



## **Report of the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas**

**9th Summit of the Americas**

**Los Angeles, United States**

**June 6 to 8, 2022**

# Report

## INTRODUCTION

From 6–8 June 2022, [Marc G. Serré](#), MP, Chair of the [Canadian Section of ParlAmericas](#), led a delegation to Los Angeles, California, for activities that included a Parliamentary Gathering organized by the United States' (U.S.'s) [House Democracy Partnership](#) (HDP) and several events held during the 9th Summit of the Americas. The other delegates were Senator [Rosa Galvez](#), Vice-Chair of the Canadian Section and President of ParlAmericas' Parliamentary Network on Climate Change, [Richard Cannings](#), MP, [Rob Morrison](#), MP, and [Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné](#), MP.

Julie Pelletier, Association Secretary, and Erin Virgint, Advisor to the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas, supported the Canadian delegation.

## PARLIAMENTARY GATHERING ON THE OCCASION OF THE 9<sup>TH</sup> SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS

### A. OPENING SESSION

The Parliamentary Gathering on the Occasion of the 9th Summit of the Americas (the Gathering) was organized by the HDP, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI). The Gathering brought together 46 parliamentarians from 22 countries of the Americas and the Caribbean.

Consistent with the Summit's theme of "Building a Sustainable, Resilient, and Equitable Future," discussions during the Gathering focused on combatting political corruption, improving "green energy" practices, promoting parliamentary transparency, encouraging democratic engagement, governing during a health crisis and enhancing women's inclusion in parliaments.

Derek Luyten, Executive Director of the HDP, opened the Gathering. The opening session was moderated by Kristen Sample, the NDI's Director of Democratic Governance. Kristen Sample described the roles of the three institutions that organized the Gathering, and explained that they play an important role in facilitating discussions on pressing issues facing the Americas and the Caribbean.

Derek Mitchell, President of the NDI and former U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of the Union of Myanmar (Burma), Dan Twinning, President of the IRI, and Justin Wein, Chief of Staff to HDP Chairman David Price, highlighted the role of legislatures in democracies. They described the HDP's primary role: providing an avenue for parliamentary diplomacy.

Derek Mitchell stressed the importance of partnerships between and among various countries' legislators, and suggested that they must continue to discuss political corruption, economic development and climate change as a way to hold executive branches accountable.

Dan Twinning noted that the HDP is an effective avenue for legislative diplomacy, learning and exchanging ideas, and speculated that such events as the Gathering lead to more

vibrant democracies. As well, Dan Twining spoke against the spread of authoritarian governments in the western hemisphere, arguing that no enduring development can happen under such regimes.

Justin Wein asserted that, although the views held by legislators across the hemisphere may be different, many are facing similar challenges: political corruption, the spread of disinformation on social media, inadequate healthcare, and the rising costs of food and energy. Moreover, Justin Wein underscored the importance of free and fair elections, the ultimate goal of which is to build representative democratic institutions.

Brigid Annisette-George, Speaker of Trinidad and Tobago's House of Representatives and Vice-President of ParlAmericas, underlined the major challenges confronting the western hemisphere – democracy, political corruption, climate change and social justice – and contended that addressing them requires collaborative action. Speaker Annisette-George characterized the common ground between and among countries attending the Gathering as “rich,” but also as requiring continued work. According to Speaker Annisette-George, parliamentarians have a duty to represent marginalized groups, with the goal of having them address inequalities together.

## **B. DIALOGUE WITH THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES**

Luis Almagro, Secretary General of the Organization of American States, participated in a discussion moderated by former U.S. Senator Christopher Dodd. They highlighted the significance of the Summit of the Americas as a venue for multilateral conversations about the main challenges facing democratic governance in the Americas and the Caribbean. The Secretary General added that, because extremism on the left and the right of the political spectrum is rising, legislators must unite in pursuing the goal of strengthened democracies. Moreover, the Secretary General said that efforts designed to improve equality, physical safety and economic development are important in building stronger democracies in the region.

## **C. PANEL DISCUSSIONS**

### **1. STRENGTHENING DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE TO COMBAT CORRUPTION**

To open a panel discussion about strengthening democratic resilience to combat political corruption, Tony Garrastazu – the IRI's Regional Director for Latin America and Caribbean programs, and moderator for the session – underscored the need for parliaments to prioritize combatting such corruption. In Tony Garrastazu's view, democracies in the western hemisphere are currently being threatened by rising authoritarianism, and parliamentarians must play a central role in combatting political corruption.

