Report on the 18th Conference of Commonwealth Speakers and Presiding Officers held in Kenya

January 2006

Hon Margaret Wilson MP, Speaker
Forty-eighth Parliament

Presented to the House of Representatives
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BACKGROUND

The 2005/06 official inter-parliamentary travel programme provided for the New Zealand Parliament’s attendance at the Conference of Commonwealth Speakers and Presiding Officers. Speakers of the House of Representative have regularly attended the conference because of the unique professional development opportunity it offers. Speakers from most Commonwealth countries are present, providing the opportunity for wide-ranging discussion and the exchange of many different views on the role and responsibilities of presiding officers.

The conference is held every two years, usually in early January. In alternate years the conference’s standing committee meets to confirm the venue and agenda for the next conference. The report of the standing committee meeting held in Singapore in January 2005 is attached as Appendix A. The meeting was attended by Rt Hon Jonathan Hunt, representing the Australia/New Zealand region.

INTRODUCTION

The 18th Commonwealth Speakers and Presiding Officers Conference was held in Nairobi, Kenya from 3 to 8 January 2006. It was attended by Speakers from 41 of the 55 Commonwealth countries. I attended as a member of the conference and the standing committee.

In the official delegation to the conference were Mary Harris, Deputy Clerk of the House of Representatives, and Rose Rigarlsford, Private Secretary to the Speaker.

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

The conference was opened by His Excellency the Honourable Mwai Kibaki CHG, MP, President of the Republic of Kenya. In his opening address he described parliament as the “supreme organ in any democracy”, in which the Speaker occupies a pivotal role.

He saw the conference providing an opportunity for presiding officers “to discuss relevant contemporary challenges” facing the Commonwealth. He emphasised “augmenting efforts towards strengthening the role of parliament” in democratic governance and noted the need for the international community to help support parliaments in developing democracies, through fostering the exchange of best practices. He also reminded Speakers of the need to be conversant with current issues of concern to their people.
He invited the conference to see the beauty of Kenya and experience the traditional warmth and hospitality of the Kenyan people.

A copy of President Kibaki’s opening address is included in Appendix B.

The host and Chairperson of the conference, the Honourable Francis Ole Kaparo EGH, MP, Speaker of the Kenya National Assembly, also addressed the conference during the opening session. He noted that this was the first time Kenya had hosted the conference and only the second time it had been held in Africa.

He saw the purpose of the conference being to discuss and discover commonality of interests. Through looking into the crucial role of the Speaker there is the opportunity to strengthen parliamentary institutions. As the principal officer of the House, the Speaker is the protector and defender of members’ rights, powers and privileges, the Speaker is “in a peculiar position to offer effective leadership to Parliament”. He noted the “stubborn impartiality” required to afford members sufficient opportunity to probe the Executive and address the House and contrasted this with the equally demanding responsibility of ensuring that procedures are not used in such a way as to subvert Government operations in the House. He concluded that such an “umpire role can make the Speaker to be a lonely person”.

The conference had three main topics:

- Integrity and security of parliamentary precincts
- Relationship between parliament and the executive
- Capacity building in parliament.

Each topic was discussed in a working session, led by a presenter.

**Integrity and security of parliamentary precincts**

Hon Michael Martin MP, Speaker of the House of Commons of the United Kingdom, presented a paper entitled *Security and Access – the Balance*. In his paper he addressed the obligation to take appropriate measures to ensure proper security for parliamentary staff and functions and the “desire to provide an appropriate welcome and meaningful experience for those visiting” Parliament.

He noted that the Serjeant-at-Arms is responsible to the Speaker for providing security and that in the last 100 years London’s Metropolitan Police have been “central to this responsibility, providing an establishment of police and security officers to control access points and patrol the Estate”. These arrangements had remained largely unchanged until the advent of 9/11 and more recent terrorism incidents in London.

A security review had been undertaken. A Security Coordinator covering both Houses had been appointed. The introduction of armed police officers, CCTV cameras, vehicle blockers, steel barriers and visitor passes had “altered the image and perception of the House of Commons”. He expressed concern that the introduction of measures such as the security screen in the gallery had “conspired to make a visit to the House a more negative experience”.

He noted that “security measures are relatively easy to impose but very difficult to remove”. The House of Commons had considered measures, adopted some and rejected others. In some circumstances the measures in place depended upon the perceived threat.

