

**SPEAKING NOTES
THE HONOURABLE NOËL A. KINSELLA
SPEAKER OF THE SENATE**

**ON THE OCCASION OF A RECEPTION CELEBRATING
COMMONWEALTH WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS**

**SPEAKER'S CHAMBERS
NOVEMBER 3, 2014**

Speaker Scheer,

Your Excellencies, the Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Ms. Truppe,

Honourable Senators and Members of the House of Commons,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Thank you all for joining this gathering to celebrate the many women throughout the Commonwealth who are representatives in their parliaments. We have with us today the Honourable Andrew Scheer, Speaker of the House of Commons, and Ms. Susan Truppe, Parliamentary Secretary for the Status of Women and Federal Representative for the Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians.

Our parliaments are invaluable institutions and are at the forefront in the effort to help achieve gender equality through legislation to advance women's rights. Individuals and groups within parliament are powerful advocates for these changes.

Since it was informally established in 1989, the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians – the CWP – has understood the important connection between gender equality and parliamentary assemblies. The CWP has worked to advance the representation of women in Commonwealth Parliaments and to increase the involvement of women parliamentarians within the Commonwealth Parliamentary Assembly.

Women’s representation in parliaments worldwide has undergone a slow but consistent rise. The world average for women’s representation in the single or lower houses of parliament was 22% as of October 2014;¹ ten years earlier, the average was only 16%.² Nine Commonwealth countries currently³ have at least 30% representation of women in their lower or single chambers.⁴

Canada’s Senate stands at 38%.⁵ The first woman to hold a seat in the Senate was the Honourable Cairine Wilson in 1930. She was a brilliant woman who had a number of firsts to her name, including being the first female Canadian delegate to the United Nations in 1949.

Women continue to enjoy great success in parliaments around the world, aided in part by the work and support of the CWP, an

¹ Inter-Parliament Union, “[World Average and Regional Averages](#),” *Women in National Parliaments*, 1 October 2014.

² Inter-Parliament Union, “[World Average and Regional Averages – Statistical Archive](#),” *Women in National Parliaments*, 30 September 2004.

³ Inter-Parliament Union, “[World Classification](#),” *Women in National Parliaments*, 1 October 2014.

⁴ These Commonwealth countries (and the most recent percentage of women) are: Rwanda (63.8%), Seychelles (43.8%), South Africa (40.8%), Mozambique (39.2%), United Republic of Tanzania (36.0%), Uganda (35.0%), Grenada (33.3%), Guyana (31.3%), and Cameroon (31.1%).

⁵ Parliament of Canada, ParlInfo, [Party Standings in the Senate](#), 12 August 2014.

organization that helped them fully and equally participate in their government and society. You might wish to reflect on how the CWP has assisted your own parliament in improving women's representation, or how this organization has helped you or a colleague on the road to equal participation.

Senator Cairine Wilson must have had great courage to become the first woman to enter Canada's Senate – at the time, an all-male political realm! Over 80 years ago, she understood the role that women could and would come to play in politics, stating: “As women we wish to use our powers ... to promote legislation which will benefit the greatest number.”⁶

In closing, the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians is an organization that appreciates the unique role that female parliamentarians play in our democracies. Please join me in congratulating the CWP on their exceptional work. Thank you.

⁶ Valerie Knowles, *First Person: A Biography of Cairine Wilson, Canada's First Woman Senator*, Toronto, 1988, p. 67.