

Report on the Virtual CPA CWP Annual Conference

February 2021

Nicola Crawford, Parliamentary Engagement Co-ordinator

On 25 and 26 February, the Northern Ireland Assembly Branch of the CPA participated in the virtual CWP Conference, hosted by CPA UK.

As the conference was unable to be held in person, it was adapted to a virtual platform on the topical theme of: “**Prioritising Women’s Representation and Promoting Gender Sensitive Parliaments**”.

Discussions as part of the conference included:

- *Making the case for women in Parliament.*
- *Election cycles and working with organisations and campaigns to promote women’s representation.*
- *Gender sensitive parliaments.*
- *An introduction to the CPA Guidelines on gender sensitive parliaments.*
- *Women in the justice system.*
- *UN Women’s Safe Spaces Campaign.*
- *Effective policy making for preventing and protecting women from harassment, violence and abuse.*

The Assembly Branch was represented by Michelle McIlveen MLA and Paula Bradley MLA.

Other Parliaments represented at the conference were the UK Houses of Parliament, Scotland, Wales, Cyprus, Gibraltar, Jersey, Guernsey, Alderney, Isle of Man, St Helena and the Falkland Islands.

Day One

Session One – Making the case for women in Parliament

The theme of the first session was ‘*Making the case for women in Parliament*’ and Professor Rosie Campbell, a professor of politics and director of Global Institute for Women’s Leadership at King’s College London, gave a presentation on the topic. She discussed the research that has been done into the subject and that it has shown the following:

- That women in politics do more constitutional work than men;
- Female representatives are connected to lower levels of corruption;
- The female leadership style is more co-operative & inclusive;
- Women prioritise women's interests, equal rights, family and healthcare;
- Women have shown greater policy emphasis on care.

She advised that more research is needed on:

- Political leaders in the Middle East & Central Asia;
- Violence against women in politics;
- Class difference;
- Non-english speakers.

Professor Campbell then discussed how female politicians have fared during the pandemic and stated that women leaders, such as Nicola Sturgeon and Jacinda Ardern, have a more significant impact during it than male leaders.

The discussion that followed focused mainly on how to, firstly, get more women into politics and secondly, how to keep them in the job as many leave due to the long hours, lack of job flexibility and child care issues.

Session Two – Election cycles and working with organisations and campaigns to promote women's representatives

The three presenters, Shelaine Green, Women in Public Life, Cerys Furlong, Chwarae Teg and Frances Scott 50:50 Parliament Campaign discussed their various campaigns to address issues of female under-representation.

Frances Scott presented on her 50:50 campaign which Promotes "Ask her to Stand Day", inspiring women to stand for election with constituents invited to the Commons. She stated that women want to be represented by people like them and need to believe in themselves and be more confident especially as they have better leadership styles which gives more positive outcomes.

During the discussion that followed the presentations **Paula Bradley MLA** asked how do we keep retention of women in politics, as it is not seen as a career? Shelaine answered, that we need to work more with campaign groups, publicise women politicians and highlight their profile to use as examples of being retained. She stated that more men need to show support and that Boris Johnson did a video for her campaign supporting women in politics. There is a strong need to change political careers to make them more attractive to women, a family friendly policy is required and we must lead by example, challenge and debate on these issues and champion each other's success.

Session Three – Gender Sensitive Parliaments

Sarah Petit from the UK Parliament staff gave a presentation on Gender Sensitive Parliaments and discussed an audit undertaken by the UK Parliament in 2018. The audit found the main challenges to women entering politics were long hours, family pressures, sexual harassment and bullying and on-line threats. She stated that a family policy needs to be developed as good practice in parliaments.

Paula Bradley MLA stated that there was a cross party motion to adopt a gender sensitive parliament in the NI Assembly and that an audit would be useful to progress this.

Session Four – An introduction to the CPA Guidelines on Gender Sensitive Parliaments

Professor Sarah Childs discussed the CPA Guidelines on Gender Sensitive Parliaments with the delegates.

DAY 2

Session One – Women in the Justice System

Dorothy Bain QC, Scotland, and Hon. Mrs Justice Ramagge Prescott, Gibraltar, spoke about their professional experience of the justice system and how women are treated by the system.

Session Two – UN Women’s Safe Spaces Campaign

Claire Barnett, Executive Director of UN Women UK, told delegates about the Safe Spaces Campaign.

Sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence in public spaces, both in urban and rural settings, are an everyday occurrence for women and girls in every country around the world.

Women and girls experience and fear different forms of sexual violence in public spaces, from unwelcome sexual remarks and gestures, to rape and femicide. It happens on streets, in and around public transportation, schools, workplaces, public toilets, water and food distribution sites, and parks.

This reality reduces women's and girls' freedom of movement. It reduces their ability to participate in school, work, and public life. It limits their access to essential services and their enjoyment of cultural and recreational activities, and negatively impacts their health and well-being.

Although domestic and workplace violence is now widely recognized as a human rights violation, sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women and girls in public spaces are often neglected, with few laws or policies in place to prevent and address it.

For 10 years, UN Women's global initiative, Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces for Women and Girls, has worked with leading women's organizations, local and national governments, UN agencies, and other partners to develop, implement, and evaluate comprehensive approaches to prevent and respond to sexual harassment against women and girls in public spaces in different settings.

Beginning in the cities of Quito (Ecuador), Cairo (Egypt), New Delhi (India), Port Moresby (Papua New Guinea), and Kigali (Rwanda), this multi-stakeholder global initiative has grown to include 50 cities and continues to achieve positive results with its partners.

Session Three – Effective policy making for the preventing and protecting women from harassment

Different policies were discussed and the delegates related their own stories about the various harassment they have been subject to in their political careers, the majority of which has been via social media.

Closing Remarks

Samantha Sacramento MP, Chair of the CWP Steering Committee, thanked delegates for attending and paid a special thanks to Helen Haywood from CPA UK for organising such an informative and thought provoking conference.

Nicola Crawford
5th March 2021