



Report of the Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CCOM)

Bilateral Visit to the Caribbean

Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago and Bridgetown, Barbados

January 18 to 24, 2020

Report

A delegation from the Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association visited Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados from January 18-24, 2020. Ms. Yasmin Ratansi, M.P., Chair of the Branch, led the delegation composed of the Honourable Rosemary Moodie, Senator, Mr. Chandra Arya, M.P. and Mr. Robert Kitchen, M.P. Accompanying the delegation was Mr. Rémi Bourgault, Secretary of the Canadian Branch.

The Association's constitution encourages visits between member countries to give parliamentarians an opportunity to discuss issues of common interest in bilateral relations and matters related to the Commonwealth as a whole. The visit to Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados aimed to strengthen ties with our partners in the Commonwealth Caribbean, in keeping with the Canadian Branch's mandate to facilitate twinning arrangements between Canada's provincial and territorial legislatures and the Caribbean.

A wide range of topics were discussed during the bilateral visit, including the state of parliamentary democracy in relation to Westminster practices as well as the challenges of climate change, security, trade and investment.

VISIT TO TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Geography

The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago consists of two main islands (Trinidad and Tobago) and several smaller ones located northeast of Venezuela. It has an area of 5,128 km² – slightly smaller than that of Prince Edward Island. The population of roughly 1.4 million is largely composed of people of Indian (South Asian) and African descent. The capital is Port of Spain. Trinidad and Tobago is one of the wealthiest countries in the Caribbean with an economy built around mining, agriculture, industry, tourism and services but underpinned by a single commodity – oil – which was first discovered in 1866.¹

System of government

Trinidad and Tobago is a bicameral parliamentary republic with a Westminster-style system. Its parliament consists of three branches: the President of the Republic, the Senate and the House of Representatives.

A. The President

The President of Trinidad and Tobago is elected through an electoral college composed of all members of the Senate and House of Representative. The voting takes place by secret ballot and is presided by the Speaker of the House. To be considered for President,

¹ The Commonwealth, [Trinidad and Tobago: Economy](#).

a candidate's nomination papers must be signed by 12 or more members of the House of Representatives. The President may hold office for a term of not more than five years.²

The President is the Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. The President's powers are exercisable within certain constitutional limits, which are generally conducted in accordance with the advice of or after consultation with another authority, usually the Cabinet, the Prime Minister or the Leader of the Opposition.³ The President is also responsible for summoning, prorogation, dissolution of Parliament and assenting legislation. The President appoints members of commissions and other senior officials as well as senators.⁴

The current president is Her Excellency Paula-Mae Weekes. She took office on March 19, 2018, and is the first woman to hold this position in Trinidad and Tobago.

B. The Senate

The Senate consists of 31 senators appointed by the President until the dissolution of Parliament. Of the 31 senators, 16 are appointed on the advice of the Prime Minister, 6 on the advice of the Leader of the Opposition and 9 on the President's own discretion. The Senate generally enjoys the same powers as the House of Representatives with certain limitations. Only the House of Representatives can introduce bills or amendments concerning public finance, assessment or increase of taxes or other expenditures.

While the legislative process normally requires approval from the Senate, a bill may be passed despite the chamber's opposition if it fulfils the following conditions:

the bill must have been adopted by the Chamber of Representatives in two successive sessions and rejected by the Senate in both these sessions, when it has been referred to the Senate at least one month before the end of the session; a period of six months must have elapsed between each of the adoptions of the bill by the Chamber of Representatives.⁵

C. The House of Representatives

The House of Representatives consists of 41 parliamentarians who have been elected in their respective constituencies through a single member plurality system (first-past-the-post). Additionally, the House of Representatives elects a Speaker who may or may not be one of the 41 elected representatives. Should the elected speaker be from outside the pool of candidates within the legislature, the total number of parliamentarians increases to 42. The Prime Minister appoints the Cabinet from the elected pool of 41 representatives. The cabinet is responsible to Parliament.

At present, the House of Representatives consists of 42 parliamentarians. The governing party is the People's National Movement (PNM), led by Dr. Keith Rowley. During the last parliament, the PNM was in opposition. It holds 23 of 41 seats. Former prime minister

² Office of the President of Trinidad and Tobago, [Extracts Taken from the Constitution – Chapter 3: The President](#); Office of the President of Trinidad and Tobago, [History of the Presidency](#).

³ Office of the President of Trinidad and Tobago, [The President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago](#)

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Senate, [The Senate of Trinidad and Tobago](#).

Persad-Bissessar's People's Partnership (PP) won the remaining 18 seats. The PP is a coalition comprising the United National Congress (UNC), the Congress of the People (COP), Tobago Organisation of the People (TOP) and the National Joint Action Committee (NJAC).

