

CPA UK Delegation Visit to Lesotho

REPORT SUMMARY

21 May -23 May 2024



PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

In May 2024 CPA UK was invited to return to the Parliament of Lesotho to engage parliamentarians in ethics and codes of conduct, cross-party collaboration, and committee work. This followed on from the Post Election Seminar CPA UK delivered in 2023. The programme was designed in partnership with the Parliament of Lesotho and a cross-party delegation of three UK parliamentarians and a clerk travelled to Maseru to participate.

The delegation engaged with members and officials of both the National Assembly and Senate, including members of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus, the ethics committees in both Houses, and approximately 120 Senators and MPs in a half-day workshop.

CPA UK would like to thank the presiding officers, members and officials of the National Assembly and Senate in Lesotho for their partnership and the British High Commissioner to Lesotho for his support.

CPA UK DELEGATION:

Tim Loughton MP

Rupa Huq MP

Baroness Scott of Needham
Market

Wafia Zia, Clerk

Martin Vickery, CPA UK

Maggie El Beledi, CPA UK



The Speaker, the Right Honourable Tlohang Sekhamane, The Deputy Speaker, Hon. Ts'epang 'Matlhohonolofatso Ts'ita-Mosena, the British High Commissioner to Lesotho, Harry MacDonald, and the CPA UK Delegation,

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FULL REPORT

COUNTRY PROFILE

Head of State: His Majesty
King Letsie III

Population: 2.31 million

Capital: Maseru

Legislature: Bicameral



The CPA UK delegation meeting senators and officials.

The Kingdom of Lesotho and the United Kingdom

This programme aimed to achieve the following outputs:

- 1) Participating UK and Lesotho members and officials deepen their understanding of topics discussed, including issues of member conduct, pre-legislative scrutiny and process and procedure.
- 2) The relationship between the Parliaments of the UK and Lesotho is further strengthened, in Lesotho's bicentenary year, and next steps for UK-Lesotho engagement are discussed.

The Parliaments of Lesotho and the UK have notable similarities. Both Lesotho and the UK have an elected lower house, the National Assembly and the House of Commons, respectively. Despite the difference in size, 120 MPs in the National Assembly compared to 650 MPs in the House of Commons, both lower houses function as the primary legislative bodies.

The Lesotho Senate and the UK's House of Lords both serve as the upper chambers responsible for scrutinising legislation in their respective parliaments, though the House of Lords is roughly 24 times larger than the Senate. Currently, the National Assembly and Senate are located in two different areas of Maseru due to the construction of new parliamentary premises.

During the programme parliamentarians from Lesotho and the UK shared experiences from their legislatures. Both sides highlighted ongoing national discussions about whether their upper houses need reform and, if so, in what manner.

The Constitution of Lesotho vests legislative power in Parliament, subject to its provisions. In the UK, the principle of parliamentary sovereignty is well-established, despite the absence of a written constitution. Throughout the week, parliamentarians from both the UK and Lesotho exchanged insights into how parliamentary sovereignty and the separation of powers among the executive, legislature, and judiciary function in their respective jurisdictions.

Ethics and Codes of Conduct

Codes of conduct were a central focus of the programme. The National Assembly's Ethics, Code of Conduct, Immunities, and Privileges Committee in Lesotho was established in 2008. Parliamentarians noted that frequent general elections in Lesotho have made it difficult to reach a sustained consensus on a code of conduct.

Discussions highlighted that a code of conduct should apply to everyone in parliament, with that code grounded in moral principles and integrity. Independence and transparency are crucial components for an effective code. Party affiliations need to be set aside when enforcing the code and determining sanctions for members.

UK participants shared the role and responsibilities of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards in their context and the iterative, gradual development of their ethics procedures over time.

Cross-party consensus and collaboration is vital. Parliamentarians must collaboratively establish a code of conduct focused on ensuring that members and officials, and their conduct of business in parliament, is held to the highest standards.



Parliamentarians from Lesotho and the UK discussing effective legislative scrutiny during the half-day workshop.

Cross-Party Collaboration & Committees

Parliamentary committees are essential in providing detailed scrutiny, promoting effective oversight, and supporting informed decision-making on legislation and government actions. Committees in both Lesotho and the UK are cross-party, where committee members work together to ensure thorough analysis and scrutiny.

During a half-day workshop, parliamentarians engaged in interactive activities to discuss the various methods and strategies available to parliamentarians to hold the government to account. These include gathering evidence from experts and civil society organisations, proposing specific amendments, and requiring regular updates and meetings.

Joint committees can also have the additional benefit of strengthening the links between members of the upper and lower houses, enhancing bicameral cooperation.

Some committee officials and parliamentarians shared the resource constraints they operate under and how these limitations can impact the work of the committee.

The delegation met with the cross-party and bicameral Women's Parliamentary Caucus. Women parliamentarians shared their experiences and ambitions, as well as the challenges their group faces in making effective and positive changes in parliament.

