

Canadian Group
Inter-Parliamentary Union



Groupe canadien
Union interparlementaire

Report of the Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

Annual Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations

New York, New York, United States of America

February 13 to 15, 2023

Report

A delegation of the Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (UIPU) was in New York (United States of America) from 13 to 15 February 2023 to participate in the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) [2023 Annual Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations](#) (UN) headquarters and to attend other meetings. The Canadian delegation comprised the following parliamentarians:

- The Honourable David McGuinty, P.C., M.P., President of the Canadian Group of the IPU and Head of Delegation;
- The Honourable Brian Francis, Senator;
- The Honourable Rosa Galvez, Senator;
- Ms. Andréanne Larouche, M.P.;
- Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen, M.P.; and
- Ms. Julie Vignola, M.P.

The delegation was accompanied by Ms. Shannon Petry, Association Secretary and Ms. Natalie Mychajlyszyn, Advisor.

THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

Established in 1889, the [IPU](#) is the international organization of national parliaments of sovereign states. The IPU is the focal point for global parliamentary dialogue, working for peace and co-operation as well as for the establishment of representative democracy. To this end, it:

- fosters contacts, co-ordination, and the exchange of experiences among parliamentarians of all member parliaments;
- considers questions of international interest and concern, and expresses its views on relevant issues in order to bring about action by parliaments and parliamentarians;
- contributes to the defence and promotion of human rights, which are essential aspects of parliamentary democracy and development; and
- contributes to better knowledge of the working of representative institutions, and to the strengthening and development of their means of action.¹

The IPU's activities are pursued according to its [Strategy 2022–2026](#), which was adopted in November 2021 during the 143rd Assembly of the IPU in Madrid, Spain.

At present, 179 national parliaments are members of the IPU. The organization also has 14 associate members, including the European Parliament, the Parliamentary Assembly of *La Francophonie* and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.²

THE PARLIAMENTARY HEARING

The Parliamentary Hearing at the UN is an annual event, organized jointly by the IPU and the Office of the President of the UN General Assembly. It provides an invaluable

¹ See: IPU, "[About us](#)"; and IPU, [Statutes and Rules](#).

² IPU, [Members](#).

opportunity for parliamentarians to interact with UN officials, provide input to major UN processes as well as share experiences and best practices on a topic of global concern.

The Parliamentary Hearing is a highly significant event in the IPU's calendar of activities given the long-standing importance placed by the organization on promoting the role of parliamentarians in multilateralism generally and cooperation with the UN specifically. More recently, the IPU's [Strategy 2022–2026](#) underscored this importance in its strategic objective, "Catalysing collective parliamentary action," and its aim to "further strengthen the parliamentary dimension of multilateralism and global governance including the voice of parliaments at the United Nations and other multilateral organizations" in order to "accelerate multilateral policy solutions to key global issues." Member parliaments at the 145th Assembly of the IPU in 2022 also endorsed a report on how the IPU can deepen its engagement with the UN as part of its efforts to "instil a parliamentary dimension in the work of the United Nations."

A. The 2023 Annual Parliamentary Hearing

Approximately 150 parliamentarians from 46 countries attended the 2023 Annual Parliamentary Hearing. Taking place from 13 to 14 February, the theme of the hearing was *Water for people and the planet: Stop the waste, change the game, invest in the future*. Its programme included seven panel discussions featuring experts and parliamentarians on water and sanitation issues. Several presenters over the course of the two days emphasized the timeliness of the hearing's focus, noting that it provided a parliamentary dimension to the UN 2023 Water Conference that would take place from 22 to 24 March, the first since 1977. The Hearing also reinforced the IPU's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), whose implementation by 2030 is central to the organization's promotion of peace, democracy and development.³

The President of the UN General Assembly, Mr. Csaba Kőrösi (Hungary) and the IPU President, Mr. Duarte Pacheco (Portugal) provided opening remarks, each emphasizing the critical decision-making role parliamentarians play in shaping national governance and water policies as well as holding governments to account.