Hon Michael Martin outlined some of the innovations adopted:

- The appointment of visitor assistants, trained and employed to greet and look after visitors – to balance the presence of security officers
- The building of a visitor reception building designed to cater for security checks in a professional and congenial atmosphere
- An anticipated new visitor centre providing exhibitions and information about Parliament
- The provision of visitor badges to better enable recognition and assistance.

He saw the balance between security and access as a variable one dependent upon risk. He did not want to see “Parliament turned into a fortress – isolated from the nation”. In this respect, the House of Commons seeks the right balance, which is always subject to reassessment.

Discussion covered:

- Governance of parliamentary buildings
- Control of space and infrastructure to respond to changing needs
- Balancing security concerns with accessibility for the public to parliament and members.

Particular concern was expressed about the presence of armed security personnel and security arrangements accorded to prime ministers, and whether these should extend to the Chamber.

**Relationship between parliament and the executive**

Hon Shri Somnath Chatterjee, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, India, presented the keynote address. He began from the premise that “effectively ensuring accountability holds the key to the success and sustenance of democracy”. In examining the relationship between parliament and the executive he noted a vital aspect of the relationship – the fact that “the executive emerges out of parliament and remains in office only so long as it enjoys the confidence of the House”.

Hon Shri Somnath Chatterjee commented on the importance of the effective use of parliamentary committees in facilitating parliamentary oversight of administrative action. He noted that to ensure effective accountability, parliaments must have formal powers, institutional capacity, financial and administrative autonomy and support mechanisms and drew attention to the *Latimer House Principles on the Accountability of the Relationship between the Three Branches of Government*, which emphasise that parliamentary procedures should provide adequate mechanisms to enforce the accountability of the executive to parliament.
He considered that often parliaments lack access to resources and expertise. To function objectively and effectively, parliaments need to be financially and administratively independent of the executive. Again he referred to the *Latimer House Principles on the Accountability of the Relationship between the Three Branches of Government*, which establish that parliaments should have the freedom to determine their own budgets.

He outlined the budget arrangements for the Lok Sabha, where the independence of the secretariat of the Parliament “has been constitutionally ordained”. A budget committee is appointed by the Speaker, which consists of the Deputy Speaker, and the chairman of the Estimates Committee and the chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. The Speaker approves the parliamentary estimates, which are then incorporated in the Union Budget.

Interestingly, the Budget estimates of the Lok Sabha are not subject to examination by any department committee of the Ministry of Finance or by any committee of Parliament, nor any discussion on the floor of the House.

In reviewing how parliaments exercise their responsibilities, he quoted Rt Hon Don McKinnon, Commonwealth Secretary-General, who encouraged parliamentarians to exercise their responsibilities fearlessly in working to restore “the delicate balance between the legislature and the executive”, because “almost everywhere the balance has swung too far in the direction of the executive and away from the legislature”. Hon Shri Somnath Chatterjee concluded by reflecting that these are “onerous duties that we should perform” for the deepening of democracy.

Discussion covered:

- The independence of the process of parliamentary budgeting
- Ensuring effective legislative oversight and resourcing support systems.

**Capacity building in parliaments**

Hon David Hawker, Speaker of the Australian House of Representatives, and Mrs Syringa Marshall-Burnett, President of the Senate, Jamaica, presented papers.

Hon David Hawker reflected that capacity building has become “something of an industry” with many agencies being involved. In his presentation he focused on parliament-to-parliament contact. He looked first at orientation programmes for new members. The Australian House of Representatives programme takes a “big picture approach to assist members survive the early days as new members”. It covers topics such as:

- Parliament’s constitutional context
- Governance issues
- Parliament’s interaction with the community
- Electoral provisions
- Parliamentary committees
- Chamber operations.
Details of the House’s Opening Day are provided to assist new members through the ceremonies that are “so important to them and their families”, along with consideration of parliamentary traditions and guidance on preparing their first speech.

The Australian House of Representatives orientation programme also covers electorate and Parliament House offices and staff as well as the assistance that can be provided from the Parliamentary Library and maximising the benefits of technology. The programme seeks to minimise the risk of what “educators call an overloaded curriculum” in four ways:

- Provision of documentation, including DVDs for members’ later reference
- Regular seminars throughout the year on subjects such as privilege
- Conducting visits and surveys to assess further needs
- A members’ portal to provide easy access to electronic material.

Hon David Hawker also spoke of the regional approach the House of Representatives has adopted in the development of staff. He concluded by noting that the best source for parliamentary training is from experienced parliamentary staff. Interestingly, the Australian approach did not emphasise utilising experienced members in the induction of new members, an approach that our House has found works well.

