

Media Release

SPEAKER HON. KATHERINE EBANKS-WILKS MEETS WITH UK HOUSE OF COMMONS SPEAKER AND SPEAKERS OF THE BRITISH OVERSEAS TERRITORIES

House of Parliament, George Town, 10th May 2023

The Speaker of Cayman’s Parliament, Hon. Katherine Ebanks-Wilks, was in Anguilla in April to meet with the Rt. Hon. Sir Lindsay Hoyle, Speaker of the House of Commons (UK), along with other Commonwealth Speakers, for the second *Commons and Overseas Territories Speakers’ Conference* (COTSC).

Hosted by the Speaker of the Anguillan Parliament, Hon. Barbara Webster-Bourne, the conference brought Speakers and Parliamentary Clerks from ten Overseas Territories together with constitutional experts for three days of discussions on developing strong Legislatures and effective parliamentary democracy. Honourable Speakers, Clerks, and constitutional experts met under the theme: “Deepening Parliamentary Democracy in the British Overseas Territories – a Roadmap to 2030.” The conference reaffirmed the importance of legislative democracy and helped to secure continued partnerships among the Territories.

“We committed to embedding the CPA’s [Commonwealth Parliamentary Association] Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures by 2030,” said Hon. Katherine Ebanks-Wilks. “This is timely for us in Cayman, as the Parliament became autonomous so recently, just in December 2021. We can now truly utilise and develop these benchmarks to ensure we have a Parliament that is fully and completely independent from the Executive – something that will also keep us in line with our Constitution.”

The Rt. Hon. Sir Hoyle established the inaugural COTSC the year prior at Westminster. He has been vocal in prioritising the ties between the UK Parliament and the Overseas Territories, and supports bringing their voices and experiences to the UK, where many decisions are made that can bear significant impact overseas. “Since becoming Speaker,” said Sir Hoyle, “I have been determined to use this platform to ensure that we can achieve your hopes and aspirations together.”

Part of this commitment to fostering improved relations between the Overseas Territories and the UK Parliament included clearly defining the role of the Governor and the Privy Council, as well as agreeing on Parliament's role in scrutinizing the Government. Delegates agreed to consult with other Overseas Territories by 2024 on how the role of the Governor can be developed for the modern world's needs, and called on the United Kingdom to allow representatives from the Overseas Territories to be given representation on the Privy Council.

Participants discussed the importance and significance of dedicated buildings of parliament, noting that several of the Overseas Territories currently do not have their own legislative buildings at all. The UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) recently provided the commitment to financially support the construction of a parliament building in Montserrat in order for that country to promote its parliament as a bedrock of its democracy. Participants called for the FCDO to also support Anguilla, St. Helena, and the British Virgin Islands in securing their own legislative buildings.

"I was reminded of the 50th Anniversary celebration Cayman held in July 2022," said Hon. Ebanks-Wilks, "and the remarkable history that Members, the Executive, and the Clerk (Hon. Sybil McLaughlin) made when they chose to protect the strength and stability of our parliamentary democracy by building our first and only House of Parliament."

Other topics discussed during the three-day conference included Parliamentary Security, Budgetary Management, Parliamentary Service and Members Services, and a commitment to Parliamentary Scrutiny. Hon Speaker Katherine Ebanks-Wilks presented on the topic of Parliamentary Independence and Governance and the Clerk Zena Merren-Chin sat as a Panelist on the Administration of Parliamentary Services session.

Commonwealth Speakers and representatives attended from Anguilla, Bermuda, the Cayman Islands, Falkland Islands, Montserrat, St Helena, Turks and Caicos and Gibraltar as well as the United Kingdom. Speakers and Presiding Officers attending included:

1. Hon. Barbara Webster-Bourne, Speaker of the Anguilla House of Assembly
2. Hon. Dennis P. Lister, JP, MP, Speaker of the Bermuda House of Assembly
3. Hon. Katherine Ebanks-Wilks, MP, Speaker of the Cayman Islands Parliament
4. Hon. Keith Biles, JP, MLA, Speaker of the Falkland Islands Legislative Assembly
5. Hon. Charliena White, Speaker of the Montserrat Legislative Assembly

6. Hon. Cyril Gunnell, MLC, Speaker of the St Helena Legislative Council
7. Hon. Gordon Burton, MHA, Speaker of the Turks and Caicos House of Assembly
8. Rt Hon. Sir Lindsay Hoyle, MP, Speaker of the UK House of Commons