

Section canadienne de
l'Assemblée parlementaire
de la Francophonie



Canadian Branch of the
Assemblée parlementaire
de la Francophonie

Report of the Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie

Meetings of the Parliamentary Affairs Committee and the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie

Rabat, Morocco

March 1 to 3, 2023

REPORT

The Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF) participated in the meetings of the APF's Parliamentary Affairs Committee and Network of Women Parliamentarians held at the House of Representatives of Morocco in Rabat from March 1 to 3, 2023, at the invitation of its Speaker, Rachid Talbi El Alami, President of the Moroccan House of Representatives and Vice-Chair of the APF.

The Canadian delegation consisted of three parliamentarians:

- Joël Godin (Member of Parliament);
- Marie-France Lalonde (Member of Parliament); and
- René Villemure (Member of Parliament).

They were accompanied by Dominique Montpetit, advisor for the Canadian Branch of the APF.

Meeting of the Parliamentary Affairs Committee

The Parliamentary Affairs Committee (the Committee) held meetings presided by Committee Chair Mr. **Joël Godin**. Mr. **René Villemure** represented the Canadian Branch of the APF. All regions of the APF and some 15 parliaments were represented.

The Committee began by reviewing the report on the effects of misinformation on parliaments. Geneviève Hébert (Quebec) and Nadia El Yousfi (Belgium/French Community/Wallonia-Brussels) reported on the progress of their work. The Committee heard from the two spokespersons for the 9th Francophone Youth Parliament (FYP), Madina Tall (Côte d'Ivoire) and Federico Borre (Aosta Valley). They presented the resolution adopted by the FYP on parliamentary democracies facing misinformation.

Joël Godin asked the FYP spokespersons what parliaments and parliamentarians could do to combat misinformation while respecting freedom of expression. Mr. Borre stressed that there is a difference between protecting freedom of expression and not encouraging misinformation. He added that parliaments should encourage academic research on the subject, as well as the development of tools to combat misinformation. Ms. Tall added that it is essential to educate the public and develop digital literacy.

René Villemure then asked the FYP representatives how they think it is possible to distinguish between true and false information, since real information is harder to identify than fake information. Ms. Tall replied that one possible avenue is to promote technological "fact-checking" tools to verify information before it is shared.

The Committee also heard from Amine Mounir Alaoui, representative of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council of the Kingdom of Morocco, on the subject of disinformation. He presented a memorandum entitled "Les fake news, de la désinformation à l'accès à une information avérée et disponible" [Fake news, disinformation and access to true and available information], which was submitted by his institution in December 2022. He put forward a number of related recommendations: (1) raise public awareness about the need to make better use of digital technology; (2)

provide more resources to make verification systems more effective; and (3) make traditional information producers and new producers, such as influencers, more accountable. At the end of the presentation, **Joël Godin** asked for Mr. Alaoui's opinion on what parliamentarians can focus on to halt the spread of fake news. Mr. Alaoui noted that parliamentarians needed to take time to properly respond to this phenomenon and stressed that the French-speaking world could work on a common initiative to counter the existing legal vacuum surrounding the production of fake news.

The Committee then heard from Yamina Doolaur and Bertrand Levant, program specialists at the Political Affairs and Democratic Governance Branch of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF), who reported on actions undertaken in partnership with the APF in 2022. They also presented avenues for future cooperation, notably with regard to parliamentary capacity-building, gender equality and whistleblower protection.

During the meeting, the Committee also discussed the evaluation of the APF's cooperation programs. **René Villemure** presented a document prepared by the Canadian Branch that outlines some program evaluation best practices. He presented the criteria used by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development for its development aid projects:

- relevance, i.e. the extent to which the objectives and design of the intervention correspond to the needs and policies of all stakeholders;
- the project's coherence with other initiatives in place in the country in question;
- effectiveness, i.e. the extent to which the project's objectives and results have been achieved;
- the efficiency of the intervention, i.e. whether it produces or is likely to produce results in a cost-effective and timely manner;
- the impact of projects, positive or negative, intended or unintended; and
- the viability and sustainability of initiatives.

Ms. Doolaur, an OIF representative, said that the criteria presented corresponded to international standards for the evaluation of cooperation and capacity-building actions. She emphasized the importance of complementary actions.

It was agreed that the Canadian Branch would send out a questionnaire to APF member branches to gather information on the various methods used for program evaluation, that it would continue to work on this, and that it would present a progress report at the next Committee meeting in Tbilisi, Georgia, in July 2023.

On the second day of meetings, **Joël Godin** suggested that the Committee work on the issue of defending and promoting the French language for the purpose of developing a report on the legislative tools available to parliamentarians to protect French and promote learning the language, as well as on the oversight powers to verify that governments are

complying with international, national or local standards. The parliamentarians in attendance lent their support to the project, and a call for applications to complete the report was launched.

Lastly, the Committee followed up on the resolutions adopted at the 47th Annual General Meeting of the APF in July 2022. These resolutions dealt with the openness and powers of parliaments in emergencies, as well as past partnership agreements with the Réseau francophone d'éthique et de déontologie parlementaires and the Parliamentary Research Chair at the University of Luxembourg. On the resolution on the openness of parliaments, **René Villemure** said that Canada has adopted certain provisions on ethics and conduct for elected officials that are currently under review. Regarding the resolution on parliamentary powers and action in emergencies, **René Villemure** shared Canada's experience with the accountability process related to the application of the *Emergencies Act*.

Meeting of the Network of Women Parliamentarians

The Network of Women Parliamentarians (the Network) held meetings presided by Chantal Soucy (Member, Quebec), Chair of the Network. **Marie-France Lalonde** took part in this meeting in her capacity as rapporteur for the Network. All regions of the APF and over 20 parliaments were represented.