Session 1: SDG 6 as a linchpin of sustainable development

Presenters:

- Ms. Kelly Ann Naylor, Senior Water Expert, former UNICEF Associate Director for Water, Sanitation and Hygiene; and
- Mr. Federico Properzi, Chief Technical Advisor, UN Water.

Parliamentarians heard presentations on the lack of global progress towards achieving commitments made under Sustainable Development Goal 6 on clean water and sanitation, as well as the challenges impeding full implementation of the goal by 2030. The presenters emphasized the cross-cutting aspect of SDG 6 with other goals, such as climate action, reducing inequalities, gender equality, and good health.

³ For a detailed report of the 2023 Hearing and presentations by panelists, as well as the Hearing's programme, please see the event's [website](#).

In his intervention, **Mr. McGuinty** emphasized the importance of promoting cross-jurisdictional approaches, such as integrated watershed management councils, as a way for enhancing cooperation among sovereign states, Indigenous peoples, the private sector and civil society over such a vital capital asset as water.

Session 2: Access to safe water and sanitation as a human right

Presenters:

- Ms. Caterina de Albuquerque, former UN Rapporteur on the right of water and sanitation, Chief Executive Officer, Sanitation and Water for All; and
- Ms. Sareen Malik, African Civil Society Network on Water and Sanitation.

In their presentations, Ms. De Albuquerque and Ms. Malik stressed that governments must realize their legal responsibility to respect, protect and fulfill the right to clean water and sanitation by devoting available resources and continuously improving access for all. Parliamentary delegates made several recommendations about the role parliamentarians can play to help realize water and sanitation as a human right, such as incorporating such human rights obligations into national laws, passing budgets that allocate maximum available resources for water and sanitation, and holding governments accountable on their commitments.

Session 3: Climate change and water scarcity: Building resilience to avoid the worst

Presenters:

- Ms. Suzanne Ozment, World Resources Institute;
- Ms. Karine Rouge, CEO, Veolia North America; and
- Mr. Stefan Uhlenbrook, Director of Hydrology, Water and Cryosphere, World Meteorological Organization.

The presenters focused their remarks on various aspects of how to build resilience in the face of climate change's negative impact on water resources. They discussed measures that parliamentarians can influence, including facilitating gray water recycling, promoting nature-based solutions or green infrastructure that enhances healthy ecosystems as well as supporting research and data-collection so that policy decisions are based on accurate assessments of water supply and demand.

In her intervention, **Senator Galvez** brought attention to the thousands of satellites in earth's orbit for various purposes, and the increased risk of collisions and debris that result from such numbers, thereby endangering data collection and early warning systems for water resources.

For her part, **Ms. Vignola** shared the work watershed organizations in Quebec do to educate youth about the impact of the recreational use of heavy vehicles on wetlands. Through their work, these organizations promote awareness of the role wetlands play as natural filters and seek support for their restoration.

Session 4: Water conservation: the low hanging fruit

Presenters:

- Mr. Johannes Cullmann, Vice Chair of UN Water, Chief Science Advisor to the President of the UN General Assembly; and
- Ms. Mary Ann Dickinson, former CEO of the Alliance for Water Efficiency.

The presenters highlighted various low-cost measures that legislators can promote and enforce to improve water conservation. These measures include changing behaviours regarding water usage through various forms of financial incentives and sanctions, as well as investing in water-efficient infrastructure. Among other water conservation challenges raised during the discussion, delegates listed the difficulties of balancing access where inequalities, food insecurity and unsustainability persist.

Ms. Vignola emphasized the importance of introducing water conservation behaviour in the early stages of a child's development.

Ms. Larouche noted that stakeholders such as farmers and the marine transportation sector have important roles to play in finding solutions to improved water conservation.

Session 5: Financing infrastructure for sanitation and water services: The trillion-dollar challenge

Presenters:

- Senator Rosa Galvez;
- Mr. Paul O'Connell, President, Water Equity;
- Mr. Sudipto Sarkar, Lead Water Specialist, World Bank; and
- Mr. Henk Ovink, Special Envoy for International Water Affairs of the Netherlands, Co-host of the UN Water Conference.

