The 60th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference was held in Yaoundé, Cameroon, on 2 – 10 October 2014. It began on a sad note owing to the untimely passing of the Secretary General of the Association, Dr William Shija on 04 October 2014.

The conference was organised under the theme “Repositioning the Commonwealth for the Post 2015 Development Agenda”. The theme was perceived to be quite relevant especially given the upcoming target of the Millennium Development Goals in 2015. As such, the conference afforded Member Parliaments an opportunity to interrogate the progress made on the Millennium Development Goals, evaluate the content of the sustainable development goals in line with the principles of the Commonwealth Chart.

During conference, a series of workshops were held simultaneously to discuss diverse topics. These topics included Unity in Diversity, The role of Parliament; Joining hands for Women’s Rights; the Role of Parliamentarians in Gender Empowerment; Evaluating the Emergent Content of the Post-2015 Development Agenda against the Standards of the Commonwealth Charter; Good Governance for the 21st Century - Transparency and accountability. How Can Parliament ensure that Young People are placed at the Centre of Sustainable Development: The Role of Education; Financial oversight in Westminster style and Francophone parliaments: sharing good practice and What is the role of Parliament in providing for the most vulnerable in society?

Elections were held for a new Chairperson and Treasurer to hold office for the next 3 years. Consequently, Ms Shirin-Sharmin Chowdhury from Bangladesh and Mr Request...
Muntanga from Zambia were elected as Chairperson and Treasurer respectively.

The Society of Clerks-at-the-Table International met alongside the CPC in Cameroon under the leadership of Mr Goddy Mukete, deputy secretary general of the Cameroon Parliament. Some of the key issues up for discussion was the expanded role of administrative leaders beyond that of a traditional clerk, parliamentary privilege and how certain decisions to address challenges have unintended consequences when implemented. The host also shared how the Cameroon parliamentary system operates and reflected on some recent parliamentary developments.

The South African delegation was led by Mr RJ Tau, deputy chairperson of the NCOP and included several Members of Parliament and Provincial Legislatures and officials. The 61st Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference is to be held in Pakistan in 2015.

WORKSHOP ON THE AMENDED FMPA ACT PAVES THE WAY FORWARD FOR PRESIDING OFFICERS

Presiding offices held a workshop on 02 October in Johannesburg to consider and discuss the implications of the recently amended Financial Management of Parliament Act (FMPA) and the related treasury function of the Executive Authority. The Act defines the Executive Authority as the Speaker of the National Assembly, the Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces and Speakers of Provincial Legislatures.

In terms of the amended Act, Section 34 the Act authorizes the Executive Authority to prescribe Regulations concerning the allocation and use of any funds provided by Parliament/Provincial Legislature to Political Parties and chapter 6 of the Act on Supply Chain Management. In terms of the Act to the extent that regulations are required, the Executive Authority means the Speaker of the National Assembly or the Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces.

Presiding Officers also discussed the process of submitting Parliament’s/Provincial Legislatures’ budget and adjustment budget to National/Provincial Treasuries and steps on how to strengthen the oversight mechanism.

Recommendations were made allowing for the development of Draft Procedures on broad sector consultation process for prescription of Regulations by Parliament on behalf of the Sector as per Section 65 of the Act.

Furthermore, in the light of the provisions of the Act dealing with the Oversight Mechanism, provincial legislatures may be required to review their governance structures/models.

A draft implementation plan supplementing the FMPLA Implementation Guidelines will be discussed at the special Speakers’ Forum meeting on 07 November 2014.
NCOP Deputy Chair Elected to IPU Position

The Deputy Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces (NCOP), Mr Raseriti Tau, has been elected President of the International Peace and Security Committee of the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) at the Union’s assembly held in Geneva last month. Mr Tau’s term as President of the committee ends in October 2018.

South Africa’s multi-party delegation to the IPU Assembly on 12-16 October was led by the National Assembly (NA) Speaker, Ms Baleka Mbete. The main theme of the Assembly was: “Achieving gender equality, ending violence against women”.

IPU Members adopted an emergency resolution with proposals for a debate including the rights of the Palestinian people; the role of MPs and IPU in fighting terrorism and extremism, as well as action to combat human trafficking.

A resolution on “International law as it relates to national sovereignty, non-intervention in the internal affairs of States and human rights” was also adopted by IPU Members on the concluding day. A packed agenda included discussions on water governance, climate change, cooperation to counter the global drug problem, the role of parliaments in striking a balance between national security and individual freedoms, and the influence of corporate investment in sustainable development.

A roundtable on the situation in the Middle East convened by the Committee on Middle East Questions in parallel to the 131st Assembly also take place. IPU Members and UN representatives looked at what parliaments can do to promote and secure peace between Israel and Palestine following recent events, as well as IPU’s role in promoting peace in the region as a whole. The 20th Meeting of Women Parliamentarians also took place on the side lines of the IPU Assembly.

Development Seminar attracts top calibre speakers

A line-up of renowned local and international speakers and presenters will address the biennial SALSA Development Seminar. This year’s seminar will be hosted in Durban on 08 – 10 December 2014.