There are allegations of discrimination by the media against women parliamentarians. There was a general experience that the Parliament is not sufficiently inclusive for women parliamentarians. Some felt it was harder for female parliamentarians to make their voices heard in the Chamber and that there was a lack of female voices in certain debates. The political party structures can inhibit female members working together to raise cross-party matters relating to the experience of female members.



The Lesotho Women's Parliamentary Caucus meeting the CPA UK delegation.

Nonetheless, female parliamentarians in Lesotho noted how the Administration of Estates and Inheritance Act (2024) advanced women's rights by abolishing customary law practices related to inheritance. The Act introduces the inheritance rights for female children and ensures equal inheritance for siblings, regardless of age or gender.

The delegation shared how they have faced stereotyping in the workplace. Different approaches to increasing the number of women was also shared, one example being all-women shortlists.

It was unanimously agreed that much more work is needed to address the challenges female legislators face in both Lesotho and the UK.



The CPA UK delegation speaking and meeting with Senators in the Senate Chamber.

Next Steps

CPA UK looks forward to continued collaboration with the Parliament of Lesotho in future programmes. CPA UK will continue to follow the development of a code of conduct in Lesotho in both the Senate and the National Assembly.

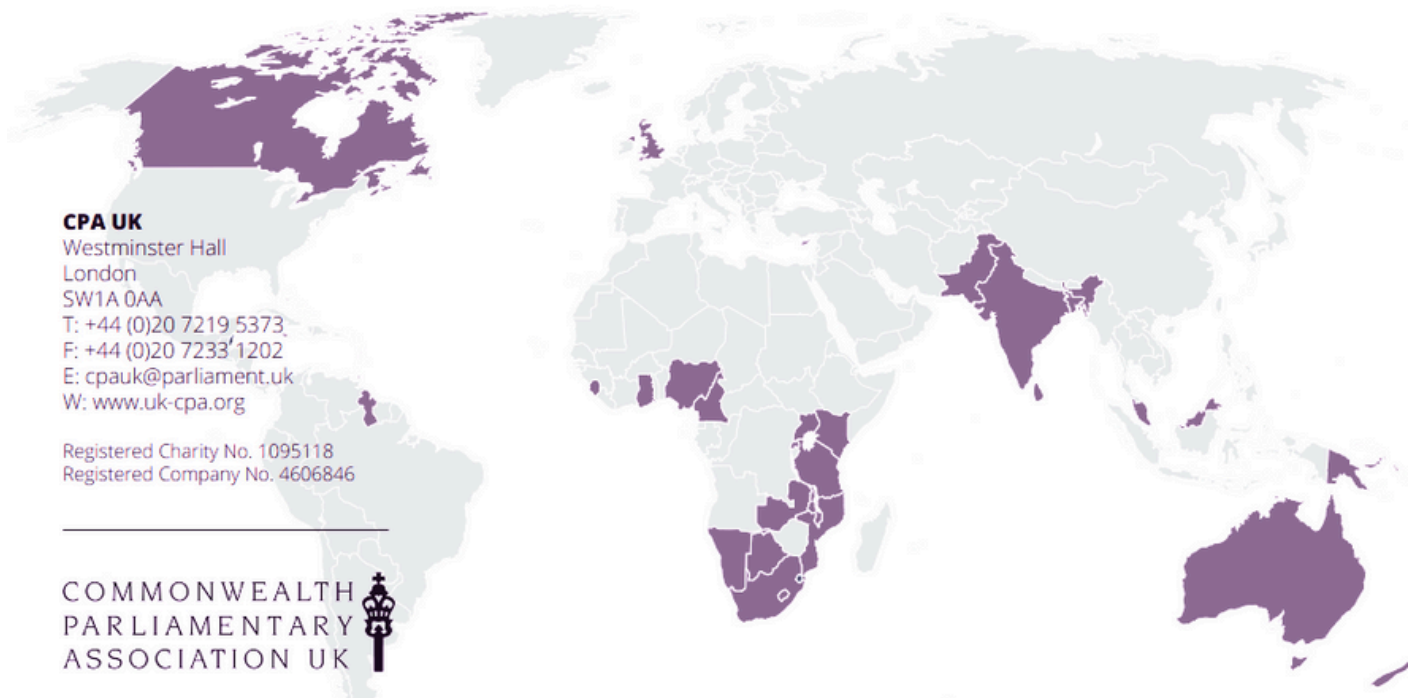
Since this programme, in July 2024 a Senator from Lesotho participated in CPA BIMR's Election Assessment Mission to observe the UK General Election. CPA UK looks forward to strengthening partnerships between newly-elected UK MPs and our partners in Lesotho.



Members from the Senate and National Assembly committees responsible for ethics and codes of conduct.



Parliamentarians discussing the development of codes of conduct.



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