Senator Galvez focused her presentation on the importance of increasing investments in water infrastructure to fill the gaps that prevent universal access to clean water and sanitation. She stressed that climate financing and water financing are essential to comprehensively realizing the SDGs. She noted that while the private sector has a role to play, it should be subject to conditions where externalities and consequences are concerned. She further remarked that the motivation of the private sector should be being directed away from profits and towards being good global citizens with an interest in achieving the SDGs. She also argued that the risks of financing infrastructure must be better distributed to build resilience for the long-term. Lastly, she offered her reflections on the challenges and shortcomings facing Canada in terms of water financing and water management.

In response to questions and comments from delegates, **Senator Galvez** noted that Canada has expanded its impact assessment process to incorporate views of multiple stakeholders, including Indigenous peoples and 2SLGBTQI+ communities. She also stressed that Canada prioritizes corporate social responsibility, pointing to the 2022 launch of the government's new strategy for responsible business conduct abroad which emphasizes sustainable growth, gender equality and environmental protection as well as the establishment in 2019 of the Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise.

Ms. Mathysen intervened to stress the importance of preventing water privatization and of introducing fiscal conditions for those enterprises that take advantage of free water infrastructure to earn a profit. She also inquired about best practices in other countries regarding public-private partnerships for public water infrastructure as well as legislation that prevents sale of water by the private sector.

Session 6: Toward a more inclusive water policy: Leaving no one behind

Presenters:

- Ms. Ana Merelis Genaro, MP, Chamber of Deputies of Bolivia;
- Prof. Caitlyn Hall, Member, Young Hydrologic Society; and
- Ms. Lesha Witmer, Member, Steering Committee of the Women for Water Partnership.

The presenters underscored in their remarks that the more participatory and inclusive water policies are, the more successful and efficient they will be. They stressed that early and meaningful involvement of youth, women, Indigenous peoples as well as marginalized communities in water management project planning is essential to ensure that the specific needs of these groups are reflected in local, national and global approaches. In this respect, parliaments have a role to play in calling for simplifying engagement processes, building capacity in these communities, and raising awareness about inclusivity among all decision-makers.

Ms. Larouche intervened to highlight that despite being especially affected by water policies set out by governments, women and youth are frequently excluded from the decision-making process for many reasons. She highlighted that gender-based budgeting and gender-based analysis are essential to building a fair and inclusive society. In this context, she noted that, while Canada has prioritized gender-based analysis in regulations and legislation, the application of gender-integrated approaches to water policies will lead to broader impact.

Session 7: Transboundary waters: From competition to cooperation for peace

Presenters:

- Ms. Danielle Gaillard, Senior Specialist on Water and Global Processes;
- Prof. Melissa McCracken, Assistant Professor of International Environmental Policy, the Fletcher School, Tufts University; and
- Prof. Susanne Schmeier, Associate Professor of Water Law and Diplomacy, IHE Delft Institute for Water Education.

The presenters provided information about the links between water scarcity and international conflicts, and the mutually beneficial opportunities for building trust and cooperation among riparian states. They noted the increased risks of conflicts arising from the negative impact of climate change on water resources and the growing prevalence of “water diplomacy” through official and unofficial tracks.

Ms. Vignola intervened by reminding delegates that water is an issue that intersects with many concerns the world is facing today. She noted that as conflicts arise between states

over shared water resources and ecosystems, more research on the links between nationalism, water and opportunities for cooperation are warranted.

Special Briefing – The future of multilateralism: challenges and opportunities for the United Nations

Mr. Danilo Türk (former President of Slovenia), in his capacity as a member of the High-Level Advisory Board (HLAB) on Effective Multilateralism, briefed delegations on current efforts at the UN to revive multilateralism; these efforts will culminate with an outcome document to be released at the 2024 Summit of the Future. President Türk highlighted the six areas on which the initiative is focusing:

- Collective security, including reform of the UN Security Council to make the body more representative and inclusive as well as to broaden its mandate to include peacebuilding, so that it focuses not only on conflict prevention, but also on making societies more resilient.
- Abundant and sustainable finance that delivers for all, including through reforms of international finance infrastructure and more private sector engagement.
- Climate governance, with an emphasis on enabling green transition, and strengthening environmental dimensions in decision-making.
- Digital transition, to ensure that everyone can enjoy the benefits of the digital age and that data is secure and protected.
- Current and emerging transnational risks, including artificial intelligence, outer space, transnational organized crime, biohazards and viruses.
- Inclusive and accountable multilateralism, which includes stakeholders from all levels of society.

