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The Speaker

COMMONWEALTH DAY

“A Connected Commonwealth”

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Houses of Parliament

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Keynote Address and Introduction to the Commonwealth Day Theme:

“A Connected Commonwealth”

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Small Branches Chairperson

Hon. Speaker Angelo Farrugia

- Honourable Chairperson of the CPA, Ms Emilia Monjowa Lifaka, MP
- Mr James Duddridge, MP, Chair of the CPA UK Executive Committee
- The Lord Chidgey, Co-Chair of the Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Party Committee on International Affairs (DfID)
- Helen Goodman MP, Member for Bishop Auckland
- Mr Akbar Khan, CPA Secretary-General
- Honourable Members of Parliament
- Commonwealth Day Participants
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning,

It is an honour and a privilege to be here with you today to celebrate this year's Commonwealth Day.

My name is Angelo Farrugia. I am the Speaker of the Parliament of Malta, and also the Chairperson of the Small Branches Network of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association – the CPA. The CPA Small Branches are 43 jurisdictions within the Commonwealth with populations of up to 500,000 people.

We are here today to discuss a very important topic: climate change. In October last year, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its latest report. It warned us that we only have 12 years left to act for global warming to be kept to a maximum of 1.5 C. Beyond this temperature, the report says, even half a degree will significantly increase the risks of drought, floods, extreme heat and poverty for hundreds of millions of people. However, the urgent and unprecedented changes we need to implement to prevent this rise in temperature are affordable and feasible.

I stand here, before you, as the Speaker of the Parliament of Malta, a small island nation in the Mediterranean Sea. Climate change is a global challenge, which means that we all can make a difference to tackle it.

As a Speaker of a Small Island State, I can testify to that. In Malta, we changed the main source of energy of our power stations which were dependent on coal and heavy fuels within the period of three years to clean gas production. The station is now powered by up to 75 per cent clean energy.

Malta subsequently presented a report to the European Union on how the country deals with the challenges defined in the Paris Agreement, which was endorsed by all the European Environmental Ministers. Consequently, they agreed to meet the challenges by 2025, 2030 and 2040, respectively.

Everyone can lead by example – even small states. I dare to say, **especially** small states, given that they can organise themselves much more flexibly, being small.

However, we all know that if we cannot involve and inspire others, we will not be able to succeed as a global community to mitigate the threat of climate change. The urgency of the issue, however, can be seen as an unprecedented opportunity to move nations closer together and unite them in a common endeavour.

As nations of the Commonwealth, we belong to a much bigger framework than just our individual nations. For some of you, the Commonwealth might only have historic value. But let me tell you, it is much more than that.

What has the Commonwealth done so far to mitigate against Climate Change? And how can we, the citizens of the Commonwealth, ensure that these commitments are adhered to and that our targets are constantly evolving and adapting to the goals we need to have in place to ensure the health of our planet?

Firstly, as the Speaker of a small member state of the Commonwealth, I am proud to say that the Commonwealth has long been a great source of support to its small member states through global advocacy on a policy level. From the Commonwealth Langkawi Declaration on the Environment in 1989 to the 2015 climate commitment by leaders in my own country, Malta, it has intervened to strengthen the voice of Small States and unite its members to address the existential threat of climate change.

As Small States, we also share knowledge amongst ourselves: Mauritius, for example, shared valuable marine protection know-how with other Commonwealth countries, using the Commonwealth Blue Charter as a platform to exchange best practice. As one of the ‘champion’ countries of the Commonwealth Blue Charter, adopted by 53 countries in April 2018, it co-leads an action group on coral reef restoration along with Australia and Belize. The Commonwealth Blue Charter is an agreement by all 53 Commonwealth countries to actively co-operate to solve ocean-related problems and meet commitments for sustainable ocean development.

While the Commonwealth works with governments, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) is the Commonwealth body which focuses on strengthening the institution of Parliament, individual Parliamentarians and the development of parliamentary staff.

In the area of Climate Change, the CPA focuses on the role Parliamentarians can assume to ensure that governments adhere to their international commitments and enable national action plans to mitigate against Climate Change. The CPA furthermore takes into account that Parliamentarians

are the ones who see how legislation is implemented on the ground and those who ensure that Climate Change is mainstreamed across all areas of government.

