



FALKLAND ISLANDS GOVERNMENT

PRESS RELEASE

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Hon Sharon Halford MLA reports on Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Regional Conference

The Honourable Sharon Halford, MLA attended the annual conference of the British Islands and Mediterranean Region of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, which was held on the Isle of Man from 10 to 14 May. Mrs Halford said, "This was an opportunity to renew old acquaintances with friends of the Falkland Islands, to share common experiences, to gain fresh perspectives, and to bring back new ideas to discuss with my colleagues in Government."

The theme of this conference was 'Possibilities', the possibilities for democracy created by new technologies including, in particular, recent developments in information technology.

The first day involved a broad overview of governments and technology. Topics covered include the pros and cons of allowing staff to use networking sites in the workplace; IT management and obtaining value for money in IT procurement; and keeping costs down by updating programs rather than replacing hardware. Delegates were reminded that whilst technology is the method it is not the message. Mrs Halford said she was particularly interested by a comment from the speaker that attracting financial institutions to work in your territory is guaranteed to improve your IT connections since without fast IT connections the finance industry is unable to work efficiently.

The technology already exists to permit on-line voting, and the use of laptops is now allowed in some legislatures. On the second day delegates had a demonstration of how the electronic voting system works in the Tynwald, the Isle of Man's legislature. Delegates were also shown the Hansard voice recognition system in use in Council Chambers; as a parliamentarian speaks, their words appear on a big screen.

During the conference Mrs Halford chaired a session on 'The challenges presented by information technologies in terms of protecting important rights and freedoms such as the right to privacy'. The keynote speaker was Christopher Graham, the UK's Information Commissioner. It was pointed out that whilst you need data protection it is not always easy to marry this up with freedom of information. On line communication is instant and this is not always comfortable. One difficult issue is how long data should be kept by government agencies.

The regional AGM was held towards the end of the conference, which gave delegates the opportunity to update everyone on parliamentary developments in their territories. Mrs Halford commented that, "When future meetings were discussed there was a huge emphasis on cost cutting as everyone has to cut back on what they can spend as the recession is still biting."

The final event was a formal dinner, at which the Falklands delegation were seated at the top table beside the Gibraltar delegation. Mrs Halford concluded that, "Outside the workshops it is important to always be putting your message across and I got plenty of opportunities to do this with people wanting to know about the oil and the neighbours."

The next international event at which the Falkland Islands will be represented is the annual meeting of the Special Committee of 24 which takes place at the United Nations in New York on 24 June and is to be attended by the Hon. Emma Edwards MLA and the Hon. Gavin Short MLA. Falkland Islands Government representatives have taken the opportunity to speak directly to the United Nations and refute the Argentine sovereignty claim to the Falkland Islands every year since 1987.

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