Panellists for the session comprised Norma Torres and Ted Lieu, members of the U.S. House of Representatives, Fatima Mena, a member of Honduras' National Congress, and Joseph Isaac, Speaker of Dominica's House of Assembly.

Representative Torres emphasized the need for legislatures to establish anti-corruption regimes that have both prevention mechanisms and an ability to punish offenders. In Representative Torres' opinion, legislatures and citizens must work together to protect democratic institutions from political corruption and to implement measures that ensure legislative oversight. As well, Representative Torres asserted that democratic institutions that promote a culture of integrity will ultimately provide better policies and greater access to public services for all.

Representative Lieu noted that legislatures affected by political corruption cannot advance democratically, socially or economically. According to Representative Lieu, practical solutions that legislatures should consider when combatting such corruption include ensuring freedom of the press, creating oversight bodies within legislatures – such as committees – to monitor corruption, and establishing law enforcement bodies that have appropriate jurisdiction and resources to enforce anti-corruption legislation.

Deputy Mena commented that political corruption prevents countries from advancing in many areas because it decreases public resources, increases economic and social inequality, undermines trust in institutions, and creates social discontent and political polarization. Deputy Mena added that such corruption affects all communities and does not allow for the equitable delivery of public services. In Deputy Mena's view, efforts to address political corruption should start at the highest level, with the executive and legislative branches establishing a culture of anti-corruption within themselves.

Speaker Isaac indicated that, particularly within the Westminster parliamentary system, the way in which the executive branch exercises its power should be monitored, particularly in a majority government setting. Focusing on Westminster parliaments in the Caribbean, Speaker Isaac said that freedom of the press, an independent judiciary, legislation providing for freedom of information, and the existence of public accounts committees are integral to maintaining integrity and combatting political corruption. In Speaker Isaac's opinion, parliamentarians and parliamentary staff can help to ensure integrity and an absence of such corruption by adopting or updating legislation, policies, and codes of ethics and conduct.

## **2. APPLICATION OF DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES TO IMPROVE GREEN ENERGY COMMITMENTS**

Kristen Sample, who moderated a panel discussion on the topic of applying democratic principles to improve commitments regarding green energy, explained that parliaments have a critical role to play in improving rules and regulations regarding green energy initiatives.

Panellists for the session comprised Veronica Camino Farjat, a member of Mexico's Senate, Senator Galvez, Anthony Viera, a member of Trinidad and Tobago's Senate, and Carolyn Trench-Sandiford, President of Belize's Senate.

Senator Camino Farjat stated that the impacts of climate change are not experienced equally around the world or within communities. According to Senator Camino Farjat, the perspectives of women and other marginalized groups should be considered when policies for mitigating climate change are developed and implemented.

Describing climate change as an urgent issue that requires immediate concrete actions in the Americas and the Caribbean, Senator Galvez noted that there is great potential for renewable forms of energy – such as wind and solar – in Canada and elsewhere in the western hemisphere, although funds and the political will to advance meaningfully in this area are lacking. In Senator Galvez’s view, Canada has an important role to play in helping developing nations create mechanisms to combat climate change.

Senator Galvez also underlined Canadian initiatives designed to combat climate change, such as the 2021 [Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act](#), which requires the Government of Canada to: set national targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions every five years, starting in 2030; and develop plans for achieving those targets with the goal of reaching net-zero emissions by 2050. Highlighting Bill S-243, the Climate-Aligned Finance Act, that Senator Galvez introduced in March 2022, attention was drawn to the bill’s aims of aligning the activities of federal financial institutions and federally regulated entities with Canada’s climate commitments.

Senator Viera identified some of the challenges associated with moving to a green economy, and specifically mentioned job losses in certain sectors, such as oil and gas. In Senator Viera’s opinion, it is essential to consider this sector’s workforce when transitioning to new sources of energy.

