

African CPA Secretary-General appointed



The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's first African Secretary-General, Dr William F. Shija of Tanzania, arrived in London in December to prepare to assume the post to which he was appointed by the CPA General Assembly.

Dr Shija, a Member of the Tanzanian Parliament from 1990 to 2005 who held four ministerial portfolios between 1990 and 1998, was appointed to a five-year term by the General Assembly at its September meeting in Abuja, Nigeria. He formally assumed the CPA post on 1 January following the conclusion of the five-year term of Hon. Denis Marshall, QSO, of New Zealand.

The Tanzanian, who was also a Member of the Pan-African Parliament in 2004 and 2005, was nominated by the CPA Executive Committee which conducted a Commonwealth-wide selection process. He takes over a Secretariat which runs programmes and services for the 177 Parliaments and Legislatures in the nations, states, provinces and territories of the Commonwealth. More than 350 representatives of those Assemblies constituted the General Assembly in Nigeria and accepted the Secretary-General nomination from the 35-Member Executive Committee which represents all Commonwealth regions.

Dr Shija becomes the fourth former Parliamentarian to hold the post of CPA Secretary-General. Previous former Members who held the post were: Mr Marshall, a former New Zealand Minister; Mr Arthur Donahoe, QC, a former Speaker of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly, and the late Hon. David Tonkin, a former South Australian Premier. Two previous CPA Secretaries-General, Sir Robin Vanderfelt and the late Sir Howard D'Egville, came from United Kingdom administrative backgrounds.

Hon. Hashim Abdul Halim, MLA, Chairman of the CPA Executive Committee and Speaker of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly in India, said Dr Shija has the parliamentary and international experience to direct Commonwealth programmes to assist Parliamentarians to become better representatives of their people.

In accepting the appointment in Abuja, Dr Shija said it was encouraging that Commonwealth Parliamentarians present in Nigeria were committed to resolving the major challenges facing the world, including the reduction of poverty and the elimination of gender inequities. Sharing ideas and experiences through the CPA meetings enable Parliamentarians to improve their efforts to bring good governance to all Commonwealth citizens and to deepen public understanding of democratic government.

Born in 1947, Dr Shija was a Tanzanian civil servant and teacher who qualified in mass communications and journalism in India and the United States before going on to teach communications in Tanzania. After his election to Tanzania's Parliament in 1990, he became Minister for Science, Technology and Higher Education. He later held the ministerial portfolios of Information and Broadcasting, Energy and Minerals, and Industries and Trade and also served as a Regional Commissioner.

After leaving cabinet, he chaired Parliament's Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs from 1999 to 2005. At the Pan-African Parliament, he chaired the Committee on Education, Culture, Tourism and Human Resources.

Dr Shija is married and has five children, two of whom have joined him in London.