



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba



**British Islands and Mediterranean Region (BIMR) Commonwealth
Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Inaugural Conference**

Saturday 15 March to Sunday 16 March 2014

Enhancing the Participation of Women in Politics

REPORT

The content of this report is not attributable to the speakers at the Conference but instead is based on the notes taken by scribes at the Conference. Accordingly, the content of this report should not be quoted or considered as representing the views of the speakers present.

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BACKGROUND

This report provides an overview of the discussions which took place during the formal sessions of the Conference. The content of this report is not attributable to the Conference delegates/discussion leaders but instead is based on the notes taken by scribes at the Conference. Accordingly, the content of this report should not be quoted or considered as representing the views of delegates who were present. Instead this report is intended to provide a general overview of the discussions that took place at the Conference.

The Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) is the network of women Members of CPA legislatures. The CWP network provides a means of:

- Building the capacity of women elected to parliament to be more effective in their roles;
- Improving the awareness and ability of all parliamentarians, male and female, and encouraging them to include a gender perspective in all aspects of their role - legislation, oversight and representation;
- Helping parliaments to become gender-sensitive institutions; and
- CWP is governed by a Steering Group made up of representatives from each region. The international Steering Group is chaired by Hon. Rebecca Kadaga MP, Speaker of the Ugandan Parliament.

CWP works on a regional basis, with each of the nine regions of the CPA coordinating programmes, conferences and meetings among its legislatures. The CPA UK Branch secretariat coordinates the CWP activity for the British Islands and Mediterranean Region (BIMR).

History of the British Islands and Mediterranean Region Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Group

At the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the 42nd British Islands and Mediterranean Region Conference which took place in Edinburgh in June 2012, it was agreed that for the first time, an election process should be established to fill the vacancy for the BIMR representative on the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Steering Group. At the next AGM which took place in February 2013 in the Falkland Islands an election process was agreed and enshrined in the BIMR constitution. It was also decided at that conference that a BIMR CWP Steering Committee would be established to support and inform the work of the BIMR regional representative on the CWP Steering Group.

At the end of March 2013, Patricia Ferguson MSP was elected to represent the British Islands and Mediterranean Region on the CWP Steering Group. Ms Ferguson is also the Vice - Chair of the CWP Steering Group.

CWP BIMR's focus is on working with women across the region to increase global representation of women in parliaments and politics and connecting women through the Commonwealth network.

Objectives of the BIMR CWP

The objectives of the BIMR CWP are to:

- Build the capacity of women elected to parliament to be more effective in their roles;
- Improve the awareness and ability of all parliamentarians, male and female, and encouraging them to include a gender perspective in all aspects of their role - legislation, oversight and representation;
- Help parliaments to become gender-sensitive institutions;
- Encourage more women into politics and connect with the work of the Commonwealth;
- Focus on themes of communication, advocacy and engagement;
- Link with other groups and associations such as UN Women, UNDP and CSW; and
- Expand the work and understanding of CWP.

Governance of the BIMR CWP

Each Branch within the BIMR may nominate a woman parliamentarian to represent their Branch on the Steering Committee. There are 13 Branches within BIMR. The Members of the BIMR CWP Steering Committee are:

- Patricia Ferguson MSP, Scotland; (Chairperson)
- Hon Samantha Sacramento MP, Gibraltar;
- Sandra James MBE, Guernsey;
- Hon Clare Christian MLC, Isle of Man;
- Senator Sarah Ferguson, Jersey;
- Hon Dr Justyne Caruana MP, Malta;
- Jo-Anne Dobson MLA, Northern Ireland Assembly;
- Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods MP, UK; and,
- Joyce Watson AM, Wales.

One of the first decisions made by the Steering Committee was to hold a Conference to bring together women parliamentarians from within the region to begin the process of understanding what the particular local challenges are within this very diverse region. The CPA Scotland Branch Executive Committee agreed to provide financial support and other resources. A successful application was also made to the CPA Secretariat to access funds to develop the CWP within the BIMR region.