Discussion covered:

- Orientation programmes for newly elected members
- The role of inter-parliamentary cooperation in the creation and training of a parliamentary service.

On this last point the Speaker of the Cook Islands Parliament, Hon Norman George, in discussing regional cooperation, drew attention to the very valuable assistance that the New Zealand Parliament provides to the Cook Islands Parliament and other Pacific Islands Parliaments.

**BUSINESS SESSION**

The business session dealt with two items:

- An amendment to the rules, proposed by India

The conference agreed an amendment to Rule 4, the effect of which was to add an additional region (India) to the regions that are represented on the standing committee. The India region will have one representative.

Hon Margaret Wilson was elected to the standing committee for 2006 – 2008 representing the Australia/New Zealand region. This follows the agreement reached with the Commonwealth Parliament of Australia for a system of rotation for filling the position, as follows:

- New Zealand House of Representative
- Australian Senate
- New Zealand House of Representatives
- Australian House of Representatives.

I attended the standing committee meeting in Nairobi, at which the proposed amendments to the rules and the conference agenda were considered. The next meeting of the standing committee will be held in the Bahamas in January 2007. The United Kingdom House of Commons and House of Lords will host the next conference in January 2008. India indicated that it would be willing to host the conference in 2010.

**CONCLUSION**

This was my first conference. While new to the conference’s proceedings I found the discussion valuable. I was also able to make many new contacts and thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to interact with so many fellow Speakers. Such conferences provide a very important opportunity for the professional development of presiding officers.

I extend my appreciation to the host and Chairperson of the conference, the Honourable Francis X ole Kaparo EGH, MP, Speaker of the Kenya National Assembly. The hospitality extended to our delegation by Mr Speaker and the staff of the Parliament made our visit a most memorable one.

Hon Margaret Wilson
Speaker
APPENDIX A

Report on the Standing Committee of the Conference of Commonwealth Speakers and Presiding Officers
Singapore
7-8 January 2005

INTRODUCTION

The standing committee meets every alternate year between the annual Conference of the Commonwealth Speakers and Presiding Officers and is responsible for setting the agenda for the annual conference as well as deciding on the venue to stage each conference. The mandate of Speakers on the standing committee lasts for two years, from the end of one conference to the end of the next conference. I was elected to the standing committee at the 2004 conference for the Australia/New Zealand region and a new standing committee will be elected at the end of the next conference in 2006.

STANDING COMMITTEE

The standing committee agreed that the 18th conference would be hosted by Kenya from 4–8 January 2006. The topics for the 2006 conference would be:

- integrity and security of parliamentary precincts
- the relationship between parliament and the executive
- capacity building in parliaments.

See Appendix for the minutes of the meeting.

CONCLUSION

I would like to extend my thanks and gratitude to the Hon Abdullah Tarmugi, Speaker of the Parliament, for the kind hospitality during our stay in Singapore.

Rt Hon Jonathan Hunt
Speaker
APPENDIX

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

FRIDAY, 7 JANUARY 2005

The Standing Committee of the Conference of Commonwealth Speakers and Presiding Officers met at 10:37 o’clock a.m., Friday, January 7, 2005 at the Parliament of Singapore, the Chairperson, the Hon. F. X. Ole Kaparo, Speaker of the Kenya National Assembly, presiding.

Members Present: from Bahamas: Hon. Sharon Wilson, President of the Senate; from Canada: Hon. Peter Milliken, Speaker of the House of Commons; from The Gambia: Hon. Sheriff Mustapha Dibba, Speaker of the National Assembly; from Kenya: Hon. F.X. Ole Kaparo, Speaker of the National Assembly; from Lesotho: Hon. N. Motsamai, Speaker of the National Assembly; from New Zealand: Rt. Hon. Jonathan Hunt, O.N.Z., Speaker of the House of Representatives; from Singapore: Hon. Abdullah Tarmugi, Speaker of Parliament; from Tonga: Hon. Tu’ivakano, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly; from Trinidad and Tobago: Hon. Barendra Sinanan, Speaker of the House of Representatives; from United Kingdom: Rt. Hon. Michael Martin, Speaker of the House of Commons.

