

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association
Park Plaza Hotel, London
July, 2011

Mohammad Asghar attended the Conference in London as an observer.

Being an observer, Mohammad did not attend official “by invitation” dinners and events – but various workshops concerning issues related to the Commonwealth.

Regional Meeting – Day One

Mohammad attended a Regional Group meeting with the British Isles & Mediterranean.

At the meeting, issues were discussed related to improving levels of co-operation.

It was agreed to keep subscription costs at the same level.

Representatives from Saint Helena expressed concern that their island did not have a commercial airport and subsequently they felt isolated. Delegates expressed sympathy with this situation.

Official Opening – Day One

At 4pm in Westminster Hall, the official opening of the Conference took place with the Princess Royal in attendance. This was finished by 6pm.

Good Governance Workshop – Day Two Morning

Mohammad attended a lively debate on the second day, concerning the enhancing of good governance and accountability.

Issues discussed included the 2009 UK Government expenses scandal.

Mohammad used the meeting to pay tribute to the system in the Assembly, with professional staff offering guidance to Assembly Members on claiming expenses.

Concerns linked to the abuse of expenses systems were raised by other Commonwealth nations.

Mohammad notes that the workshop showed there is a lot to share between different countries in ensuring good practice and that came through at the meeting.

It was noted that certain countries have significant numbers of Parliamentarians, so it becomes more difficult to adequately control expenses.

Other issues put forward at the workshop concerned terrorism and security; whilst Malta said high levels of immigration (in particular, from Libya) was impacting on their economy.

A representative from Trinidad & Tobago said he was upset about rises in British air travel costs – and that the increases had severely affected tourism in the Caribbean and subsequently the economy.

World Economy Workshop – Day Two Afternoon

Mohammad attended a fascinating discussion on the world economy and the challenges facing Commonwealth nations economically.

Discussion topics included a lack of wealth distribution in many Commonwealth countries and other economic challenges facing the Commonwealth's poorer countries.

Mohammad urged poorer Commonwealth nations to discuss working together and to try and sell their commodities to the world as a group.

He also noted that many African nations are behind other nations on issues like research & development, but are resource-rich and need to start utilising that.

Other obstacles to prosperity highlighted by countries included tariffs.

Election – Final Day

Sir Alan Haselhurst was elected as Executive Committee Chair for the CPA.

Ministerial Visits – Final Day

Prime Minister David Cameron gave a speech to the Conference. Questions were asked by delegates and observers – notably on security, terrorism and British aid.

Mr Cameron outlined the coalition government's commitment to world aid. William Hague also gave a speech and took questions from the floor.

He spoke in strong terms against Colonel Gaddafi and used his speech to highlight the importance of democracy and of political leaders respecting the will of the people.

Both Mr Cameron and Mr Hague highlighted the importance of a strong and active Commonwealth.

Other Observations

Mohammad feels a lot of work remains to be done to improve understanding and collaboration between different geographical areas of the Commonwealth.

There is great potential, he feels, for further trade between the Commonwealth's poorer nations to improve the economic situation they face.