Senate President Trench-Sandiford discussed the impact of climate change on women and minority groups, emphasizing that the only pathway to sustainable development and climate change policies that benefit everyone is to include women and minority groups in the development of such policies. Suggesting that legislators must consider the unequal impact that climate change can have on women and men, Senate President Trench-Sandiford drew attention to extreme weather events and natural disasters that affect men and women differently, particularly regarding loss of income, housing, healthcare and access to such resources as clean water.

### **3. TRENDS IN DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION TO PROMOTE TRANSPARENCY AND COUNTER DISINFORMATION**

Denisse Miranda, the Open Government Partnership’s Chief of the Independent Report Mechanism, moderated a panel discussion on the topic of trends in digital transformation to promote transparency and counter disinformation. According to Denisse Miranda, democratic countries are experiencing a cultural transformation in which citizens expect access to public information, the existence of accountability mechanisms in their democratic institutions, and an ability to participate in the legislative process. In Denisse Miranda’s view, digitizing legislatures is an important step in bridging the gap between citizens and their elected representatives.

Panellists for the session comprised Linda Sanchez, a member of the U.S. House of Representatives, Germán Blanco, a member of Colombia’s Chamber of Representatives, Margarita Stolbizer, a member of Argentina’s Chamber of Deputies, and Javier Macaya, a member of Chile’s Senate.

Representative Sanchez explained that misinformation and disinformation often target specific groups of the population based on language, asserting – for example – that false information was spread in the American Latino community during the COVID-19

pandemic. As well, Representative Sanchez added that the dissemination of misinformation and disinformation can pose serious threats to public health and national security, and proposed two solutions: enact legislation that imposes harsh penalties on those who spread misinformation and disinformation; and establish bodies to monitor and enforce such laws. Representative Sanchez also mentioned that cooperation is required among the western hemisphere's legislatures to develop a coordinated response to the spread of misinformation and disinformation.

Representative Blanco discussed unequal access to the Internet in the western hemisphere, noting that inequalities can be exacerbated by the digitization of legislatures because citizens vary in their ability to access public information. In Representative Blanco's opinion, if the public is expected to use technology or the Internet to access reliable information, there must be equal access to the Internet.

Deputy Stolbizer described access to credible public information as a basic human right, suggesting that equal access to such information improves confidence in democratic institutions. Furthermore, Deputy Stolbizer commented that the digital transformation has brought parliaments closer to the people in recent years, although online resources should be updated regularly to ensure that digital parliamentary tools continue to meet the needs of the public.

Senator Macaya argued that those who knowingly spread disinformation that threatens public health and safety should face consequences. According to Senator Macaya, there is a need to balance freedom of speech with combatting the spread of disinformation. In Senator Macaya's view, it is critical that citizens have access to accurate information to make informed choices when voting.

#### **4. BUILDING CONSENSUS TO SUPPORT INCLUSIVE DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT**

Brad Smith, former Chief of Staff to former member of Congress and HDP founding Chairman David Dreier, moderated a panel discussion on the topic of building consensus to support inclusive democratic engagement. Emphasizing the importance of ongoing efforts to improve such engagement, particularly among youth, Brad Smith asserted that strengthening democracies in the western hemisphere will require strong multilateral governance and coordinated efforts amongst legislatures. In Brad Smith's opinion, enhancing citizen participation in the democratic process, particularly by historically marginalized groups, is essential to strengthening democracy.

Panellists for the session comprised Wilma Andrade, a member of Ecuador's National Assembly, Arthur Holder, Speaker of Barbados' House of Assembly, Sonia Gutiérrez, a member of Guatemala's Congress, Andrónico Rodríguez, President of Bolivia's Senate, and Radjendrekooamar Debie, a member of Suriname's National Assembly.

Deputy Andrade stated that democratic institutions in the Americas and the Caribbean are weakening, and argued that parliamentarians should be creative and open to innovation in citizen engagement. As well, Deputy Andrade suggested that the public should be involved in the development of new methods of democratic engagement.

Speaker Holder underscored the importance of engaging youth in the decision-making process, including through having them provide input into the legislative process and through ensuring that they are elected and represented in legislatures. According to Speaker Holder, to enhance participation in the democratic process, parliaments must find ways to engage meaningfully with such groups as youth, women and minorities. Speaker Holder added that, as a starting point, parliaments must ensure that marginalized populations feel heard and adequately represented by their elected officials.