CONFERENCE

THEME

The themes explored during the conference included:

- How to improve female participation in political life, including the effectiveness of 50/50 campaigns and female only lists.
- Exploring practical ideas to support Parliaments where female representatives hold less than 20% of the seats.
- The actions female politicians can take to ensure equality for all within their network.
- How the media represents female politicians and positive action that might be taken to raise awareness of gender issues.

CONFERENCE OBJECTIVES

The objectives for the conference were as follows:

1. To encourage the development of relationships across the recently established BIMR CWP Steering Committee;
2. To enable policy discussions among women Parliamentarians from across the BIMR region and the CPA more generally;
3. To enhance the reputation of the CPA as a key arena that is engaged in promoting women Parliamentarians;
4. To encourage dialogue amongst delegates on the topic of the Commonwealth Charter; and
5. To contribute to objective six of the CPA Business Plan ('To promote gender equality and equity in the work of the CPA and across the Association').

OPENING SESSION

The Opening Session of the conference was held in the Holyrood Room of the Scottish Parliament. Delegates were addressed by Patricia Ferguson MSP, Vice-Chair of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Steering Group. The delegates are pictured below.



Patricia Ferguson MSP welcomed the conference delegates and the two members of the Scottish Youth Parliament who were also attending as observers. She introduced herself as chair of the British Islands and Mediterranean Region Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians steering committee and Vice-Chair of the CWP steering committee. The opening address also considered:

- The overall aims of the conference;
- That the conference was intended to act as a catalyst for the start of a sustained programme of work by women parliamentarians both in their own legislatures and collectively, in the context of the Commonwealth Charter, which emphasises the value of democracy; and
- How the conference could provide an opportunity for women to share ideas and to learn from one another.

Patricia Ferguson MSP then introduced the Honourable Lindiwe Maseko MPL, Speaker of the Gauteng Provincial Legislature, to provide the keynote address to the conference.



Photo: The Honourable Lindiwe Maseko MP is pictured addressing delegates above.

The Hon Speaker's address to delegates dealt with the following themes:

- That the forthcoming elections in South Africa were an opportunity for people to celebrate democracy and a time to reflect on the progress that has been made in promoting the rights of women;
- The challenges that women globally continue to face;
- An exploration of the successes and best practice which had been pursued in South Africa with regard to encouraging women to participate in politics;
- Consideration of issues such as limited financial support for women candidates; limited access to political networks; the practice of 'tokenism'; and the lack of training in leadership for women which remain key issues with regard to female participation in politics;
- Discussion of the impact of the proportional representation system in South Africa upon political participation by women;
- The measures that the African National Congress (ANC) had taken to promote gender equality across the structures of the ANC and, in particular, the impact of the use of gender quotas;
- The role of women leaders in mentoring other women into becoming Parliamentarians;
- The importance of elections as being critical to empowering women in the political arena both as voters and as candidates; and
- The critical role of political parties in holding the key to political participation by women.

Patricia Ferguson MSP thanked the Hon Speaker for setting the scene for discussions about women in Parliament and about how to encourage more women

to participate, and noted that women's involvement in politics was not a tick-box exercise.

SESSION ONE: BIMR WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS: STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Chair: Sandra White MSP

Speakers:

Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods MP (UK branch), Member of the BIMR CWP steering committee

The Hon Samantha Sacramento MP, Minister for Equality, Social Services and the Elderly (Gibraltar branch), Member of the BIMR CWP steering committee

Jo-Anne Dobson MLA (Northern Ireland branch), Member of the BIMR CWP steering committee



Photo: The Chair and Panellists at Session One of the conference are pictured above: (from left to right) Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods MP, Jo-Anne Dobson MLA, The Hon Samantha Sacramento MP and Sandra White MSP.

Following the Opening Ceremony, the first session of the Conference was opened by the Chair, **Sandra White MSP**, who outlined the focus of the session as being on the strengths and weaknesses of, and challenges for, women in politics and women with political aspirations. The Chair then introduced the first speaker, Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods MP.

Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods MP covered the following themes in her presentation:

- The current position in the United Kingdom with regard to women's participation in politics;
- Situated the UK within a wider global context with regard to political participation by women;
- Consideration of the impact of quotas and special measures upon female participation and the different models of quota system that can be operationalised;
- The approach that the Labour party has taken with regard to all-women shortlists; and
- The importance of issues of party reform and financial support for women candidates upon participation by women.

The **Hon Samantha Sacramento MP** considered the following topics:

- The balance required in campaigns for improving participation by women in politics between pushing for increased representation and articulating why that representation is necessary;
- Explored the very different size of legislatures within the BIMR region and whether quota systems would be appropriate in smaller legislatures;
- The importance of encouraging women to join political parties and to work at grass-roots level in public life; and
- The critical role that current women Parliamentarians can play in inspiring other women to enter politics.

Lastly, **Jo-Anne Dobson MLA** discussed the following themes:

- The current position in Northern Ireland with regard to women's participation in public life;
- The importance of engaging with young people and providing leadership by example;
- The importance of women becoming involved in voluntaristic, grass-roots campaigns as a key springboard into more formal political engagement; and
- The applicability of quota systems within the context of Northern Ireland.

The Chair thanked each of the speakers for their presentations and opened the session to questions from delegates. A wide range of issues were discussed during the question and answer session covering the following topics:

- The extent to which increasing the proportion of women parliamentarians could occur through voluntary means alone;
- How to encourage more women to become engaged in politics and the key role of party leaders as advocates for increased representation of women;
- The extent to which all-women shortlists had been successful;

- How to encourage a higher proportion of women parliamentarians in jurisdictions which do not have a party political culture but rather tend to elect Independents;
- Discussion of the role of 'women's academies' which had been established by some political parties and provided training for potential women candidates using party funds;
- The importance of family-friendly hours and that the issue was not just about getting women elected into Parliament but supporting women to stay there; and,
- Media portrayal of women MPs acting as a key barrier to encouraging other women to enter politics.

SESSION TWO: THE COMMONWEALTH CHARTER: WHAT CAN BIMR CWP DO TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY AND EQUITY IN THE WORK OF THE CPA BIMR REGION AND ACROSS THE ASSOCIATION?

Chair: Senator Sarah Ferguson (Jersey Branch)

Speakers:

Joyce Watson AM (Welsh Assembly), Member of the BIMR CWP steering committee

Dr Marsha Scott (Engender and West Lothian Council)

Sandra James MBE (Guernsey Parliament), Member of the BIMR CWP steering committee



Photo: The Chair and Panellists at Session Two of the conference are pictured above. From left to right, Joyce Watson AM, Dr Marsha Scott, Senator Sarah Ferguson, Margaret Neal (CPA Scotland Branch Secretary), and Sandra James MBE.

The Chair, **Senator Sarah Ferguson**, outlined the topic for the second session of the conference and introduced the first speaker, Joyce Watson AM.

Joyce Watson AM considered the following topics in her presentation to delegates:

- Her own experience of entering in politics and career within political parties;
- The experience in Wales of promoting gender equality within the National Assembly;
- Consideration of how to enhance gender equality across CPA activities; and
- The importance of the CPA as an arena for learning from other jurisdictions with regard to what has been effective in terms of gender equality.

Ms Marsha Scott began considered the following themes in her presentation:

- The structural conditions affecting gender equality and the extent to which improvements can be delivered on a voluntary basis if structural change within institutions does not take place;
- Consideration of wider equality issues such as a gender 'pay gap'; and
- The importance of networks of women in being able to deliver change.

The final speaker at the second session was Deputy **Sandra James MBE** who addressed the following themes in her presentation:

- The different context and barriers which women can face entering politics in legislatures which are composed primarily of Independent Members and where party structures do not exist;
- The support networks and resources which women can utilise in legislatures composed of Independents; and
- The importance of building confidence throughout all stages of life but particularly amongst the young.