In Attendance: from Bahamas: Mr. David Forbes, Assistant Clerk to the Legislature; from Canada: Mr. William C. Corbett, Clerk of the House of Commons; Ms. Marie-Andree Lajoie, Clerk Assistant of the House of Commons; Mr. Patrick Kennedy, Chief of Staff, Office of the Speaker; from The Gambia: Mr. Momodou Sellu Jallow, Clerk of the National Assembly; from Kenya: Mr. Samuel Ndindiri, Clerk of the National Assembly; Mr. Boniface Lenairoshi, Clerk Assistant of the National Assembly; from Lesotho: Ms. Libuseng Majoro, Assistant Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly; from New Zealand: Mr. Sean Rota, Private Secretary to the Speaker of the House of Representatives; from Singapore: Mr. P. O. Ram, Clerk of Parliament; Ms. Sheau Jiuan Ng, Deputy Clerk of Parliament; from Tonga: Ms. Fatai Pale, Clerk of the House; from Uganda: Hon. Nathan Nabeta, MP; Mr. Kagole Kivumbi, Public Relations
Manager, Parliament; from United Kingdom: Mr. Roger Sands, Clerk of the House of Commons; Mr. Peter Barratt, Assistant Secretary to the Speaker; Mr. Ian Davis, Speaker’s Trainbearer.

The Chairperson welcomed members of the Standing Committee and offered apologies for the following absences:

- From COOK ISLANDS: Mr. Speaker Norman George
- From INDIA, Mr. Speaker Chatterjee
- From UGANDA, Mr. Speaker Edward Ssekandi who has sent Mr. Nathan Nabeta, MP as an observer in his stead.

The Chairperson presented the draft agenda for the meeting.

On motion of Speaker Hunt, seconded by Speaker Tu’ivakano, it was agreed - That the agenda be adopted.

On motion of Speaker Milliken, seconded by Speaker Hunt, it was agreed - That the Minutes of the January 9, 2004 meeting of the Standing Committee in Montebello, Canada, be adopted, as amended.

The Secretary presented an update on the status of Reports outstanding from recent Conferences. With regard to the Report of the 16th Conference held in Kasane, Botswana in 2002, the Committee agreed that the Secretary arrange to have the Report posted on the Conference’s Internet site as soon as practicable. The draft Report of the 17th Conference held in Montebello, Canada in 2004 was presented to the Committee members who were asked to submit any comments to the Secretary by February 1, 2005 so that the Report could be produced and posted to the Internet as soon as possible.

At the request of Speaker Chatterjee who could not attend the meeting, Speaker Abdullah, seconded by Speaker Milliken, moved - That the Standing Rules be amended by deleting Rule 4 and substituting the following therefor: (N.B. Please note that changes from existing wording are underlined.)
4 a) There shall be a Standing Committee consisting of a Chairperson and members generally representative of each of the regions of the Commonwealth, defined as follows: Africa; Asia; Australia/New Zealand; the British Isles and the Mediterranean; Canada; the Caribbean, the Atlantic and the Americas; India; the Pacific; Southeast Asia.

b) the representation from each region shall be as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>three</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia/New Zealand</td>
<td>one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The British Isles and the Mediterranean</td>
<td>one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Caribbean, the Atlantic and the Americas</td>
<td>two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Pacific</td>
<td>two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast Asia</td>
<td>one</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Committee decided that it would postpone consideration of the amendment until India was in attendance to present its reasons for this change. Accordingly, the matter was set as an agenda item for the meeting of the Standing Committee in 2006 in Kenya.

The Secretary reported on the suggestions received as topics for discussion at the 2006 Conference which are as follows:

**From the United Kingdom:**
Dealing with Visitors to Parliament
- Accessibility of the public to Parliament
- Accessibility of the public to Members of Parliament and
- Security of both the Institution and those who work in it.

**From Canada:**
Issues relating to the Precincts of Parliament
• Governance of Parliament Buildings: Control of Space and Budgets
• Articulating the changing needs of Parliament and Parliamentarians
• Responding to changing needs

Orientation Programme for Newly-elected Members of Parliament

Capacity-Building within the Institution of Parliament

Possible Other Topics of Interest
• The Relationship between the Speaker and the Executive
• Information Strategies within Parliaments
• The Effectiveness of Legislative Oversight and the Importance of Legislative Support Services
• The Importance of Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation within Regions of the Commonwealth

The Committee discussed these proposals and made suggestions. The Clerks will meet tomorrow at 9:45 o'clock a.m. to prepare a draft agenda for the consideration of the Committee later that morning.

Speaker Kaparo presented options regarding the 2006 Conference in Kenya. After discussion, it was agreed – That the Conference would be held from January 4 to 8, 2006 in Nairobi and Mombasa.

The Committee considered future events. Representatives from the Caribbean Region agreed to discuss the feasibility of one of the Region hosting the 2007 meeting of the Standing Committee. They undertook to report progress to the Secretary by the beginning of March, 2005.