Canada–Trinidad and Tobago Bilateral Relations

Canada and Trinidad and Tobago enjoy bilateral relations that span across numerous sectors, including trade, science and technology, security, governance, culture, the environment, sport and health. Canadian investments in Trinidad and Tobago are concentrated in the petrochemical, oil, gas and financial sectors.⁶

Additionally, Canada and Trinidad and Tobago share academic ties. Several local tertiary education institutions have signed cooperative agreements with a number of Canadian institutions to facilitate collaborative research projects, degree programs, and staff and student exchanges.

In May 2019, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago and the Legislative Assembly of Ontario formalized a twinning agreement through a memorandum of understanding. The twinning initiative came to fruition through an agreement between the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association branches from Canada, Trinidad and Tobago and Ontario.

Economy

Trinidad and Tobago, by far the largest economy in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), has a high GDP per capita (\$16,145). However, its economy, which is dependent on the energy sector, is highly volatile. GDP growth for 2019 was recently revised to 0% due to lower than expected energy production.

Canada–Trinidad and Tobago Trade Relations

Trinidad and Tobago is Canada's largest trading partner within CARICOM and the third largest in the Caribbean. Its main exports are iron ore, petroleum oils, machinery and food products. Canadian investment is concentrated in the petrochemical, oil and gas, and financial sectors. The clean energy sector offers new opportunities for collaboration in the areas of renewable energy, energy efficiency, water and wastewater systems, and environmental engineering.

Delegation meetings in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

Meeting with the Honourable Christine Kangaloo, President of the Senate; the Honourable Bridgid Annisette-George, Speaker of the House of Representatives; and members of the CPA Trinidad and Tobago Executive Committee

At the beginning of the meeting, the President and the Speaker expressed regret that they were unable to accommodate the delegation in the Parliament building, the Red

⁶ Global Affairs Canada, [High Commission of Canada in Trinidad and Tobago](#).

House. Parliamentarians are due to return to the building in a week's time, after several years of restoration. During the meeting, Ms. Ratansi mentioned the signing of the agreement with the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as part of the CPA Federal Branch initiative to twin Canadian provincial and territorial legislatures with their Caribbean counterparts. Speaker Annisette-George noted the important ties between her country and Canada, not to mention the importance of the Trinidad and Tobago diaspora in Canada. Parliamentarians discussed procedural similarities between the two parliaments. It is important to note that Speaker Annisette-George is one of the Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic regional representatives on the CPA International Executive Committee.

Both the President and the Speaker said they were looking forward to travelling to Canada next year for the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference to be held in Halifax, January 12-18, 2021.

Meeting with representatives of several parliamentary committees

Delegates met with members of several Senate and House of Representatives parliamentary committees to discuss common issues, including the Social Services and Public Administration Committee, the Human Rights Committee, the Finance and Legal Affairs Committee, and the National Security Committee.

Parliamentarians took the opportunity to discuss a number of topics, including the lack of justice infrastructure, child protection, youth violence and firearms. It was noted that political divisions across the country are the greatest challenge in addressing many of the issues facing the country.

Meeting with representatives of the Institute of Gender and Development Studies

The creation of the Institute for Gender and Development Studies (IGDS) stems from the work of the Women and Development Studies Group (WDSG) at the University of the West Indies (UWI). Its mission is to produce and disseminate knowledge on gender-related issues in the Caribbean for the UWI and to enhance Caribbean development. It offers disciplinary and interdisciplinary courses on gender relations across faculties within the University of the West Indies at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. The IGDS initiates collaborative research projects that address the relationship of gender to all areas of society. The IGDS pursues a program of outreach activities that includes seminars, workshops and networking events.

The Canadian High Commission has collaborated with the IGDS on various projects, including activities related to International Women's Day.

Meeting with Ms. Kimberly Badal, Co-founder and Chair, Caribbean Cancer Research Initiative

The delegation also had the opportunity to meet with Ms. Kimberly Badal, a recipient of the Bryden Alumni Award from York University. Ms. Badal is Co-founder and Chair of the Caribbean Cancer Research Initiative (CCRI), an organization that advocates for cancer patients and promotes cancer research in the Caribbean.

The CCRI was incorporated as a non-profit organization in June 2016 in Trinidad and Tobago. Thanks to innovative leadership, the CCRI has several significant accomplishments to its credit today, such as securing several national and international grants, establishing the first cancer patient counselling training program in the Caribbean, training 42 cancer patient counsellors across the region, organizing several education and awareness sessions, guiding more than 100 public sector patients through their cancer treatment, speaking at various international conferences, and creating jobs for highly qualified but underutilized local people.