The Chair then opened the session to questions from delegates. A wide range of topics were discussed during the question and answer session including:

- Discussion of the negative connotations associated with the word 'feminism';
- How to remove the perception of the involvement of women in public life as being tokenistic;
- The responsibility of women in influential positions challenging the structures of organisations that they are members of;
- A discussion around the importance of parents advocating equality issues and values to their children;
- The gendered nature of employment and how the position of women within the labour market could be advanced; and
- Discussion of formalising a network system, within CPA BIMR, to enable women politicians to provide a mentoring and support network to other women politicians.

SESSION THREE: PRE-SELECTION AND POST-ELECTION CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Chair: Agnes Tolmie (Chair of the Scottish Women's Convention)

Speakers:

Shona Robison MSP (Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport)

Johann Lamont MSP (Leader of Scottish Labour Party)

Dr Angela O'Hagan (Convener of the Scottish Women's Budget Group)



Photo: The Chair and Panellists for Session Three of the conference are pictured above. From left to right, Dr Angela O'Hagan, Johann Lamont MSP, Agnes Tolmie, and Shona Robison MSP.

The Chair, **Agnes Tolmie**, opened the session by summarising that the session aimed to deal with the barriers and opportunities facing women candidates. The Chair then introduced the first speaker of the session, Shona Robison MSP, then Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport.

The Minister, **Shona Robison MSP**, opened the session and considered the following themes:

- The importance of conferences, such as the CWP conference, in exploring the challenges facing women Parliamentarians;
- The differentiated nature of female political engagements across different spheres of engagement such as, formal party political involvement, campaigning and voting;
- Measures which can be taken to encourage women into political life;

- The role of the media and their portrayal of women Parliamentarians and women in public life more generally;
- The Scottish Government's current policies with regard to the representation of women in public life; and
- The importance of finding common cause across political parties on the issue of gender equality.

The Leader of the Scottish Labour Party, **Johann Lamont MSP**, then addressed delegates and considered the following topics:

- That the Scottish Parliament hosting the inaugural CWP BIMR conference was a sign of political progress;
- An exploration of the measures that the Labour party had taken to address wider gender equality issues such as, equal pay, equal representation and domestic violence;
- The importance of women politicians in inspiring women to become engaged in politics;
- The positive action measures that the Labour party had taken and the importance of party political structures in addressing gender equality; and
- The importance of family-friendly policies in encouraging participation and of remaining vigilant as to their application once such policies are in place.

The final speaker in this session, **Dr Angela O'Hagan**, addressed delegates and considering the following issues:

- The need for institutional and structural change is gender equality is to be achieved;
- The opportunities that the Scottish Parliament had provided to ensure that equality remained on the political agenda;
- Consideration of a 'push-pull' effect between women in parliament, officials and civil society;
- The consideration of equality considerations within the Scottish Parliament's budget process;
- The need to push for more women in Parliament and for women MSP's to pull on women on the outside.

The Chair then opened the session to questions with a range of topics being discussed including:

- The family-friendly policies which had been introduced at Westminster in recent years;
- A discussion around the level at which quotas should be set - whether this should be 40% or 50%;
- The barriers which women face in undertaking election campaigning;
- The role of gender budgeting and gender impact assessments;
- The need to ensure that women from a diversity of backgrounds are elected; and
- Whether a cross-party mentoring scheme to support women politicians should be established.

SESSION FOUR: THE MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN POLITICS

Chair: Margaret Mitchell MSP

Speakers:

Ruth Davidson MSP (Leader, Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party)

Susan Dalgety (Media Relations expert)

Kate Higgins (Social Media expert and blogger).



Photo: The Chair and Panellists at Session Four of the conference are pictured above. From left to right, Ruth Davidson MSP, Susan Dalgety, Margaret Mitchell MSP, and Kate Higgins.

The Chair, **Margaret Mitchell MSP**, introduced herself and welcomed delegates to the session. The Chair outlined the three general topics of the session as follows:

- Should the media show gender sensitivity in their coverage of election campaigns?
- What should women parliamentarians do and not do to raise their profile?, and
- How the BIMR CWP might use the media to raise the profile of the group.