Speaker Martin proposed that the United Kingdom could host the 19th Conference in 2008, suggesting tentative dates of January 3-6, 2008. The Committee gratefully accepted the proposal.

At 11:15 a.m., the Committee adjourned to the call of the Chairperson.
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS - DRAFT

SATURDAY, 8 JANUARY 2005

The Standing Committee of the Conference of Commonwealth Speakers and Presiding Officers met at 11:18 o’clock a.m., Saturday, January 8, 2005 at the Parliament of Singapore, the Chairperson, the Hon. F. X. Ole Kaparo, Speaker of the Kenya National Assembly, presiding.

Members Present: from Bahamas: Hon. Sharon Wilson, President of the Senate; from Canada: Hon. Peter Milliken, Speaker of the House of Commons; from The Gambia: Hon. Sheriff Mustapha Dibba, Speaker of the National Assembly; from Kenya: Hon. F.X. Ole Kaparo, Speaker of the National Assembly; from Lesotho: Hon. N. Motsamai, Speaker of the National Assembly; from New Zealand: Rt. Hon. Jonathan Hunt, O.N.Z., Speaker of the House of Representatives; from Singapore: Hon. Abdullah Tarmugi, Speaker of Parliament; from Tonga: Hon. Tu’i’ivakano, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly; from Trinidad and Tobago: Hon. Barendra Sinanan, Speaker of the House of Representatives; from United Kingdom: Rt. Hon. Michael Martin, Speaker of the House of Commons.

In Attendance: from Bahamas: Mr. David Forbes, Assistant Clerk to the Legislature; from Canada: Mr. William C. Corbett, Clerk of the House of Commons; Ms. Marie-Andree Lajoie, Clerk Assistant of the House of Commons; from The Gambia: Mr. Momodou Sellu Jallow, Clerk of the National Assembly; from Kenya: Mr. Samuel Ndindiri, Clerk of the National Assembly; Mr. Boniface Lenairoshi, Clerk Assistant of the National Assembly; from Lesotho: Ms. Libuseng Majoro, Assistant Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly; from New Zealand: Mr. Sean Rota, Private Secretary to the Speaker of the House of Representatives; from Singapore: Mr. P. O. Ram, Clerk of Parliament; Ms. Sheau Jiuan Ng, Deputy Clerk of Parliament; Mr. Harold Seah, Principal Clerk; from Tonga: Ms. Fatai Pale, Clerk of the House; from Uganda: Mr. Kagole
Kivumbi, Public Relations Manager, Parliament; from United Kingdom: Mr. Roger Sands, Clerk of the House of Commons; Mr. Peter Barratt, Assistant Secretary to the Speaker; Mr. Ian Davis, Speaker’s Trainbearer.

The Chairperson made opening remarks and presented the agenda for the meeting.

On motion of Speaker Hunt, seconded by Speaker Motsamai, it was agreed - That the Minutes of the meeting of January 7, 2005 in Singapore be adopted, as amended.

The Chairperson presented the Clerks’ Draft Topics for 2006 and, after consideration, it was agreed that the topics for the 2006 Conference would be as follows:

1. **INTEGRITY AND SECURITY OF PARLIAMENTARY PRECINCTS**
   - Governance of Parliament Buildings: Control of Space and Infrastructure to Respond to Changing Needs
   - Balancing Security Concerns with Accessibility for the Public to Parliament and Members

2. **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARLIAMENT AND THE EXECUTIVE**
   - Independence of the Process of Parliamentary Budgeting
   - Ensuring Effective Legislative Oversight: Building and Resourcing Support Systems

3. **CAPACITY-BUILDING IN PARLIAMENTS**
   - Orientation Programmes for Newly-Elected Members
   - The Role of Inter-Parliamentary Co-operation in the Creation and Training of a Parliamentary Service
Speaker Abdullah presented delegates and participants with Certificates of Appreciation signed by him and the Chairperson, Speaker Kaparo.

Speaker Hunt noted that, after 38 years in Parliament, he will retire as Speaker to take up the post of High Commissioner for New Zealand in London. The Chairperson, Speaker Kaparo noted that Speaker Hunt had been awarded the Order of New Zealand and, on behalf of the Conference to which he has contributed so much, extended congratulations and best wishes for a long, prosperous and happy tenure in his new post.

