

## CPA Press Release

For immediate release, 10 April 2017

### Closing the gender gap and promoting equality in social, economic and political issues is the renewed focus for Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians in South-East Asia while the CPA Roadshow highlights youth political participation to university students in Malaysia

Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) from the South-East Asia Region have highlighted a number of key issues on the theme of **'Women and Development: Bridging the Gap'** at the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians South-East Asia Regional Seminar held at the Parliament of Malaysia. In the South-East Asia Region, there is an urgent need for action on gender equality in parliaments where the levels of representation for women in Malaysia and Singapore fall below the target of 30% female representation in Commonwealth Legislatures set by the Commonwealth Heads of Government.



The CWP regional seminar created a platform of engagement to identify strategies to close the gender gap and promote gender equality across social, economic and political forums in the South-East Asia Region of the CPA. Members of Parliament from the region emphasised the crucial role that the CWP plays in supporting women Parliamentarians to raise the profile of these key issues in their work.

The CWP regional seminar was hosted by the CWP Chairperson, **Hon. Dr Dato' Noraini Ahmad MP** and the CWP South-East Asia Steering Committee Member, **Hon. YB Datuk Hajah Norah binti Ahmad MP**, and the seminar covered topics including promoting sustainable economic growth through the digital economy; encouraging gender equality in politics; and addressing sexism, harassment and domestic violence against women and children. The CWP South-East Asia Region emphasised that despite the fact that women remain significantly underrepresented in parliaments and legislatures in Singapore and Malaysia, it is important to look beyond their critical mass to the impact women Parliamentarians have on legislative and political process, and on evaluating and shaping policies in their efforts to reach gender parity.

The Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) network provides a means of building the capacity of women elected to parliament to be more effective in their roles; encouraging Parliamentarians, male and female to include a gender perspective in all aspects of their role - legislation, oversight and representation; and helping parliaments to become gender-sensitive institutions.

#### Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)

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The seminar was opened by **Hon. Tan Sri Datuk Seri Panglima Pandikar Amin bin Haji Mulia, Speaker of the Parliament of Malaysia** who also gave the keynote address. Members of Parliament from across the South-East Asia Region and representatives of international organisations attended the seminar. Former Commonwealth Parliamentary Association International Executive Committee Members, **Hon. Dr Ronald Kiandee MP, Deputy Speaker of the Dewan Rakyat Parliament of Malaysia** and **Hon. S.K Devamany MP, Deputy Minister in the Malaysian Prime Minister's Department** together with **Deputy Speaker of the Parliament of Singapore** and current CPA International Executive Committee Member, **Hon. Lim Biow Chuan, MP** also attended the CWP regional seminar.

**The Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), Mr Akbar Khan** gave the opening remarks at the seminar in Malaysia and said: *“The coming together of Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians from across the region is a perfect demonstration of promoting the Commonwealth values of gender equality, human rights and democracy that was so clearly highlighted in the 2017 Commonwealth theme of a ‘Peace-Building Commonwealth’. It is only through respect, understanding and by working together that we can defend the dignity of each individual and create fairer societies for all.*

*“Against a backdrop of the renewed global commitment to gender equality and the new development agenda, and particularly UN Sustainable Development Goal 5 on Gender Equality, there is a keen focus and greater energy geared towards bridging the gender gap and securing equality for men and women in social, economic and political spheres. It is through networks like the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP), and the CWP regional seminar here in Malaysia, that we can make great strides in improving gender equality in parliaments across the Commonwealth and in giving an enhanced profile to gender equality issues. The under-representation or marginalisation of women and other social groups, including minorities, and the disabled, is not only unjust and unequal, but also undermines the legitimacy of our democratic institutions. I hope that seminars like this will encourage further work to be done to achieve gender parity in parliaments and legislatures in South East Asia.”*

Please [click here](#) to read the full speech.

The CPA Secretary-General also encouraged Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians from the South-East Asia Region to follow the National Assembly of Mauritius which recently launched its Parliamentary Gender Caucus to promote gender equality across democratic institutions in Mauritius. Globally, over 80 parliamentary women’s or gender caucuses have been created since 1995 and the establishment of gender caucuses is often a vital ingredient in bringing greater equality between men and women in the daily operations of parliament as a democratic institution.

The visit of the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association to the CPA Malaysia Branch and Parliament of Malaysia highlighted a number of key issues including the important role that the CPA is playing in parliamentary strengthening; the importance of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians network in promoting gender equality in parliaments; and the crucial role that parliament should play in public engagement in the political process, especially engaging with young people who constitute 60% of the 2.4 billion population of the Commonwealth.

The CPA Secretary-General also brought the CPA Roadshows to Malaysia during his visit with an engaging session with over 200 university students and members of the Malaysia Youth Parliament at UiTM (MARA University of Technology) in Malaysia where students had the opportunity to discuss the

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importance of the Commonwealth and of parliamentary democracy. The CPA Roadshows provide an opportunity for young people to learn about the political values of the Commonwealth such as diversity, development and parliamentary democracy; to discuss issues of concern about the society in which they live; and to meet local Members of Parliament and Parliamentary staff and to find out about the work of the CPA.



The CPA Secretary-General was accompanied on the CPA Roadshow

by **Hon. Dato' Noraini Ahmad MP** (Malaysia), **Senator Datuk Seri Abd Halim Abd Samad**, Deputy President of the Senate of Malaysia and other Members of the Parliament of Malaysia.

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**CPA Images Flickr Album: Images of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) South-East Asia Regional Seminar in Malaysia:** <http://tinyurl.com/konl3f5>

**CPA Images Flickr Album: Images of the CPA Roadshow in Malaysia:** <http://tinyurl.com/kjvmwa9>

#### Notes to Editors

The **Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP)** was founded in 1989 to increase the number of female elected representatives in Parliaments and legislatures across the Commonwealth and to ensure that women's issues are brought to the fore in parliamentary debate and legislation.

The **Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)**, now in its 105<sup>th</sup> year with HM The Queen, Head of the Commonwealth as its Patron, 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 over 180 Commonwealth Parliaments and Legislatures working together to deepen the Commonwealth's commitment to the highest standards of democratic governance. Parliaments, their Members and officials learn from each other through CPA activities: Annual Commonwealth Parliamentary Conferences, Regional Conferences and other symposiums; Interparliamentary visits; Parliamentary Seminars and Workshops; Publications including *The Parliamentarian*, the Journal of Commonwealth Parliaments; and the Parliamentary Information and Reference Centre.

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