Margaret Mitchell MSP then introduced the first speaker of the session, the Leader of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party, Ruth Davidson MSP.

Ruth Davidson MSP considered the following themes in her presentation:

- Her own personal experiences of working in the print and broadcast media;
- The performance of the Conservative party within the Scottish Parliament in terms of gender equality;
- The experience of women politicians in dealing with the media; and
- The gender composition of the mainstream media.

The second speaker, **Susan Dalgety** addressed delegates and considered the following themes:

- The portrayal of women in the media;
- The experience of female Ministers during the first session of the Scottish Parliament;
- The gender composition of the mainstream media; and
- The role of social media as an alternative means for women politicians to communicate and its effectiveness.

The final speaker at the session, **Kate Higgins** considered the following issues:

- Her motivation to become active in social media;
- The importance to women politicians of, and how to, organise a media plan;
- The current viability of the mainstream media;
- The increasing prominence and role of social media platforms; and
- Exploration of the use of Facebook and Twitter as a means of engaging with a wider audience.

The Chair then opened the discussion to delegates with the following topics being discussed:

- How to deal with personal abuse which can be received on social media platforms and in particular, that women politicians should come to each other's defence if someone is being 'trolled' on social media;
- The effectiveness of doing 'day in the life' features and virtual surgeries through social media;
- That social media offers the best way for women to make their point of view known without having their opinion filtered by editors;
- That involvement in social media humanises politicians which the public tend to appreciate;
- That the mainstream media tend to look at social media as a means of finding news stories and therefore social media can be used to influence the mainstream media; and,
- Discussion of the recent prosecutions which had been held in cases of online harassment.

CLOSING SESSION

Patricia Ferguson MSP addressed delegates at the closing session and covered the following topics:

- Thanked delegates and panellists for their contributions to the conference;
- Considered that the inaugural conference had been an exceptional event and should become a regular occurrence;
- The future work of the BIMR-CWP steering committee;
- How heartening it was to share experiences and ideas with her fellow women politicians;
- Particular thanks for the attendance and contribution made by the Hon Speaker, Lindiwe Maseko MPL;

Ms Ferguson concluded her remarks by thanking all the delegates again for their valuable contributions to the conference and their numerous ideas, which would feed into the work plan that will be taken forward after the conference. Patricia Ferguson wished all delegates a safe journey home and closed the conference.



Photo: Patricia Ferguson MSP addresses delegates at the closing session of the conference.

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The CPA Scotland Branch wish to thank the Panellists and Session Chairs at the Conference, namely:

- Professor Roberta Blackman-Woods MP, UK Branch;
- Susan Dalgety, Senior Associate, Active Learning Centre;
- Ruth Davidson MSP, Leader of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party, Scotland Branch;
- Jo-Anne Dobson MLA, Northern Ireland Branch;
- Senator Sarah Ferguson, Member of the BIMRCWP Steering Committee, Jersey Branch;
- Kate Higgins, campaigner and blogger;
- Sandra James MBE, Guernsey Branch;
- Johann Lamont MSP, Leader of the Scottish Labour Party, Scotland Branch;
- The Hon. Lindiwe Maseko MP, Speaker of the Gauteng Provincial Parliament, South Africa;
- Angela O'Hagan, Convenor of the Scottish Women's Budget Group;
- Shona Robison MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Commonwealth Games, Sport, Equalities and Pensioners' Rights, Scotland Branch;
- Hon. Ms Sacramento Sacramento MP, Minister for Equality and Social Services, Gibraltar Branch;
- Dr Marsha Scott, Engender Scotland;
- Agnes Tolmie, Chair of the Scottish Women's Convention; and
- Joyce Watson AM, Member of the BIMRCWP Steering Committee, Wales Branch.

The CPA Scotland Branch also wishes to acknowledge and thank the staff from departments across the Scottish Parliament who contributed to the hosting of the BIMR CWP Inaugural Conference. Staff from the following departments contributed:

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- Security; and
- Visitor Services.

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