As Chairperson of the Small Branches of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, I am proud to say that the CPA has always had a pioneering role in equipping Parliamentarians to deal with the challenge of Climate Change.

In doing this, the CPA has been generously assisted in this work with our many partners, including the Commonwealth Secretariat, the World Bank, and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

I would also like to mention a Commonwealth initiative my own country is hosting: The Commonwealth Small States Centre of Excellence. The Centre is a predominantly web-based entity established to support and provide capacity-building programmes to Small States in their attainment of national and international development goals. The Centre is a joint initiative of the Government of Malta and the Commonwealth Secretariat. The priority areas of the Centre for Small States' development include natural disaster management and mitigation and ocean governance.

So, where do you come in in all of this? I would like to encourage you to think about something in the field of environment where your country is a leader, and then share this with your colleagues here today. I would also like you to identify what your country could do better, and listen your counterparts' experiences in their countries. If you can, I would encourage you to relate them to an international, Commonwealth-wide commitment your country has made.

Try to talk to more than one person and take note of those initiatives you think could be trialled in your country as well. And when you are back home, reach out to your representative, either through requesting a surgery or organising a community meeting, inviting your MP. This way, you can maximize grassroots awareness by telling your MP and peers what you have learned, inspiring community action. Lastly, you can offer to connect them with the representative of another country who has worked on similar initiatives, through your colleagues you have met here, providing they are also reaching out to their representative.

While we need the necessary systemic actions, as I call them, we also should not underestimate the power of the individual.

You are all here as individuals, representing your respective jurisdictions. You might think the only way to inspire action is lobbying your parliamentary representative to ensure that your country has the right rules and regulations in place.

As a politician, I partly agree that rules and regulations are important to give our initiatives the right incentives and framework. In fact, we have to continually adapt legislation and work together to tackle Climate Change. However, what we forget when we look at the bigger picture is that we all have power individually to achieve lasting change by being a role model for others and to inspire our peers.

As some of you will know, Greta Thunberg, a Swedish political activist, became a prominent figure for starting the first school strike for climate outside the Swedish parliament building. In December 2018 she addressed the United Nations Climate Change Conference.

Holding us politicians to account is what we expect from our youth. In the same vein, this is not the only way of engaging in saving our planet. We can also inspire by taking individual, powerful actions in our daily lives. These actions range from buying appliances that are more energy efficient, switching to green electricity to using public transport instead of driving.

These things might seem small on the surface. However, if we take them up ourselves and inspire others to the same, we can have a big impact together. We as politicians can provide incentives to support the choices you make, such as tax cuts for renewable heating systems and green energy.

We, the politicians, need you as much as you need us to create lasting change; it is our collective responsibility. The only difference is that you, the young people, have higher stakes in this endeavour, since you are going to live longer and see more of the consequences of the lack of actions we are not taking today. Taking individual action whilst acknowledging our joint responsibility is the key to success.

Let me share an example to illustrate this. As I have already mentioned, I am not only the Speaker of Malta, but also the Chairperson of the Small Branches Network of the CPA.

Representatives of the Small Branches met in October of last year in Nairobi, Kenya at the United Nations Environment Programme Headquarters to discuss what Parliamentarians can do to mitigate against the effects of Climate Change. Most of you will know that Small States suffer most of the effects of the bigger polluters. How, then, can we be proactive in this field given our size and our limited emissions? When we discussed those matters with the UN Environment Programme, it became clear that especially we as Small Branches are the perfect environments to trial new technologies to cope with the challenge. This means that we, as Small States, can serve as role models to the international community in the field of climate change.

As I said to my fellow Parliamentarians in Nairobi, the case for action is not something we can hold off or debate. As the former UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, said: "There is no plan B because there is no planet B." The time for action is now.

To conclude, I would like to leave you with two questions:

- Firstly, I would like you to pause for a minute and imagine what we could all achieve if we acted together.

- Secondly, imagine yourself with your children and grandchildren. What will we tell them if we do not act, while we still have time to do so?

Thank you very much.