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PRESS RELEASE BY THE OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

Maltese Parliamentary Delegation participates in Commonwealth Small Branches and Women Parliamentarians Conferences in Cape Town

A Maltese parliamentary delegation led by Speaker of the House of Representatives Carmelo Abela and comprised of Members of Parliament Fleur Abela and Ian Vassallo is participating in the 42nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Small Branches Conference and the 10th Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Conference, currently being held in Cape Town, South Africa.

The two meetings form part of the wider 69th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC), which is bringing together Speakers, Members of Parliament and parliamentary officials from across the Commonwealth. The Small Branches Conference, held under the theme "*Supporting Independent and Resilient Parliaments in the Commonwealth*", provides a dedicated forum for parliamentarians from smaller jurisdictions to discuss the opportunities and challenges faced by their legislatures. Discussions have addressed issues including the separation of powers, parliamentary budget offices and strengthening the capacity and resilience of smaller Parliaments.

Speaker Carmelo Abela spoke about democracy in smaller jurisdictions and how separation of powers are more challenging to small countries. He emphasised that the smaller the country, the greater the importance in ensuring that no single institution becomes too powerful. The Speaker highlighted the importance of ensuring that the specific circumstances of small jurisdictions are reflected in wider Commonwealth parliamentary discussions.

The delegation also participated in the 10th Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Conference, whose theme is "*Making Gender Sensitivity an Institutional Mandate: Ethics, accountability and structural change*". The Conference examined how Parliaments can strengthen gender equality not only through representation, but by embedding gender sensitivity within parliamentary structures, procedures, policies and institutional culture.

Fleur Abela was invited to address the delegates during one of the sessions of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians. Recalling her previous roles serving abroad and her present role as a member of Parliament, she focused her intervention on the role of women parliamentarians, emphasising their "responsibility in ensuring that next generation's women inherit democratic institutions in which their dignity, voice and fundamental rights are protected and respected."

During a side event on Strengthening Parliamentary Action for Women's Children's and Adolescents' Health, Ian Vassallo spoke about the importance of exchange of experiences during these fora, and he shared Malta's experience in relation to sexual health policy and the advances made in the sector. He also discussed the effect

on the quality of life of people in the cohort, mental health, and future advances needed to be incorporated in education and prevention on national and community level.

In addition, Speaker Abela mentioned that access to public healthcare is free of charge and as such this guarantees access to the system. He also pointed out that Parliament has a specific Standing Committee on Health matters. Finally, he pointed out the responsibility that every nation has to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations when it comes to the issue of health, both on a national and global level.

During a joint session of the CPA Small branches and the CWP, which dealt with inclusivity measures in capacity-strained Parliaments, Speaker Abela spoke of the work done by the Maltese Parliament to achieve autonomy, and how this allows Parliament to manage its own budget, independently from the Executive. He also mentioned measures being taken with regard to childminding which will assist all Members of Parliament who have young children.

Participation in these specialised meetings forms part of Malta's wider contribution to the 69th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference and reflects Malta's commitment to parliamentary diplomacy, democratic resilience and cooperation between Commonwealth legislatures.

The Maltese delegation welcomed the opportunity to contribute to discussions taking place among Commonwealth Parliaments and to share Malta's experience and strengthen parliamentary relations as a Commonwealth jurisdiction.