Tour of the Methanex plant

The delegation toured the Methanex plant. This Vancouver-based Canadian company is the leading producer and supplier of methanol to major international markets. The company operates production facilities in Canada, the U.S., Egypt, Chile and New Zealand, and has two plants in Trinidad and Tobago. Of Methanex's employees in Trinidad and Tobago, 99% are Trinidadian and Tobagonian. The tour of Methanex's methanol plant gave the delegation a better understanding of the breadth of Trinidad and Tobago's oil and gas industry and the important role that the Canadian private sector plays in the country.

Other matters

The delegation also had the opportunity to meet with international partners to discuss the current situation in Trinidad and Tobago on a number of issues.

Acknowledgements

The delegation would like to thank the dedicated staff of CPA Trinidad and Tobago for preparing a comprehensive itinerary.

VISIT TO BARBADOS

Geography

Barbados is the most easterly island in the Caribbean Sea. It is located south of St. Lucia, east of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and north of Trinidad and Tobago.⁷ The Caribbean is an island region that is vulnerable to the effects of climate change.⁸ The region's islands tend to be small, remote and prone to natural hazards, including tropical storms and hurricanes. Barbados falls within the Caribbean hurricane zone, with a rainy

⁷ The Commonwealth, "[Barbados](#)," *Member countries*.

⁸ Economist Intelligence Unit, "[Caribbean faces climate change challenges](#)," Barbados, July 17, 2019.

hurricane season occurring between June and October.⁹ Barbados has a subtropical climate.

Barbados is one of the top 20 most water-scarce countries in the world.¹⁰ It has few natural resources beyond deposits of oil and gas, which supply approximately 33% of the country's energy needs. Bridgetown has a deepwater harbour.

System of Government

A. Executive

Barbados' head of state is the British monarch, currently Queen Elizabeth II, who is represented in Barbados by a Governor-General, currently Sandra Mason. In 2008, a planned referendum to replace Queen Elizabeth II with a president as head of state was deferred.¹¹

At present, Ms. Mia Mottley – leader of the Barbados Labour Party (BLP) – is the country's Prime Minister; she is Barbados' first female prime minister.¹² Members chosen by the prime minister to serve in Cabinet may be from the Senate or the House of Assembly.¹³ The current Cabinet includes seven women, the highest number in the country's history.¹⁴

B. Legislature

Barbados is a parliamentary democracy and is modelled on the Westminster system of government. Its bicameral parliament¹⁵ comprises the Senate and the House of Assembly. The BLP, which was founded 1938, and the Democratic Labour Party (DLP), which was founded 1955, are Barbados' main political parties.

The most recent elections in Barbados, which had a voter turnout rate of 60%, were held on May 24, 2018; the BLP returned to power after 10 years in opposition. The BLP won all 30 seats in the House of Assembly, with the result that there was no official opposition immediately following the election.¹⁶ On June 1, 2018, the BLP member Bishop Joseph Atherley decided to sit as an independent and was sworn in as the Leader of the Opposition; he is the only opposition member.¹⁷ The next elections are expected to occur by May 2023.

⁹ Ksenia Chmutina and Lee Boshier, "[Construction in Barbados: keeping natural hazards in mind?](#)," Disaster Prevention and Management, 2014.

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Derek O'Brien "[Formal Amendment Rules and Constitutional Endurance](#)," *The Foundations and Traditions of Constitutional Amendment*, 2017, p. 310.

¹² Barbados Integrated Government, "[Prime Minister of Barbados](#)," Government.

¹³ Barbados Integrated Government, "[Parliament](#)," Government.

¹⁴ Caribbean Elections, "[Post-election](#)," *Barbados General Election Results – 24 May 2018*.

¹⁵ Barbados Integrated Government, "[Parliament](#)," Government.

¹⁶ "[Barbados country profile](#)," BBC News, 27 May 2018.

¹⁷ Caribbean Elections, "[Post-election](#)," *Barbados General Election Results – 24 May 2018*.

The Senate

Barbados' Senate has 21 members; 12 are appointed on the advice of the prime minister, two are appointed on the advice of the Leader of the Opposition and seven are appointed at the Governor-General's discretion. Senate appointments occur when elections are held for members of the House of Assembly. Senators serve five-year terms. The President is the Senate's presiding officer.¹⁸ The current distribution of seats in Barbados' Senate, by political affiliation is as follows: Government senators, 12; Independent senators, 7; Opposition senators, 2.

The House of Assembly

Barbados' House of Assembly has 30 members who are directly elected in single-member constituencies by first-past-the post voting¹⁹; they serve five-year terms. The party winning the most seats in the House of Assembly becomes the governing party, and the leader of that party becomes the prime minister and head of government. The Speaker is the House of Assembly's presiding officer and is elected from among the House's members. At present, the House of Assembly includes six women, the largest number of female members of the House in Barbados' history.²⁰ Based on data from Europa World online in January 2020, the distribution of seats in Barbados' House of Assembly is as follows: Barbados Labour Party, 29; Independent, 1.

