



2017

*Address by*

*The Honourable Bridgid Mary Annisette- George, MP  
Speaker of the House of Representatives*

*at the*

*18th Biennial Conference of Presiding Officers and  
Clerks of the Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic  
Region of the Commonwealth Parliamentary  
Association*

*Magdalena Grand Hotel Tobago*

*August 13-17, 2017*



## Salutations

- **The Chief Secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly-  
Assemblyman Kelvin Charles**
- **The Vice President of the Senate of Trinidad and Tobago  
Senator Nigel de Freitas**
- **Government Ministers and Members of the Executive  
Committee of the Trinidad and Tobago Branch of the  
Commonwealth Parliamentary Association**
- **Presiding Officers of the Parliaments and the Legislative  
Assemblies of the Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region  
of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association**
- **The Presiding Officer of the Tobago Assembly Legislature-  
Dr. Denise Tsoiafatt Angus**
- **Assemblymen and Councillors of the Tobago Assembly  
Legislature**
- **Clerks of the Parliaments and Legislative  
Assemblies of the Caribbean, Americas and the  
Atlantic Region**



- **Representatives of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association**
- **Guests**
- **Members of the Media**
- **The Staff of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago and of the Tobago Assembly Legislature\**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen.**

**Good morning!**



- **Antigua & Barbuda**
- **The Commonwealth of Bahamas**
- **Barbados**
- **Bermuda**
- **The Cayman Islands**
- **Dominica**
- **Grenada**
- **Guyana**
- **Jamaica**
- **Montserrat**
- **Nevis Island**
- **St Kitts and Nevis**
- **St Lucia**
- **Turks & Caicos Islands**
- **Trinidad and Tobago**



It is my distinct honour on behalf of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago and on my own behalf to welcome you all to the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and more particularly to what in a marriage one spouse may refer to as the other as one's "*better half*", the paradise Island of Tobago, on the occasion of the 18<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference of Presiding Officers and Clerks of the Caribbean Americas and Atlantic Region of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (the CPA).

I must confess my vaulting exuberance at this Opening Ceremony as this Conference affords the opportunity for those of us who stand in our various jurisdictions as the apex of democracy, as the actual symbol of the authority of the Legislature in our capacity as the Presiding Officer and as its Chief Operational Officer of its administration- The Clerk- to consider and collaborate on some of the issues which confront our Legislatures and Assemblies, and through our exchanges to create solutions which redound to the benefit and advancement of democracy.

Although it may not be ever present in the minds of our respective citizens, second to the process of free and fair elections, the roles and



functions which we perform and the efficacy with which we are called upon to do so enhance the quality of our democracy.

While it is true when compared to the life of our respective Legislatures and Assemblies many of us in our roles of Presiding Officers may be new as some Parliaments or Assemblies may not have as yet been convened since Elections and in other cases we may be just about approaching the 2nd year mark, I hasten to add, that in any event, many of us are not first time Legislators and therefore from participation from one side or the other of the Parliamentary Well, we have made observations regarding the application of the parliamentary practice and procedure particularly as relates to the exercise of the role and function of the Presiding Officer. Additionally our Clerks at the Table bring a treasure trove of experience to our assistance.

Admittedly, I have employed no scientific measure, but I am prepared to take the liberty to state that collectively we have gathered here at least 100 years of experience in parliamentary practice and procedure in the Region. My confidence may steer me to add to my calculation “Q.E.D.” but prudence dictates that I should place reliance instead on the abbreviation “E&OE”.



Our presence here speaks volumes. Our ability to reorganise our respective schedules and respond on short notice to the call to gather during our parliamentary recess is testimony to our commitment and dedication not just only to our Societies but to our Region and the CPA of which we are all members.

For the benefit of others in our listening audience, permit me to digress a tad to pre-empt the possibility of any misconception - parliamentary recess for Presiding Officers, Legislators and Clerks bears no resemblance to recess at school- at no time does our business allow for play.

The CPA comprises of 181 member Parliaments and Assemblies in 9 Regions across the globe; the Caribbean, Americas and the Atlantic is one of those 9 Regions and I am happy to report from the roll call in which I engaged at the commencement of my remarks that of the 19 Branches which comprise our Region 15 are represented at this Conference.



By way of providing context we may recall that section 1 of the Constitution of the CPA sets out its ration d'être, which is, and I quote,

*“to promote knowledge of the constitutional social and cultural aspects of parliamentary democracy” End Quote.*

I think it is important for us to set the stage for the commencement of our deliberations by stating in some detail the underpinnings of CPA activities, such as this one in which we are about to engage over the next few days, so that not only its import to us individually is appreciated but also its contribution to the Commonwealth and by extension the world.

