

Section canadienne de  
l'Assemblée parlementaire  
de la Francophonie



Canadian Branch of the  
Assemblée parlementaire  
de la Francophonie

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

### **Bureau Meeting and 48<sup>th</sup> Annual Session of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie**

**Tbilisi, Georgia**

**July 4 to 8, 2023**

# Report

The parliamentary delegation of the Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF) that attended the APF Bureau meeting in Tbilisi, Georgia on 4 July 2023, and the 48<sup>th</sup> Session of the APF, also held in Tbilisi, from July 5–8 2023, is honoured to present its report.

Led by **Francis Drouin**, Member of Parliament (MP), President of the APF, the delegation included the following parliamentarians:

- Darrell Samson, MP, president delegate of the Canadian Branch;
- the Honourable Éric Forest, Senator;
- Joël Godin, MP; and
- Marie-France Lalonde, MP.

The delegation was accompanied by Gabrielle de Billy Brown, Advisor to the Canadian Branch of the APF, and Julie Pelletier, Executive Secretary of the Canadian Branch of the APF.

More than 200 participants from 40 APF branches attended the 48<sup>th</sup> Session. Representatives from several organizations related to the Francophonie were also in attendance. At the initiative of the Georgian Branch of the APF, the 48<sup>th</sup> Session of the APF was held under the theme of citizen mobility in the French speaking world.

## BUREAU BUSINESS

The APF Bureau met on 4 July 2023, chaired by **Francis Drouin**, President of the APF. In addition to Mr. Drouin, two other members of the Canadian Branch of the APF took part in the work of the Bureau: **Joël Godin** (as Chair of the Parliamentary Affairs Committee) and **Darrell Samson** (as president delegate of the Canadian Branch of the APF).

During the discussions on the composition of the Assembly, the Bureau examined the applications for membership or change of status received since its last meeting in January 2023. **Francis Drouin** was keen to emphasize the symbolic importance of the Georgian and Ukrainian branches' applications for change of status and for membership respectively.

During the meeting, the Bureau was informed of the 2022 Activity Report of the Parliamentary Secretary General, Mr. Bruno Fuchs, Member of the National Assembly (France). He reviewed the various activities carried out by the APF in the past year, including parliamentary missions to parliaments that request it.

The Bureau also discussed its cooperation programming for 2023. In this regard, **Joël Godin** reiterated the importance of accountability and the achievement of clear results. On the same point, **Darrell Samson** took the floor to thank the Georgian Branch of the APF for its welcome and to ask a question about the decision-making process in force at the General Secretariat of the APF during changes or adjustments to the cooperation programming. **Francis Drouin**, on behalf of the General Secretariat, explained that these decisions are usually made in negotiation with the APF Branch or the donors concerned,

and that any project must be aligned with the priorities set out in the APF's strategic framework. **Joël Godin** suggested that, in the future, programming should be broken down by region so that Bureau members could better visualize the distribution of activities.

Bureau members also discussed the APF's proposed 2023–2027 Strategic Framework. In this regard, **Darrell Samson** noted the absence of the environmental issue as a specific objective in the new version of the proposed policy framework, even though it was one of the priorities of the Canadian Branch of the APF. The parliamentarians raised several points during the discussions on this topic, leading to an extension of the period for amendments to the content of the draft strategic framework. **Joël Godin** asked about the continuation of this project, to which **Francis Drouin** indicated that the search for a consensus among the branches of the APF will be necessary for the adoption of the strategic framework at the Plenary Assembly a few days later.

The members of the Bureau also heard the presentation of the APF's financial report, including the accounts for the 2022 fiscal year as well as the update of the 2023 draft budget. **Darrell Samson** asked for clarification on the hiring of an additional employee within the General Secretariat of the APF, whose role would be dedicated to diplomatic contacts and projects related to the next Francophonie Summit. He obtained confirmation that this position corresponded to the call for applications launched in June 2023.