C. Judiciary

Barbados' legal system is based on English common law. The Supreme Court is the highest court. The Privy Council in London serves as the court of final appeal.

Economy

The government's main priority is to stabilize the country's economy, address debt management issues and halt the reduction of foreign exchange reserves. In October 2018, the IMF approved a four-year arrangement under the Extended Fund Facility to support the Barbados Economic Recovery and Transformation (BERT) plan. The BERT plan aims to restore fiscal and debt sustainability, address falling reserves and increase growth. Based on its review of Barbados' economic reform program in June and November 2019, the IMF concluded that Barbados is still making good progress in implementing its comprehensive and ambitious economic reform program.

Canada-Barbados Trade Relations

Barbados is the third largest destination for Canadian direct investment abroad. Canadian investment in Barbados was \$49 billion in 2018, but this amount is skewed by the international commercial and financial services sector. Canadian banks play an important

¹⁸ Barbados Integrated Government, "[The Senate.](#)" Government.

¹⁹ Barbados Integrated Government, "[House of Assembly.](#)" Government; and Caribbean Elections, "[Barbados General Election Results – 24 May 2018](#)"

²⁰ Caribbean Elections, "[Results.](#)" Barbados General Election Results – 24 May 2018.

role in Barbados' banking sector. Canadian companies have a strong presence in Barbados.

Canadian export growth sectors include agri-food, renewable energy technologies, infrastructure and construction projects. Canadian companies are involved in multi-million dollar drinking water management projects. Construction projects include infrastructure, water services and transportation.

Delegation meetings in Bridgetown, Barbados

Meeting with the Honourable Richard L. Cheltenham, Senator, President of the Senate, the Honourable Gline Clarke, Deputy Speaker of the House of Assembly, and the Clerk of Parliament, Mr. Pedro E. Eastmond

During this meeting, the parliamentarians were keen to highlight the close ties between Canada and Barbados. President Cheltenham mentioned his studies in Montreal in the 1960s. A discussion took place on the changes underway in the Senate of Canada, including the appointment of several Independent senators in recent years. The role played by Canadian senators on important issues, such as on the Special Joint Committee on Physician-Assisted Dying, was highlighted. The composition of the Senate in both countries was also explained.

Tour of the IMPACT Justice facilities

Improved Access to Justice in the Caribbean (IMPACT Justice) is an eight-year regional civil society justice sector reform project funded by the Government of Canada. The project has been implemented within the Caribbean Law Institute Centre, Faculty of Law, the University of the West Indies (UWI), Cave Hill Campus, since 2014. Canada is contributing \$19.8 million to the UWI for the implementation of the IMPACT Justice project from 2014 to 2022.

The IMPACT Justice project aims to ensure that women, men, youth and businesses have better access to justice in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). Justice reforms are needed to create and maintain a stable and more predictable environment to address the escalation of violent crime and disputes between citizens, promote business development, attract foreign investment and meet and respect international obligations. Stronger legal frameworks facilitate social and economic reforms and promote business development in the region for men, women, youth and business.

Other matters

The delegation was officially recognized in the Senate and attended part of the proceedings. In addition, at a dinner, the delegation participated in a discussion on the role of women in parliaments. The members of the delegation also met with representatives of the Royal Commonwealth Society of Barbados. Finally, they participated in a town hall with the staff of the Canadian High Commission in Barbados.

Acknowledgements

The delegation would like to thank the staff of CPA Barbados for preparing the visit itinerary.

Conclusion

The delegation would like to thank Canada's High Commissioner to Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Kumar Gupta, and Canada's High Commissioner to Barbados, Ms. Marie Legault, as well as the dedicated staff of the high commissions for preparing a very comprehensive itinerary and contributing to a successful visit. The delegates would also like to thank the representatives of Global Affairs Canada and the Library of Parliament who helped prepare the necessary background information.

Respectfully submitted,

Yasmin Ratansi, M.P.

Chair of the Canadian Branch of the
Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association
ACTIVITY	Bilateral Visit to Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados
DESTINATION	Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, and Bridgetown, Barbados
DATES	January 18 to 24, 2020
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Rosemary Moodie
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Mr. Chandra Arya Mr. Robert Kitchen Ms. Yasmin Ratansi
STAFF	Mr. Rémi Bourgault
TRANSPORTATION	\$9,761.11
ACCOMMODATION	\$11,808.60
HOSPITALITY	\$705.69
PER DIEMS	\$4,316.06
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$520.50
MISCELLANEOUS	\$30.42
TOTAL	\$27,142.38