Steering Committee Meeting

The meeting began on 1 March 2023, with a meeting of the Network's Steering Committee. At that time, the Steering Committee finalized preparations for the Network meeting, reviewing the agenda and discussing the different elements of the meeting. At that time, **Marie-France Lalonde** presented her draft report on period poverty in the French-speaking world.

Meeting of the Network of Women Parliamentarians

During the Network meeting, **Marie-France Lalonde** presented the report of the Canadian Branch of the APF on access to menstrual products for women and girls in French-speaking countries. In her presentation, she said that the World Bank estimates that 500 million women and girls worldwide do not have access to basic products and services to properly manage menstruation. She added that period poverty is not just a problem for women and girls in low-income countries. In Canada, for example, an estimated 34% of women and girls have often or sometimes had to make budget sacrifices to afford menstrual products. **Marie-France Lalonde** specified that to gather more information about initiatives to achieve menstrual equity, the Canadian Branch distributed a questionnaire in January 2023, and as of 16 February 2023, 10 responses had been received. Lastly, she announced that the Canadian Branch of the APF would present a draft resolution on menstrual equity at the next Network meeting in July 2023.

Following **Marie-France Lalonde's** presentation, the Network heard from Nadia Bezaoui, Chair of the Organisation panafricaine de lutte pour la santé, who spoke about period poverty and reproductive health care in Morocco. Ms. Bezaoui said that many Moroccan

women and girls struggle to afford menstrual products, and that many use inadequate or homemade protection. She also discussed the many myths and stereotypes surrounding menstruation in Morocco, for example that women and girls are “impure” and the fact that menstruating women and girls are advised against washing, going to the hammam, playing sports or having sex. Ms. Bezaud said that period poverty is a source of inequality for Moroccan women and girls, particularly those living in rural areas. Her recommendations for combating period poverty include:

- building and upgrading safe, private sanitary facilities in schools and public spaces;
- improving access to menstrual products; and
- implementing a sexual and reproductive education program in schools.

In addition to this topic, parliamentarians discussed the choice of education streams for girls, the impact of climate change on women and girls, and violence against women during armed conflicts. The Network also heard presentations from **Leïla Rhiwi**, UN Women Representative in Morocco, on the equality of women and men before the law and a strategy to achieve objectives by 2030, and from **Ben-Nasar Boularbah** on gender-sensitive budgeting, a practice anchored within Morocco’s Ministry of Economy and Finance since 2013.

Lastly, the parliamentarians in attendance discussed creating a network of Moroccan women parliamentarians. **Marie-France Lalonde** shared the experience of the Parliament of Canada. She presented the mandate and work of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, the Department of Women and Gender Equality, and the activities of the all-party women’s caucus.

Workshop on policies to combat violence against women in parliaments

On the afternoon of 2 March 2023, members of the Network took part in a workshop on combating violence against women in parliaments. The workshop was led by Anick Laplante, Director of the Associate General Secretariat for Administration, Living Together and Harassment Prevention of the National Assembly of Quebec. Anick Laplante presented the framework policy for preventing and managing psychological and sexual harassment in APF parliaments, which was adopted in July 2022 at the 43rd APF Annual General Meeting in Kigali, Rwanda. The Parliament of Canada sat on the working group that developed this framework policy. During the workshop, participants discussed the various forms that harassment can take, as well as the measures that can be implemented to respond to harassment allegations.

Bilateral meetings

In addition to the two meetings organized by the APF, members of the Canadian delegation had the honour of meeting Rachid Talbi El Alami, President of the House of Representatives, and Hassan Benomar, seventh Vice-President of the House of Representatives, at the Parliament of the Kingdom of Morocco on 28 February 2023.

During their meeting with Mr. Talbi El Alami, members of the Canadian delegation highlighted the excellent relationship between Canada and the Kingdom of Morocco. During their conversation, the parliamentarians expressed their desire to see both parliaments expand their dialogue on parliamentary cooperation and public policy expertise. Promotion of the French language, youth and workers' mobility, the fight against climate change and environmental protection were also discussed.

During the meeting with Hassan Benomar, the parliamentarians discussed the many social and cultural ties uniting Canada and Morocco. For example, the place of French in education in Canada and Morocco was discussed, as were the many ties between the two countries given the large number of Moroccan students in Canada. Canadian parliamentarians and Hassan Benomar indicated that they would like to see greater mobility opportunities for young people between the two countries.

Conclusion

Through its participation in meetings of the APF's Parliamentary Affairs Committee and the Network of Women Parliamentarians, the Canadian Branch had the opportunity to contribute to the strengthening of parliamentary cooperation, to combat misinformation in democratic institutions and to advance gender equality. In this regard, the presentation of the Canadian Branch's reports opened an important dialogue with parliamentarians from various regions of the Francophonie.

Through discussions between members of the Canadian delegation and other participants at the meetings, the Canadian Branch of the APF achieved its objectives of promoting the French language, encouraging the study of cultural, economic and social issues of common interest in order to foster cooperation among APF parliamentarians and to establish cross-cultural dialogue.

Respectfully submitted,

Francis Drouin, MP

President of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie

Chair of the Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie
ACTIVITY	Meetings of the Parliamentary Affairs Committee and the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie
DESTINATION	Rabat, Morocco
DATES	March 1-3, 2023
DELEGATION	
SENATE	
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Mr. Joël Godin Ms. Marie-France Lalonde Mr. René Villemure
STAFF	Ms. Dominique Montpetit
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 13,753.79
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 5,818.37
HOSPITALITY	\$ 0.00
PER DIEMS	\$ 2,264.11
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 0.00
MISCELLANEOUS	\$ 0.00
TOTAL	\$ 21,836.27