Following a presentation on the follow-up of the [Déclaration de Djerba \[IN FRENCH\]](#), adopted at the Sommet de la Francophonie held in Tunisia on 19 and 20 November 2022, **Joël Godin** thanked Laurent Wehrli (MP, Switzerland) for adding this item to the agenda. He brought forward the work of the Parliamentary Affairs Committee on this topic. For his part, **Darrell Samson** thanked and congratulated the General Secretariat of the APF for its efforts, which led to the universal recognition of the role of the APF in the Déclaration de Djerba.

The members of the Bureau discussed the possible accession of the APF to the [Common Principles for Support to Parliaments](#) of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). As Chair of the Parliamentary Affairs Committee, which is responsible for this file, **Joël Godin** took the floor to explain that this is not usually the case to go through such a formal process, but that given the weight of the discussions, it would be preferable for a formal resolution to be adopted at the Plenary Assembly.

The Bureau then heard an update on the process of reviewing the APF statutes. **Éric Lefebvre**, MNA (Quebec), as Vice-Chair of the Political Committee, presented the next steps in the process. **Joël Godin** took the floor to propose the addition of statutory meetings by videoconference in order to be more responsive and give more flexibility to the General Secretariat to convene meetings as needed. The Bureau determined that this issue should be discussed further in the Political Committee.

The Chairs of the Committees and Networks then reported on their recent work. As Chair of the Committee on Parliamentary Affairs, **Joël Godin** presented the activities undertaken by the Committee during 2022.

Finally, **Darrell Samson** took the floor to invite parliamentarians to meet again in Montréal, Québec, (Canada) for the 49<sup>th</sup> Annual Session of the APF in July 2024.

## NETWORK OF WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS

On 5 July 2023, **Marie-France Lalonde** participated in the meeting of the Steering Committee of the Network of Women Parliamentarians, followed by the plenary meeting of the Network. During this latest meeting, **Marie-France Lalonde** presented the final report as well as the draft resolution on period poverty in the Francophone world. Her presentation generated many positive reactions, and several parliamentarians were keen to express their views on this issue as well as the realities they face in their countries. **Marie-France Lalonde** thanked the members of the Network for their contribution and noted that this generates several ideas for future studies.

The meeting of the Network of Women Parliamentarians continued with hearings on topics of interest, namely the political and socio-economic situation of women in Georgia and the safety of women and girls in conflict zones, as well as a meeting with a local woman entrepreneur. Following this meeting, **Marie-France Lalonde** intervened to support the mobilization of women in the business world and mentioned the recent announcement of the Government of Canada regarding the creation of child care programs across the country. The parliamentarians learned that such services do not exist in Georgia.

Subsequently, the Network focused on the monitoring of international commitments on gender equality and women's rights. **Marie-France Lalonde** informed parliamentarians that as of 20 June 2023, women in Canadian federal politics held 54% of seats in the Senate and 31% of seats in the House of Commons. **Marie-France Lalonde** also informed the participants that according to the United Nations Development Programme's [Gender Social Norms Index](#), 41% of people in Canada have at least one negative gender norm bias and 21% have at least two negative biases, a significantly higher proportion among men than women. **Marie-France Lalonde** also cited the cases of women parliamentarians who are criticized and insulted more often than their male colleagues.

## WORK OF THE YOUNG PARLIAMENTARIANS NETWORK

The Young Parliamentarians Network met on 5 July 2023. As President of the APF, **Francis Drouin** spoke at the beginning of the meeting to reiterate the crucial role that young parliamentarians play in democracy and, by the same token, the importance of the Young Parliamentarians Network. **Francis Drouin** also highlighted the excellent work of the Network, which contributes to building stronger democracies, opening up to young people active in politics, valuing the contribution of young parliamentarians and integrating their point of view into the work of the APF.