Deputy Gutierrez characterized Guatemala as a “young democracy,” having been established in 1985. In Deputy Gutierrez’s view, democracy is deteriorating in Guatemala due to political corruption and a lack of respect for the rule of law. Deputy Gutierrez noted that discrimination, racism and sexism remain major barriers for full democratic participation in many countries in the western hemisphere.

Senate President Rodriguez commented that, after two decades of a dictatorship, Bolivia is rebuilding its democracy. Noting that Bolivia had no democratic engagement for many years, Senate President Rodriguez stressed that it is essential to re-educate citizens about their democratic rights and duties, and to engage women, youth and Indigenous peoples in democratic activities.

National Assembly member Debie focused on the need to strengthen trust between citizens and legislatures, underlining that building an engaged electorate is becoming increasingly difficult because skepticism and distrust of democratic institutions is rising among citizens. Proposing a solution, National Assembly member Debie suggested that legislatures should find ways to include citizens when policies are being developed concerning issues that matter to them, such as climate action and the protection of natural resources.

## **5. DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE DURING A HEALTH CRISIS**

Justin Wein, moderator of a panel discussion on democratic resilience during a health crisis, stated that democracies have faced numerous challenges during the pandemic. In Justin Wein’s opinion, many legislatures acted swiftly at the pandemic’s onset to work virtually and to respond to the health crisis.

Panellists for the session comprised Claudius Francis, Speaker of Saint Lucia’s House of Assembly, Maria José Plaza, a member of Ecuador’s National Assembly, Patrice Dumont, a member of Haiti’s Senate, and Vlado Mirosevic, a member of Chile’s Chamber of Deputies.

Speaker Francis suggested that, at various times during the pandemic, the western hemisphere has faced legal challenges because individual freedoms have been constrained in order to protect the rights of many. Providing the example of Saint Lucia, Speaker Francis noted that the rules regarding social distancing and mask mandates were not applied equally, with people who are poor being arbitrarily targeted by law enforcement entities. Speaker Francis contended that equal access to vaccine doses was inadequate in protecting the health of citizens, and urged parliamentarians to focus on equal access to healthcare for marginalized populations.

National Assembly member José Plaza highlighted the critical role that legislatures play in confronting urgent health crises. According to National Assembly member José Plaza, legislators are responsible for creating policies to help the most affected sectors, such as healthcare and small businesses, in an efficient manner. National Assembly member José Plaza added that, during the pandemic, Ecuador's parliamentarians worked with the executive branch to act quickly and make sure that measures that would protect all citizens were developed.

Senator Dumont argued that the pandemic exposed the unequal access to healthcare in the Americas and the Caribbean. In Senator Dumont's view, Haiti did not have adequate resources to monitor the spread of the COVID-19 virus, staff medical facilities and keep the public informed about the virus' spread in the country.

Deputy Mirosevic stated that countries in the western hemisphere should ensure equitable access to comprehensive, high-quality healthcare centred on people and communities. In Deputy Mirosevic's opinion, to be prepared for future viral pandemics, countries in the hemisphere should cooperate in a variety of areas, including epidemiological monitoring.

## **6. EMPOWERING AND ENHANCING WOMEN'S INCLUSION IN PARLIAMENT**

Alicia Todd, Director General of ParlAmerica's international secretariat, moderated a panel discussion on the topic of empowering and enhancing women's inclusion in parliaments. According to Alicia Todd, women lack equal access to political power and, although they want to participate in democratic activities and to lead, political institutions were built without their participation in mind.

Panellists for the session comprised Mimi Walters, a former member of the U.S. House of Representatives, Maria Del Carmen Alva Prieto, President of Peru's Congress, Claudia Ortiz, a member of El Salvador's Legislative Assembly, and Natalie Campbell-Rodrigues, a member of Jamaica's Senate.

Former Representative Walters argued that, even in the most developed democracies, women face significant barriers in being elected and in being taken seriously as a lawmaker once elected. In former Representative Walter's view, it is problematic that legislators who are women are often pressured by their political parties to specialize in certain policy areas – such as health, education and gender equality – and women should also be encouraged to focus on such other topics as economics and national security. According to former Representative Walters, political parties should promote women's leadership within their caucuses.

