



Press Release

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Virtual 49th BIMR conference concluded

The two-day 49th British Isles and Mediterranean Region (BIMR) conference, hosted virtually by the Maltese Parliament, came to an end this afternoon. Following opening addresses by Speaker of the House of Representatives Anġlu Farrugia, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Cameroon and Chairperson of the CPA Emilia Monjowa Lifaka, and newly elected CPA Secretary-General Stephen Twigg, the conference was subdivided into three sessions plenary sessions and two breakout sessions.

The Maltese delegation was led by Speaker Anġlu Farrugia and was comprised of Deputy Speaker Claudette Buttigieg and Maltese BIMR Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians representative Justyne Caruana.

At the start of session 1, moderated by Speaker Anġlu Farrugia, a keynote speech was delivered by Deputy Kevin Pamplin from the States of Jersey, who shared a detailed report of Jersey's journey through the pandemic. He stated that a number of weeks in lockdown were required in Jersey to keep the situation under control. Speaker Farrugia also mentioned a number of measures which were introduced in Malta when the cases started increasing. The participants who participated in the debate which followed described the measures taken in their jurisdictions in response to the Covid-19 crisis.

During session 2 moderated by Justyne Caruana, the MPs taking part in the debate following a keynote address by Rt Maria Miller, former UK Minister for Women and Equalities and Chair of the UK Parliament's Women and Equalities Committee remarked on the fact that the pandemic has had a great impact on women in various aspects of their lives. It was argued that women are more likely to be in precarious employment that could also be terminated due to the pandemic. Other impacts which affect women disproportionately are school and nursery closures requiring home-schooling and the demand on women to give greater attention to their elderly. The impact on mothers-to-be and the access to the fathers or other partners during childbirth and during the ante-natal phase were also discussed.

Rhun ap Iorwerth, Chair of the Wales CPA Branch, addressed the third and final plenary session led by Claudette Buttigieg on whether the innovations introduced in response to Covid-19 made parliaments more resilient and whether these can make parliaments more open and accessible. In his keynote speech, Rhun ap Iorwerth described that the Welsh Assembly had adopted its rules and procedures to be able to meet virtually, initially available to a number of deputies and eventually to all deputies. He remarked that this development was well-received and the deputies themselves have

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adapted well to this new reality. He concluded that whilst these innovations were making parliaments more efficient, an online setting could be a lonely business and attention needs to be given to the social and mental well-being of MPs and staff. A number of issues were raised during the discussions, including the access to the right technologies and technical know-how of the legislators, as well as the impact on the contact between deputies and their constituents.

In addition to the plenary sessions, two smaller breakout sessions discussed whether parliaments have been sufficiently flexible to enact urgent Covid-19 related legislation and the economic impact of Covid-19 on small jurisdictions.

Concluding the conference attended by CPA Branches of Alderney, Cyprus, the Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, Guernsey, the Isle of Man, Jersey, Malta, Northern Ireland, Scotland, St Helena, the UK, and Wales, Speaker Farrugia thanked the participants for making this first fully-virtual inter-parliamentary conference hosted by the Maltese Parliament a success. He said that the discussions held during the sessions will surely serve as a basis for future discussions on how parliaments can become more resilient when faced with unforeseen circumstances which can materially impact their ability to function effectively.

The 50th BIMR conference is scheduled to be hosted by the Northern Ireland branch of the BIMR in 2021.