



**International
Women's Day**

Message from the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Chairperson for International Women's Day 2017

**Hon. Dato' Noraini Ahmad MP
Malaysia
(2016-2019)**

It's a great pleasure and privilege, as Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians to deliver this message to you on the occasion of **International Women's Day, 2017**.

As many of you will know, the theme this year for International Women's Day is '**Be Bold for Change**'.

This theme for me is very relevant and incredibly timely – having recently brought together the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians to identify our priorities for the next three years, we have been looking at how as a network we can together achieve change to increase the number of women in parliaments.

This goal we have, of reaching the Commonwealth target of 30% female representation in Commonwealth legislatures, is urgent and pressing.

Recent 2016 figures from UN Women show that although the number of Women Parliamentarians has nearly doubled in the last 20 years, this only translates to 22% of women in national Parliaments today – this equates to only 9,000 female MPs globally.

The under-representation or marginalisation of women, and indeed other social groups, including minorities, is not only unjust and unequal, but it undermines the legitimacy of our democratic institutions.

As Parliamentarians, **male and female**, we all have a critical role in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

It is for us to ensure that women have equal opportunities for leadership and to participate in all levels of decision making.

Today, on International Women's Day, we are provided with an opportunity and a platform to step-up, be bold and drive transformative change in society so that no one, especially women and girls, is left behind.

The aspiration of seeking genuine gender equality is echoed by the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals – to which we all ascribe. The SDGs seek to address

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critical challenges of poverty, inequality and violence against women. Gender equality and women's empowerment are fundamental to achieving all 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals. And SDG 5, which is the principal goal focusing on women's empowerment, is solely dedicated empowering women in the effort to reaching the aspirations of Sustainable Development Agenda.

But it is not only for female parliamentarians to carry the torch for gender equality and gender parity in our legislatures, it is for all parliamentarians, including men to champion our Commonwealth values of inclusion and gender equality.

That is why, as CWP, we are seeking out male champions of gender equality to be agents of change in our collective efforts to encourage greater female political participation.

On International Women's Day, although acknowledging our challenges is important, we are also here to **celebrate successes** in this endeavour.

Rwanda is the global first when it comes to the number of women in Parliament.

- In fact, women currently hold 61.3% of the seats in the Parliament of Rwanda.
- Seychelles has reached an admirable 43.8% of women in Parliament.
- The Parliament of South Africa has 42% of women in Parliament.
- And Namibia has achieved 41.4% of women in Parliament

These inspiring examples of what is possible should energise us all to deliver change in our own jurisdictions.

I urge you to use Parliament itself as a public institution and a vehicle of change, to set an example for all of society to follow by raising awareness of gender issues facing women and girls across the Commonwealth.

I urge you to draw upon your energy, commitment and values, not only as Parliamentarians, but also as Commonwealth citizens to build on our successes and embark on a journey to greater gender equality across our 180 Commonwealth legislatures.

What seemed unthinkable in centuries past – such as a woman's right to vote – became a reality. What seems unthinkable today - such as breaking the glass ceiling and reaching complete gender parity in parliament – can, and will happen.

To reach this goal, this vision, this aspiration – we have to stand together and be bold for change.

In the words of Michelle Bachelet, former President of Chile and Head of UN Women:

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“A better democracy is a democracy where women do not only have the right to vote and to elect, but to be elected.”

I wish you all an inspiring International Women’s Day and urge you all to be bold for change in seeking gender equality in in Parliament, and in all aspects of life.

-Ends-

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; 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 and helping parliaments to become gender-sensitive institutions.

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.

Visit www.cpahq.org/cpahq/cwp for further information.

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