The underpinnings are as follows:

- 1. Commonwealth Parliamentarians irrespective of gender race religion or culture share a community of interest based on respect for the positive ideals of parliamentary democracy, the rule of law and individual rights and freedoms;*



2. *The governance of Commonwealth citizens will benefit by exposing political practitioners to the many different policies procedures and systems employed by other practitioners on a Commonwealth regional basis;*
  
3. *Although the Westminster-style parliamentary system is dominant, all Commonwealth Assemblies contribute to the continuing evolution of democratic methods of governance based on their own cultures, socials traditions and levels of development so that no single institution or country is seen as pre-eminent and no individual practice is universally applicable without local adaptation; and*
  
4. *Political, constitutional and procedural consultations are most effectively conducted by facilitating contact between Members and officials of Parliaments and Legislatures and through full and frank discussions unfettered by intergovernmental decision-making.*



We too as members of the CPA shall be guided by those principles doing our Conference. Our theme - *Parliamentary Accountability and Governance - Comparing Institutional Designs* prima facie demonstrates this.

Under the rubric, which speaks of Accountability and Governance, it is manifested that we shall engage in the business of Parliament and Assemblies that is the legislative, oversight, budgetary and representative functions.

We shall discuss inter alia topics such as:

- **The Committee System in Small Parliaments-meeting the challenges**
- **Parliamentary Leadership: Strengthening Accountability**
- **Improving relations between Parliaments and Society**
- **Strategic Planning- a starting point for building effective Parliaments**



➤ **The adequacy of Administrative support for the management of the Legislative Branch in small island States**

The rubric “*Comparing institutional designs*” bears credence to the “life blood” that is cultural diversity, which is integral to and which should inform all legitimate institutions and systems. It also commits us to the respectful regard, which we should all demonstrate to our differences, so we compare institution designs and not dictate a universal model. We all have something to inform the other and by corollary we all have something to learn from the other.

In addition to the learnings, on a personal note the “getting to know you” is of parallel significance to me. Our conference is a springboard for re-igniting established networks with the new personalities. In the brief interactions which I have had with most of you, upon arrivals yesterday assures me of the camaraderie which already exists amongst strangers with shared interests, committed to the same cause of promoting strong democratic institutions.



Yes we have our Standing Orders, we have our learned Clerks and we have texts such as Erskin May's Parliamentary Practice and Procedure but sometimes we do need a willing experienced empathetic trusting ear to which we can turn for not only advice but at times solace-someone who, so to speak, wears shoes similar to ours, even if not the same size! That is invaluable.

The Conference additionally seeks to engage our public in a topical environmental issue. On Wednesday morning at 10:00am the Lecture Series shall present Mr. Kishan Kumarsingh, a regional expert of international acclaim, who shall speak of *the Geopolitical Responses to Climate Change*. The public is invited and I expect that in "true true" Tobagonian style, citizens shall avail themselves of the opportunity to attend, to listen and to show support to the work of our Regional Presiding Officers and Clerks at the Table.

At the risk of being interrupted by a Presiding Officer duly guided by his or her Clerk on the Point of Order regarding time limits on speaking, I wish to crave your indulgence a little longer and invoke a



request for an extension of my speaking time to treat with two final matters.

Firstly I extend apologies on behalf of the President of the Senate of Trinidad and Tobago, who has had to respond to the call to perform the higher duty as Head of State and regrettably cannot join us but who has asked me to convey her best wishes to each of you for a successful conference.

Secondly it shall be remiss of me if I fail to specifically recognize the contribution, eager interest and generous participation of the Presiding Officer, the Assemblymen and Councillors of the Assembly Legislature, the Staff of the Tobago House of Assembly, the Clerks of both Houses and the Staff of Trinidad and Tobago Parliament in doing all the preparatory work to ensure the success of our deliberations.

In giving “*jack his jacket and jim his jim boots*” (and I am taking some cultural latitude there) let me admit that from here onwards we can be assured of the best that hospitality has to offer Tobago style and Madam



Presiding Officer of Assembly Legislature, outside of the programme, I say, we are now entirely in your hands.

*Morgan Wootten*, a high school basketball coaching legend whose successes were featured in the film *“The Godfather of Basketball”* has been quoted as describing the work of a coach as follows, and I quote:

*“That’s the beauty of coaching. You get to touch lives, you get to make a difference, You get to do things for people who will never pay you back and they say you never have had a perfect day until you’ve done something for someone who will never pay you back.”* End quote.

I am of the view that that statement is equally applicable to our work of and in the Legislature.

*Every day is a perfect day, for inherent in what we do fairly diligently, effectively and efficiently, we get to do something for our citizens for which we will never be paid back and for which we have no expectation of repayment.*



Honourable Presiding Officers and esteemed Clerks at the Table, with the greatest of respect I say time is precious so **LET'S GET TO WORK!**

**I thank you!**

\*\*\*END\*\*\*