GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

PRESS RELEASE

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Speaker Leads Workshop at 68th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference

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The Speaker of the House of Assembly of the Virgin Islands, Honourable Corine George-Massicote, along with other Members of the House, participated in the 68th Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Conference held in Bridgetown, Barbados, from the 5th to 12th, October.

One of the highlights of the conference was Honourable George-Masicote's role as a discussion leader in a workshop session themed **"Debate Not Hate: Not Accepting Abuse as an Outcome of Free Speech."**

During her remarks, she emphasised the urgent need to address technology-facilitated violence, particularly its impact on women in leadership. She stated that technology-facilitated violence is not just a virtual problem but has real-world consequences.

"Women often resign from leadership roles out of fear for their safety, and girls who witness online abuse directed at women leaders hesitate to enter public life. As a result, societies lose the full benefit of women's voices in shaping policy and progress." To confront this issue, Honourable George-Massicote outlined a multi-faceted approach.

"First, it is crucial to empower women with digital literacy, privacy tools, and support networks, recognising that online safety is essential for equal participation.

Second, legal frameworks must be updated to address the gendered nature of online abuse and to overcome jurisdictional barriers that hinder effective action.

Third, it is important to restore control and amplify survivor voices, promoting empowerment and leadership by those who have experienced harm.

Finally, parliaments and women's caucuses need to take leadership by keeping technology-facilitated violence high on national agendas, advocating for stronger cyber laws and enforcement, holding social media platforms accountable, and providing resources for victim support and training for women MPs and public figures."

Honourable Melvin Turnbull also shared his experience at the conference, reflecting on the opening ceremony where he stood alongside the Honourable Speaker and the Prime Minister of Barbados, Hon. Mia Amor Mottley. He described Prime Minister Mottley's powerful and inspiring welcome address, which set the tone for meaningful dialogue among parliamentarians across the Commonwealth.

"The Prime Minister urged parliaments and world leaders, including the United Nations, to pay close attention to global developments. Most importantly, she reminded the gathering, especially small island nations, of the need to unite, build on shared strengths, and create the wealth and resilience their people deserve.

Overall, the conference provided a valuable platform for the Virgin Islands' parliamentarians to collaborate, reflect, and strengthen their commitment to advancing good governance, sustainability, and equity throughout the Commonwealth."

The House of Assembly of The Virgin Islands continues to support services for Members of the House of Assembly in the exercise of their parliamentary functions, in an informed and efficient manner, and to inform the public, on an on-going basis, about the parliamentary procedures of the House of Assembly.

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