

**The Role of Speakers in the Security of Parliaments  
and their precincts**

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23<sup>rd</sup> Conference of Speakers and Presiding Officers of the  
Commonwealth (CSPOC)

Sabah State Legislative Assembly  
Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia

9-14 January 2016

Speakers,  
Presiding Officers,  
Secretaries to Delegations,  
Colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Unfortunately, our parliaments back home are not immune from being the aim of attacks. In their own nature, parliaments may be viewed by contempt by some people; this makes them an easy target. The most recent attack we have heard about with great sadness is the Ottawa attack on Parliament Hill where a Canadian soldier lost his life when on sentry duty. 2001 also saw the attack on the Indian Parliament where a number of people lost their lives, including terrorists, security personnel, and police officers. Certainly there have been other attacks which did not make the news; others have been narrowly avoided due to the security measures which have been put in place.

I would like to share with you the recent experience concerning security issues at the Maltese Parliament. In Malta, the House of Representatives was, since its beginnings in the 1920s, situated in what is now the President's Palace, where the security of the entire Palace was exclusively entrusted to the Armed Forces of Malta. Parliament, and the Speaker as its official head, had little or no control over security measures in and around the building. The Speaker only had powers over security in the plenary hall, the committee rooms and the corridors in their immediate vicinity.

The move from the President's Palace to a new building, completely reserved to the Parliament and its activities, in May last year, has meant that the responsibilities of the Speaker have increased considerably. The new building was conceived as an open space, not reserved for the Members of Parliament meeting in it, but a space which, as far as possible, occupies an important, even if a small footprint in the capital. The architect opted for an extensive use of glass panels to symbolise openness and transparency. Whilst the new Renzo Piano-designed ultra-modern building is unique in its kind, is nothing short of remarkable, with the notions of openness and transparency laudable in themselves, the external glass walls and the lack of a clear demarcation of the parliamentary precincts are proving to be a major security headache.

Not only did Parliament move to a new building built in a manner which requires 360 degree surveillance 24/7, but Parliament had to furthermore deal with the fact that for the first time in its history it was responsible for its own security, i.e. the Speaker became fully responsible for the security throughout the parliamentary precincts. In order to fulfil this duty the Speaker obtained the go-ahead to have a number of police officers detailed to the service of the House of Representatives. The complement of police officers on duty was supplemented by the installation of a number of security cameras.

Malta has always been viewed as a credible international interlocutor. As a consequence, some may argue that the issue of security is at times being blown out of proportion, but I do not subscribe to this point of view. One needs to be prepared for all eventualities and never fall into the trap of taking things for granted. Bollards have been installed all around the borders and are being controlled by the police force. All persons entering the building, with the exception of the Members of Parliament themselves, go through security screening.

The recent Paris attacks, along with many other threats that the world has had to contend with, makes the issue of security one which cannot and should not be taken lightly, as attacks – especially those linked with terrorism – have become a part of our everyday lives. In addition to the devastation and grief that attacks bring in their immediacy, they instil a sense of long-term fear in the citizens a fear which cannot be easily placated.

An issue of major concern is that due to its nature, and the public disillusionment with politicians, parliaments are naturally high-risk buildings and could easily be targeted. For many countries, one also needs to consider the situation in their immediate neighbourhood, such as countries which are at war or subject to political instability. Although Malta is an island with no land borders it is located at the cross-roads of one of the routes taken by immigrants trying to leave North Africa to reach the European continent. The instability in Libya, Egypt and the Middle East creates huge migratory pressures on both countries of transit and of destination. In addition to the humanitarian issues that arise from migration and human trafficking, there are the added concerns that terrorists could infiltrate amongst the migrants. Based on our experience at home, so far, I can say that in spite of the challenges posed by an open and transparent building such as the new Maltese parliament

building, where a physical leap towards transparency was made, we have opted for a good model of how security is organised.

However, a secured fort does not mean that access is restricted in such a way that the well-meaning citizen is not given access to what happens in Parliament and to their elected representatives. In addition to hosting plenary and committee meetings, one must keep in mind that after all a parliament is the workplace of our employees, and that it hosts countless visitors throughout the year, both VIPs and from the general public. We firmly believe that Parliament belongs to the people and should not be limited to the elected representatives. The fact that the full responsibility of the precincts now falls under the Speaker, Parliament has already hosted a number of activities which I, or the Speaker, have chaired. These include the annual events of the Parliament for people with disabilities and the National Youth Parliament. Last November, the House of Representatives hosted a dialogue between Commonwealth Secretary-General candidates and civil society organisations as part of the Commonwealth People's Forum 2015. Parliament hosted an exchange of views on the future of the arts and creativity in Malta and Parliament organised, on its premises, various exhibitions for the public to view. The role of the Speaker in these occasions is to open and chair the debates. The point that I want to drive home, is that although recognising the issue of securing our parliaments should not be taken lightly, any measures taken should not lead to the creation of a closed institution.

This brings me back to the role of the Speaker in the context of a secure parliament. His or her role is undoubtedly to strike a healthy balance between protecting parliamentarians and the functions of parliament, and respecting the right of citizens to have access to the precincts and their legislators. The development and implementation of a long-term plan is an important opportunity to address requirements for efficient and effective security, in particular a Parliamentary precinct with clear physical boundaries. The plan must allow for a layered system of access control and a solid infrastructure for security systems.

I hope this short contribution based on our recent experience has given you food for thought for the session to come. I look forward to debating this theme further with you in the workshop itself.

Thank you.