
Despite all the differences between the countries, cultures and political systems represented, what stayed with me was just how much women had in common.

All critical questions our Senedd women's caucus continues to grapple with.

Finally a very big thank you to Al Davies, our International Relations Officer, for organising our travel and briefings, looking after us throughout the visit and making sure we were safe and well supported.
I also want to thank the Senedd Research team for their excellent briefings beforehand. They meant that we arrived well informed and able to make the most of the conference.

And perhaps that leaves the most important message for our Women's Caucus: Representation matters enormously. But we must also create the conditions that enable women not simply to enter politics, but to participate fully, safely and sustainably once they are here.

Report by Natasha Asghar MS



Photo: *Natasha Asghar MS with Members of the new CPA International Executive Committee.*

I was delighted to attend the 69th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Cape Town, South Africa, and to participate fully in the programme, including joining the CPA Executive Committee (EXCO) planning team for the first time. The conference brought together Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff from across the Commonwealth to consider the future of parliamentary democracy and international cooperation. We saw the entry of Morocco, Ukraine and Brunei into the CPA with *'observer status.'*

Participation in EXCO provided a valuable opportunity to contribute to discussions about the future direction and governance of the CPA. The conference also saw the election of the Speaker of Jamaica, the Most Hon. Juliet Holness, as CPA Vice-Chairperson. The next Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference will be hosted by Canada in 2027, providing an exciting opportunity to build on the relationships and discussions established in Cape Town.

During the conference I attended a wide range of seminars, including a particularly important session on the future of parliamentary democracy. I raised the challenge of recruitment and retention of politicians in today's political climate, particularly the barriers facing women considering a career in public life. Discussions demonstrated that this is not simply a Welsh or UK issue; Legislatures across the Commonwealth are grappling with similar questions around political culture, personal security, family life and making elected office a sustainable career.

I also participated in an Artificial Intelligence workshop, examining current applications, future prospects and implementation strategies. Canada's use of tools such as Copilot offered useful comparisons with our own experience. I also provided detailed feedback on the structure and delivery of CPA sessions, particularly the need for more engaging speakers, practical examples which resonate more with members in the room and new dynamic workshops that genuinely equip Parliamentarians for the challenges they face.

A highlight was meeting the Speaker and Members of the Western Cape Parliament, alongside representatives of different political groups, at an excellent dinner. We discussed their youth Parliament programme, which they are seeking to develop along similar lines to the model established in Wales, as well as elections, the realities of coalition working in a Legislature comprising nine parties and healthcare. As South Africa has many Doctors (*so no shortage as seen in Wales*) however, due to the healthcare system and challenges, many wish to either leave the country or are struggling to find work.

The CPA General Assembly provided a valuable opportunity to hear directly from Parliamentarians about the challenges facing their countries. Following concerns raised at previous conferences about conflict around the world, the establishment of the CPA Peace Committee was particularly welcome, and I sincerely hope, going forward it can make a meaningful contribution to promoting dialogue and peace.

South Africa's hospitality was exceptional, complemented by superb opening and closing ceremonies filled with inspiring and heartfelt speeches. I was also pleased to meet the UK High Commissioner to South Africa and discuss the enduring relationship between the UK and South Africa, as **t**he UK is one of South Africa's most important bilateral partners**,** particularly for trade, investment, skills development, science and innovation, tourism and the Just Energy Transition.

Looking ahead, I believe the Senedd should proactively put itself forward for the CPA's Green Mace Initiative. The initiative recognises Parliaments demonstrating environmental and sustainability excellence, with applications for the 2027 awards now open. The Senedd should assemble a strong evidence-based submission covering its environmental policies, operational practices, sustainability initiatives, and legislative leadership, demonstrating not only what Wales has achieved but the lessons it can share across the Commonwealth.

The South Africa conference reinforced the value of the CPA: bringing Parliamentarians together to share experience, challenge assumptions and learn from one another.
Wales has much to contribute to that conversation, and we should continue to ensure that our voice is heard clearly and constructively across the Commonwealth.



Photo: *.Natasha Asghar MS and Shav Taj MS with Speaker Daylin Mitchell and Members of the Western Cape Provincial Parliament (WCPP)*

Conference Concluding Statement and Resources.

69th CPC: Conference Concluding Statement

The **Conference Concluding Statement** for the 69th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) which took place in Cape Town, South Africa from 13-18 September 2026 is available here

69th CPC: Images

Images from the events of the 69th CPC are available to view and download at the CPA's Flickr page.

Acknowledgments

The CPA Senedd-Wales Branch would like to put on record its sincere gratitude to:

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