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Maltese parliamentarians participate in the 41st Small Branches Conference and the 9th Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians

Parliamentarians from across the Commonwealth met at the 41st Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Small Branches Conference to examine how to shape the future for CPA Small Branches and to strengthen parliamentary independence in small jurisdictions.

A Maltese parliamentary delegation, led by Deputy Speaker David Agius and including MP Davina Sammut Hili and MP Graziella Attard Previ, participated in various sessions and debates organised by the CPA Small Branches.

Deputy Speaker David Agius was the keynote speaker during a session on the impact of colonialism on human rights in Commonwealth jurisdictions. He provided a brief historical overview of Malta's experience under British rule and noted that there are essentially two contrasting schools of thought regarding colonialism's influence on the Maltese population, particularly in relation to human rights.

Deputy Speaker Agius explained that in recent years, Malta has followed a European path, beginning with its independence in 1964. In terms of human rights, Malta became a member of the Council of Europe and later joined the European Union. He emphasized that Maltese citizens have the right to appeal to the European Court of Human Rights if they believe their rights have been violated, after exhausting all national legal remedies. During the exchange of views, the Deputy Speaker referred to the ongoing situations in Gaza and Ukraine, highlighting how human rights—including those of children—are being violated without regard. He urged the Commonwealth to take action and respond to these devastating circumstances.

During the same session, MP Graziella Attard Previ stated that Commonwealth jurisdictions should not rely on colonial-era laws still embedded in their national legislation to justify the criminalisation of same-sex relations. She appealed to these jurisdictions, emphasizing that they have the power to repeal such laws and uphold the human rights and protection of LGBTIQ individuals.

She reiterated that LGBTIQ rights are human rights, and there should be no excuse for maintaining legislation that deprives individuals of these rights. The responsibility to change such laws lies solely and squarely with each jurisdiction. MP Attard Previ encouraged these jurisdictions to take the right step forward and grant LGBTIQ individuals the rights and protections they deserve.

During the debate on work-life balance, professional development and mental health for parliamentarians, MP Davina Sammut Hili participated in a roundtable session in which she shared her views on how work-life balance



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should not be considered as a luxury but as a necessity. She also stated that professional development must be continuous as the world is evolving at a fast pace and it is impossible to keep up. She also pointed out that mental health deserves an open dialogue and institutional support. MP Sammut Hili concluded by stating that a healthy parliamentarian translates into a more effective parliament.

In parallel with the CPA Small Branches Conference, Parliamentarians convened to discuss women's representation in parliaments, among other important topics. During a session entitled 'Debate Not Hate: Not Accepting Abuse as an Outcome of Free Speech', MP Graziella Attard Previ focused her intervention on online gender-based violence.

Emphasising that cyber violence against women and girls is a growing global issue, she highlighted the need for legislation to be strictly aligned with enforcement, even in cases that span across different jurisdictions. She stressed that education is a key preventive measure—citing the importance of preparing and informing children from a young age about safe, respectful, and responsible use of social media. She noted that if future generations are better equipped to navigate online platforms, society can look forward to a safer digital environment.

The Maltese Parliamentary delegation is also participating in various workshops of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference. The Conference will come at a conclusion with the annual general assembly.