The Chairperson, Speaker Kaparo made closing remarks. He thanked the host, Speaker Abdullah, the Clerk, Mr. Ram and the staff of the Parliament of Singapore for the courtesy and attention they had extended to delegations to the meeting.

The Chairperson expressed the view that the true and lasting value of these encounters lies perhaps less with the formal business agenda than with the informal opportunities for Speakers and Presiding Officers to get to know and understand one another as members of the Commonwealth family from very different backgrounds and cultures. He expressed confidence that the Conference of Commonwealth Speakers and Presiding Officers is ready to meet the challenges of a new era, growing less introspective and more outward-looking and pragmatic in its perspective and its discussions.

The Chairperson wished everyone a safe journey home.

At 11:32 o’clock a.m., the Committee adjourned to the call of the Chairperson.

Audrey O’Brien
Secretary
(Canada)

Honourable Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased, on behalf of the Government and the people of Kenya, to welcome you all to our country for the 18th Commonwealth Speakers’ and Presiding Officers’ Conference. It is an honour for Kenya to host Honourable Speakers from sister Commonwealth countries. This is especially the case, since Kenya was also privileged to host the Commonwealth Conference on the Principles of Accountability and the Relationship between the Three Branches of Government in April last year. As you are aware, Parliaments are elected to represent the people and have constitutional responsibilities to legislate and oversee the Government.

As the supreme organ in any democracy, Parliament plays the pre-eminent role in the overall direction and management of a country’s affairs in accordance with its established constitution, its institutions and its established procedures and practices. In this respect, you, as the officers that oversee and manage Parliamentary business, play an immensely crucial role in the management of public affairs.

As Speakers, for example, you discharge the important responsibility of ensuring that the rules of parliamentary procedure as embodied in the standing orders and practice are accurately and correctly interpreted and applied. It is your responsibility to interpret the standing orders, deal with points of order when they are raised, maintain order in the House and give rulings when called upon to do so.

Clearly, your responsibilities are critical to the effective performance of Parliament, and by extension, the effective management of public affairs by the people’s representatives. The office of the Speaker, therefore, occupies a pivotal role in Parliamentary democracy. Indeed, as the guardian of the rights and privileges of the House, its Committees and Members, the Speaker symbolizes the dignity and honour of the House.

I am therefore encouraged, ladies and gentlemen, to note that this conference, which brings together Speakers and Presiding officers of the Commonwealth Parliaments, will enable you to share experiences on your cardinal responsibility of guiding parliamentarians as they articulate the aspirations of the people they represent.

This conference also provides an opportunity for you to discuss relevant contemporary challenges that we face as the Commonwealth family of nations. I am confident that the deliberations and exchange of views will serve to enrich Parliamentary practice, which we in the Commonwealth share and cherish.

Honourable Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
In concluding my remarks, I would like to emphasize that the evolution of parliamentary democracies is not without some challenges. This Forum and other similar meetings will help to augment efforts towards strengthening the role of parliaments in the development and strengthening of democratic governance.

It is also important for the international community to extend support to parliaments, particularly in emerging democracies, to help them strengthen their capacity to combat corruption and establish effective parliamentary structures and processes.

Furthermore, in order to serve effectively as the representatives of the people, parliamentarians must be conversant with the current issues that are of concern to their people, and internationally. We should therefore endeavour to promote greater access of parliamentarians to information on public affairs and also ensure greater interaction between parliament and the civil society.

International co-operation among parliamentarians is also necessary in order to foster the exchange of best practices and coordinate parliamentary contribution to the fight against corruption and other urgent challenges, particularly poverty.

Indeed, this conference provides the honourable delegates with the opportunity to share experiences and best practices from your different backgrounds. It is my sincere hope that you will utilize this opportunity to share best experiences on the various topics lined up for discussion.

I am confident that your exchange of views will be of benefit not only to the Commonwealth member countries, but also to those other nations that uphold democratic principles, but are not represented in this conference.

Lastly, Honorable delegates, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I would like to take this opportunity to encourage you to take advantage of the opportunity afforded by this meeting to visit other parts of our country to sample our rich and diverse natural heritage.

I am gratified to note that you will be visiting some of our tourist attraction sights in the National Parks and the Coastal Region. I am certain that during these tours, you will be able to see for yourself the beauty of our country, and experience the traditional warmth and hospitality of the Kenyan people.

With these remarks, it is now my greatest pleasure to declare the 18th Commonwealth Speakers’ and Presiding Officers’ Conference officially open, and to wish you all fruitful deliberations and success in the New Year.

KARIBUNI AND GOD BLESS YOU ALL.