

Good Evening,

Firstly, I would like to thank my fellow presenters for their excellent remarks, and I wish to echo their thanks to those individuals who have worked so hard to produce what is an outstanding document that I have no doubt will go on to have a huge impact going forward.

It fills me with great excitement to address such a distinguished audience on such a significant occasion for Parliamentary Democracy in the Commonwealth.

I have been involved with the work of the CPA for over two decades now, so I recall well the original development of the CPA Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures in 2006, hosted by our colleagues in the Legislature of Bermuda. Since the inaugural publication in 2006, these Benchmarks have been on a journey that has seen them become established as one of the foremost standards of Parliamentary Democracy in the Commonwealth, and in the wider global parliamentary community.

As Chairperson of the CPA's Small Branches Network, it has been a privilege to have been so closely involved in this latest milestone for the Benchmarks programme, which now spans over a decade.

The journey towards these newly updated CPA Benchmarks began in 2014, with the outcomes of two Regional Assessment Workshops, the first for the CPA Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region and the second held in the CPA South-East Asia Region, leading to conclusions that there was a need to re-visit the Recommended Benchmarks in order to make them more relevant to Parliaments today.

In 2016, the CPA in collaboration with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy convened a meeting of International Organisations who were involved in the development of the original Benchmarks. This meeting included representatives from the United Nations Development Programme - UNDP, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development - OECD, the World Bank Group and the National Democratic Institute.

The resulting draft set of updated benchmarks was subsequently discussed and reviewed at a wider consultation meeting that took place at Wilton Park, West Sussex, United Kingdom in June of this year.

I was fortunate to participate at Wilton Park, and to witness the continuing development of these new Parliamentary Benchmarks, where particular amendments were also included by the 2018 study group that noted the recent developed applicable guidelines in Malta including for e.g. the applicable guidelines to witnesses appearing

before the Parliamentary Committees. So yes, the meeting was a wonderful example of the strength of the CPA's network and the depth of knowledge within our membership, and of our distinguished partners within the Commonwealth Partnership for Democracy, CP4D.

The discussions drew together representatives from across six of the nine CPA regions, including both active Parliamentarians and Parliamentary Staff, and welcomed expert voices from other International Organisations whose collective expertise contributed to the success of this meeting and the outcome product we launch this evening. We now have a set of benchmarks that has gender inclusion embedded throughout - reflecting the shared belief that a modern Parliament must be a true reflection of the society it represents.

Their support in our shared endeavour will continue to be key as we drive forward this ambitious project.

We also now have a set of Benchmarks that are fit for the future, aligned with the Commonwealth Charter and United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 16. The Benchmarks are a tool with the potential to transform Parliamentary governance across the Commonwealth and improve the lives of millions.

Before closing, I would also like to mention the involvement of the Parliament of Malta in the work to develop a Field Guide to assist Parliaments to assess themselves against the Benchmarks. As the Speaker of the Maltese Parliament, I welcome this opportunity to further implement the Benchmarks and I would encourage other Presiding Officers who are here today to consider assessing their Parliaments against the CPA Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures.

Distinguished Delegates, allow me to finish by thanking you all for being here tonight on this very special occasion and thanking all those involved in the production of these updated CPA Benchmarks. And, of course, thanking the CPA and the WFD for hosting us tonight.

I wish you a pleasant evening and look forward to carrying on the conversation with you all in the coming days.

Thank you.