Among the speakers will be long-serving former Finance Minister, Mr Trevor Manuel, who is now SA deputy chairman of financial advisory services group, Rothschild. He will present a paper on Tuesday, 09 December, on the perspectives of the National Development Plan and the role of the SA Legislative Sector.

The keynote address will be given by Dr Elizabeth Dostal, an expert on systems thinking. Her topic will focus on how to utilise the systems approach in strategizing towards realising the vision of building a stronger legislative sector.

Finally, about 350 delegates and officials from the SA Legislative Sector and from African Parliaments and beyond are expected to attend the seminar, bringing together different perspectives from Africa and further afield.
Education, skills development and health emerged as big winners during the Finance Minister’s delivery of the Medium Term Policy Statement. Minister Nhlanhla Nene unveiled the mid-term budget in Parliament on 22 October 2014.

With an allocation of almost R640 billion, basic education accounts for nearly 15% of all spending whilst skills development got R200 billion, mainly for subsidies to universities and a significant contribution to the National Student Financial Aid Scheme. This will boost university enrolments by 2016/17 to 116 000 new students.

Coming a close second was expenditure on health, at R500 billion, some of which will go to fighting HIV/AIDS, an area where government has made significant inroads in recent years.

At a glance, the mid-term budget highlighted government’s on-going efforts to boost economic growth, scale down the spiralling national debt and maintain an iron-fist grip on fiscal discipline in all state institutions. Gross domestic product growth has been revised to 1, 4%, down from February’s projection of 2, 7%, mainly due to adverse global conditions. This still falls some way short of the 5% GDP growth envisaged to anchor the National Development Plan.

On the positive side, Treasury’s efforts to curb government expenditure in non-core areas is starting to yield good results. Minister Nene announced that some R1, 3 billion has been saved due to a cut on travel, accommodation, advertising, venue and catering and use of consultants.

New leadership elected - Knowledge Management Forum

A new leadership core was elected at the Annual General Meeting of the Knowledge Management Forum. The Executive Committee will remain in office for the next 2 years and will be responsible for driving Forum programmes related to Research, Library and Knowledge Management matters.

The new EXCO comprises the following officials:
Chairperson: Ms Nompumelelo Cele (Gauteng)
Deputy Chairperson: Mr Majuta Mamogale (Limpopo)
Secretary: Ms Zama Paradise Nkomo (Northern Cape)
Deputy Secretary: Ms Mathilda Smit (Free State)
KM representative: Mr Neil Nel (Parliament)
Library representative: Ms Zingiswa Z Maneli (Eastern Cape)
Research representative: Ms Zipho Phakathi (KwaZulu-Natal)

The Forum also considered a consolidated report of the last 2 year-term, together with papers prepared for discussion by the respective commissions of the Forum, i.e. Research, Library and Knowledge Management.

Public Participation, Petitions and Communications Forum

East London was the venue of the most recent Forum meeting, held on 29 -30 October. Some of the key discussions centred on the development of 2 year implementation plans on the Public Participation framework and the customisation thereof by all legislatures; the communications strategic framework (once adopted by SALSA); petitions and training of officials. A presentation was made on the customisation process of the Public Participation Framework and how this will impact on each legislature going forward.
Human Resources Forum plans ahead for development seminar

The above Forum held its quarterly meeting on 29-31 October in Johannesburg. Deliberations on the first two days centred on preparations for the upcoming SALSA Development Seminar, to be held in Durban on 08-10 December. In that regard, the labour relations, employee wellness, HR development and gender sub-committees convened separately to develop their biennial reports. The purpose of the exercise was three-fold, namely, to reflect on the work done by the sub-committees in the past two years; to detect gaps; and to develop a new action plan.

On the last day, the Forum EXCO met and discussed an action plan for the next 2 years and also look at ways on how to make the forum more efficient.

Table Staff Forum elects new leadership

Members of this Forum attended the Biennial General Meeting where a new Executive was elected. Because the convening secretary, Mr M Xaso of the NA, accompanied the Speaker, Hon Mbete, to Zimbabwe, Advocate Phindela of the NCOP presided over the elections. He thanked the outgoing Executive for the good work they have achieved and wished the new Executive Committee well in their new endeavours.

Important presentations included final drafts of the Resolution Tracking Framework and a document on Plenary Standard Operating Procedures. It was also proposed that a Digest of Rulings and Expressions ruled as unparliamentary (including rulings challenged, but not ruled unparliamentary) should be undertaken under the guidance of the new Executive.

A number of new projects were identified during the proceedings which indicates an exciting period ahead for the Forum.

The new Executive Committee is constituted as follows: Chairperson, Mr C Mahlangu (National Assembly); deputy Chairperson, Mr J Modipane (Mpumalanga); Secretary, Ms J Singh (Gauteng); deputy Secretary, Mr M Mbebe (NCOP); and Mr W Sebopele (North West) and Mr O Wong (Northern Cape) as additional members.

Legal Advisors’ Forum

Legal Advisors of the South African Legislative Sector held their quarterly meeting on 30-31 October in Mpumalanga. A new Executive Committee was elected, led by Advocate Ntuthuzelo Vanara from Parliament and Advocate Mdluli from Mpumalanga as chairperson and deputy chairperson respectively.