

## **Introduction**

1. From 3-6 April 2023 we gathered at the House of Assembly in Anguilla as Speakers from Anguilla, Bermuda, Cayman Islands, Falkland Islands, Montserrat, Saint Helena, Turks and Caicos Islands and the UK House of Commons for the second in person Speaker-led conference and the first to be held in an Overseas Territory.
2. We reaffirmed the central role played by legislatures in democratic life, our commitment to the principles of democracy in our legislatures, the sacredness of democracy and the need for partnership to sustain it.
3. As our legislatures bring together all components of society, they are the cornerstones of democratic governance; they represent the wills and expressions of the people through scrutiny and the democratic process.

## **Parliamentary buildings**

4. Strong legislatures, based within physical, separate, accessible buildings are the bedrock of democracy and essential for the development and prosperity of our citizens.
5. We welcome the financial commitment from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office for a parliamentary building in Montserrat.
6. We ask for emergency action be taken to make the meeting place for the Legislative Council of Saint Helena fully accessible to ensure that Members can undertake their democratic duties.
7. We repeat our call to provide ring-fenced parliamentary funding so that Anguilla, St Helena and the British Virgin Islands can have dedicated buildings in which to carry out their activities and duties; this would ensure such funding is not postponed or cancelled in the face of competing priorities.

## **Deepening our parliamentary democracy**

8. We commit to deepening parliament democracy within each of the Overseas Territory legislatures with a key milestone of 2030 for embedding good practice.
9. We recognise the role that the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures has in helping us achieve good governance and deepening our democracy, and therefore by 2030 we will have passed our version of the 'CPA Model Law' and have, for each Overseas Territory
  - a. An established and active Corporate Body/Commission to lead Parliament that
    - i. is cross-party and Chaired by the Speaker.
    - ii. includes the Clerk as a member/secretary to the Commission.

- b. Provisions to ensure the independence of the Commissions and to stipulate their powers.
- c. An established Parliamentary Service with delineated functions.
- d. Financial autonomy, powers, revenue raising and accountability mechanisms.
- e. Defined pay and remuneration rules and principles for staff hired by the Commission

### **Creating a Modern relationship with the UK**

- 10. Through various forms the UK has had a relationship with what are now called the British Overseas Territories since the 1600s. Now in the 2020s we need to take this relationship to a new modern and forward-thinking way of working together.
- 11. We recognise that to create a modern relationship with the United Kingdom the role of Governor needs to be clearly defined and we commit to bring ideas about how this could look to COTSC 2024 after consultation with others in our territories.
- 12. The role of the Privy Council has a significant impact on the British Overseas Territories including the way our legislatures work, but we have no representation on it. We call for each territory to be given representation.

### **Financial Affairs**

- 13. Financial autonomy allows each parliament to function independently of other branches of government and special interest groups and ensures the focus is firmly on its core functions of law making, oversight, and representation. This autonomy is essential to ensuring that the parliament can conduct its functions without undue influence from external forces.
- 14. By 2030 we will have embedded financial autonomy from the Executive and ensured that we have deepened our democracy.

### **Scrutiny**

- 15. The scrutiny role of a parliament is critical in ensuring that a government remains accountable to the people and that democracy is upheld. It is a fundamental part of the checks and balances system that helps prevent abuses of power and maintains the integrity of the democratic process.
- 16. Public money raised and spent by a territory's government, or their public bodies, should be scrutinised without impediment by their Overseas Territories' legislature. We call on the UK and each Territory government to respect and commit to this fundamental principle so that people can have confidence in their democracy.

### **Parliamentary Service and Members Services**

17. An independent parliamentary service is important because it helps to ensure the impartiality, accuracy, and effectiveness of the parliamentary process. This service provides support and advice to parliamentarians, helping them to conduct their legislative and scrutiny functions in an informed and efficient manner.
18. By 2030 we will have transferred the management of the parliamentary service from the Territory Government.
19. Members need to have access to proper services and resources to carry out their democratic duties.
20. We will produce a report that outlines as a baseline the current level of resource and services provided to run the Legislatures of Overseas Territories and the mechanism for paying and remuneration for Members and Speakers.

### **Parliamentary Security**

21. Parliamentary security is essential to ensure the proper functioning of democratic institutions, protect against terrorism and other threats, safeguard sensitive information, and maintain public order.
22. Protests and demonstrations are a legitimate part of democratic society, but they can also pose a threat to parliamentary security if they become violent or disruptive. Proper security measures can help to ensure that protests are peaceful and do not pose a threat to the safety of parliamentarians or others.
23. Security for Parliamentarians in their constituencies is also an essential requirement.
24. We will commission in partnership with CPA a 'Parliament buildings security audit tool' to help us assess the risk and resource that is needed to protect the parliamentary buildings and those working and visiting them and any new building developments.

### **British Overseas Territories Youth Summit 2023**

25. We congratulate the Anguilla Youth Parliament for the initiative of bringing together young people from across the Territories in the first online Youth Summit.
26. We acknowledge the calls to action within their Communiqué and as Speakers will take steps to ensure these are met and will report back on progress at the next COTSC, including participation at the House of Commons UK Youth Parliament sitting.
27. The challenges that young people have presented in their communiqué are concerning and we resolved as Speakers to collectively write to the UK Government and each Territory government highlighting these challenges and asking that they be addressed.

**Close**

28. We welcomed the opportunity to come together as Commons and Overseas Territories Speakers and to have frank and open discussions on areas of mutual interest.
29. We are committed to working together to create a unique and modern partnership to strengthen parliamentary democracy. By working together there is much we can achieve.