Congress President Alva Prieto focused on Peru's preferential voting system and its impacts on the election of women, noting that – in 2020 – Peru passed legislation to promote equal participation by men and women through guaranteeing parity and alternation in party lists of candidates. As well, Congress President Alva Prieto said that more women were elected in Peru's 2021 general election than at any other point in history, although more first votes were for candidates who are men. Suggesting that a sexist culture in Latin America excludes women from democratic activities, Congress President Alva Prieto said that gender equality should be incorporated into school curriculums.



Deputy Ortiz emphasized that there is an urgent need in the western hemisphere both to increase the number of women who are candidates in electoral processes and to protect women from political violence. In Deputy Ortiz's opinion, legislatures should encourage greater political participation by women – particularly those who are young – by providing such supports as childcare and breastfeeding areas for parliamentarians.

Senator Campbell-Rodrigues discussed concrete measures to improve gender equality in legislatures, such as creating childcare facilities, developing codes of conduct on workplace violence and sexual harassment, adjusting parliamentary session and committee schedules to consider parliamentarians' childcare obligations, informing parliamentarians about how to consider legislation through a gender lens, and fostering solidarity among parliamentarians who are women, such as through all-party women's caucuses.

Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné spoke about running for elected office while pregnant, stating that it is important for women to see a pregnant woman be a political candidate and to be elected.

## **7. CLOSING REMARKS**

Deborah Ulmer, the NDI's Regional Director for Latin America and Caribbean Programs, and Tony Garrastazu provided closing remarks. Deborah Ulmer commented on participants' ability to develop solutions to the democratic challenges that the western hemisphere is currently facing, while Tony Garrastazu stated that legislators play a role in both ensuring the existence of checks and balances, and leading the hemisphere to a stronger, more democratic and increasingly prosperous future.

## **PANEL DISCUSSION AND RECEPTION**

On 7 June 2022, the Canadian Section's delegates attended a panel discussion and reception hosted by Eric Garcetti, Mayor of Los Angeles. The theme of the panel discussion was women's leadership in Latin America.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Mélanie Joly, PC, MP, provided the keynote address at the reception, mentioning that such events as the Summit of the Americas are important to Canadians because Canada has a vibrant Latin American community. Minister Joly asserted that ensuring the existence of strong democracies in the Americas is in Canada's interest, and is aligned with the Canadian values of human rights, freedom, equality and inclusion.

## **YOUTH FORUM**

On 8 June 2022, delegates from the Canadian Section attended the opening ceremony of the 6th Young Americas Forum of the Summit of the Americas. They learned about the innovative entrepreneurship of youth from throughout the western hemisphere. As well, Sherry Tross – High Commissioner of the Federation of Saint Kitts and Nevis – gave them a tour of the Youth Summit Expo.

## **MEETING WITH THE NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA**

The Canadian Section's delegates met with representatives of the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC). At the meeting, the NWAC's representatives identified the themes that had been discussed during their meeting with the Summit of the Americas' Forum of Civil Society. Specifically, they highlighted the trauma-informed approach to healthcare, which is a form of care being used at their new Resiliency Healing Lodge, located in Chelsea, Quebec.

Respectfully submitted,

Marc G. Serré, MP  
Chair, Canadian Section of ParlAmericas

### **Travel Costs**

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| <b>ASSOCIATION</b>    | Canadian Section of ParlAmericas  |
| <b>ACTIVITY</b>       | 9th Summit of the Americas  |
| <b>DESTINATION</b>    | Los Angeles, United States  |
| <b>DATES</b>          | June 6 to 8, 2022   |
| <b>DELEGATION</b>     |   |
| SENATE                | Hon. Rosa Galvez  |
| HOUSE OF COMMONS      | Mr. Marc G. Serré<br>Mr. Richard Cannings<br>Mr. Rob Morrison<br>Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné |
| STAFF                 | Ms. Julie Pelletier<br>Ms. Erin Virgint   |
| <b>TRANSPORTATION</b> | \$ 12,477.36  |
| <b>ACCOMMODATION</b>  | \$ 6,694.53   |
| <b>HOSPITALITY</b>    | \$ 717.34   |
| <b>PER DIEMS</b>      | \$ 3,101.40   |
| <b>OFFICIAL GIFTS</b> | \$ 0.00   |
| <b>MISCELLANEOUS</b>  | \$ 426.00   |

**TOTAL**

**\$ 23,416.63**