He emphasized that parliamentarians are crucial stakeholders in promoting multilateralism generally and the current process specifically. He encouraged delegates to take advantage of opportunities to influence the process in order that its outcome reflect their priorities and roles as parliamentarians.

In his intervention, **Mr. McGuinty** underscored the importance of the HLAB's mandate, particularly given the many challenges multilateralism is facing today. He conveyed the remarks he hears from constituents about the UN's limitations and its ambitious agenda regarding the SDGs. He noted that when governments are not provided with clear and realistic expectations, the implementation of any global objective is put at risk and people, especially youth, become discouraged. He remarked on the high levels of distrust and misinformation as the context in which the HLAB is carrying out its mandate and which has resulted in a more polarized global society. He encouraged the HLAB to meaningfully engage with parliamentarians as part of its process, consider more realistic expectations in its outcome document, as well as focus on the necessary political and economic investments to combat inequality and unemployment.

Wrap-up Session: What is next for water policy making?

Parliamentarians were briefed by the UN Under-Secretary General for Policy, Mr. Guy Ryder (United Kingdom) in the final session of the two-day hearing. Mr. Ryder remarked

that the world was at the halfway point of the 2030 Agenda, but that it is not on track to realize the SDGs. He called on parliamentarians to join other stakeholders in redoubling efforts to ensure that the SDGs are met. He encouraged them to continue to take advantage of various opportunities and meetings at the UN to share the views of their constituents and to engage in multilateral work involving all the SDGs, but especially the goal of improving access to clean water and sanitation.

In making his concluding remarks, Mr. Pacheco emphasized that parliamentarians have an important role to play in accelerating the implementation of all the SDGs. Their contribution to improving access to clean water and sanitation is particularly crucial as every country faces some challenges in that regard. By way of their budgetary, legislative and oversight functions, he argued, parliamentarians are in a position to translate global instruments regarding water into national measures.

OTHER MEETINGS

During its time in New York, the delegation also held several meetings with various interlocutors (see list below). They discussed various matters relating to Canada's priorities at the UN, Canada–U.S. relations, the safety and security of UN missions in challenging environments, the impact of recent developments in the Middle East on regional and international security, IPU business, bilateral issues as well as global efforts on climate action and the elimination of violence against women and girls.

- Canada's Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York, Ambassador Bob Rae, and mission officials;
- Acting Consul General of Canada to New York, Mr. André Frenette, on current issues in Canada–U.S. relations;
- Mexican Group of the IPU;
- Belgian Group of the IPU, as President of the Twelve Plus Group;
- British Group of the IPU;
- Spotlight Initiative to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls;
- Parliamentarians for Global Action;
- Ms. Hila Wesa, Political Affairs Officer, Office of the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, United Nations; and
- Mr. Gilles Michaud, Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security, United Nations.

Respectfully submitted,

The Hon. David McGuinty, P.C., M.P.

President of the Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION

Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

ACTIVITY

Annual Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations

DESTINATION	New York, New York, United States of America
DATES	February 13 to 15, 2023
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Brian Francis, Senator Hon. Rosa Galvez, Senator
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Hon. David McGuinty, P.C., M.P. Ms. Andréanne Larouche, M.P. Ms. Lindsay Mathysen, M.P. Ms. Julie Vignola, M.P.
STAFF	Ms. Shannon Petry, Association Secretary Ms. Natalie Mychajlyszyn, Analyst
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 10, 106.95
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 6, 343.60
HOSPITALITY	\$ 0.00
PER DIEMS	\$ 4, 677.33
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 119.10
MISCELLANEOUS	\$ 0.00
TOTAL	\$ 21,246.98