During the meeting, the Network addressed the issue of the role of young people in the decision-making process by hearing Ms Shorena Tsitsagi, Head of the International Relations Department, of the Georgian Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth. It also addressed the importance of parliamentary ethics and professional conduct with a presentation by Lyne Robinson-Dalpe, Director of Advisory and Compliance at the [Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner](#) of Canada. The Network also discussed organizing actions for the benefit of young people in the French-speaking world, and adopted the final report and draft resolution on deliberative democracy. Finally, the parliamentarians present examined the proposed recommendations in the context of

the general debate on citizen mobility in the French-speaking world, which they had to complete in preparation for the debate scheduled for the Plenary Assembly.

## **WORK OF THE POLITICAL COMMITTEE**

The Political Committee met on 6 July 2023 under the chairmanship of Christophe-André Frassa (Senator, France). As usual, the Committee began its work with a round table discussion on the political news of each of the APF branches present. The **Honourable Éric Forest**, Senator, took part, introducing three bills that have an impact on the place of French in Canada and that recently received Royal Assent: the [Act for the Substantive Equality of Canada's Official Languages](#), the [Online Streaming Act](#) and the [Online News Act](#).

The **Honourable Éric Forest** presented the final report and the draft resolution on the promotion and use of French in the Francophone world. In particular, he pointed out that this draft report was a joint initiative with the Committee on Education, Communication and Cultural Affairs and had not been substantially amended since the previous meeting. The **Honourable Éric Forest** summarized the outline of the report as well as the calls for action contained in the draft resolution. The topic of the report sparked lively discussion among several members of the Committee, who were keen to express their views on the place occupied by the French language on the international stage, particularly in Europe. The draft resolution, which was simultaneously discussed in the Committee on Education, Communication and Cultural Affairs, was then forwarded to the Plenary Assembly for adoption.

The Quebec Branch of the APF proposed a new topic for its report: cybersecurity and interference in democratic processes. The **Honourable Éric Forest** was enthusiastic about this topic, explaining that it is particularly relevant in view of the growing use of artificial intelligence. He proposed the inclusion of the influence of artificial intelligence on ethics, as well as data manipulation, as possible themes to be integrated into the draft report of the Quebec Branch of the APF.

Other issues were also discussed at the Political Committee meeting. It examined the evolution of the various political situations in the French-speaking world, particularly in the branches that have been suspended or placed on alert by the APF. The Committee also held a hearing with the Executive Secretary of the G5 Sahel Interparliamentary Committee to follow up on the situation in the region and efforts to return to democracy in some of its member states. In addition, the Political Committee discussed the transition from a presidential to a parliamentary system in Georgia through a presentation by Giorgi Kakhiani, member of the Committee on Procedural Affairs in the Georgian Parliament.

## **WORK OF THE PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

The Parliamentary Affairs Committee met on 6 July 2023, with **Joël Godin** as chair. **Marie France Lalonde** participated in the meeting and presented the draft report of the Canadian Branch of the APF on the various evaluation criteria and techniques that could be used to assess APF cooperation programs. **Joël Godin** provided background on this report, which aims to ensure the positive impact of the cooperation actions carried out by the organization.

As part of its study on the effects of disinformation in parliament, the Committee heard testimony from the Ambassador of Georgia to France regarding the risks of disinformation for democracy and more specifically its impact in Georgia. **Marie-France Lalonde** asked what measures were recommended in a context where it is the politicians themselves who use disinformation. In addition, it worked on its bodies of law project on the protection of whistleblowers as well as on the draft report on the role of parliaments in the promotion of the French language.

The Committee also discussed its partnership with the [Réseau francophone d'éthique et de déontologie parlementaires \(RFEDP\) \[IN FRENCH\]](#) and heard from Lyne Robinson-Dalpe, Director of Advisory and Compliance at the [Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner](#) of Canada. As part of this partnership, the APF is working with the National Assembly of Côte d'Ivoire to develop a code of conduct for members of parliament, which is expected to be presented near the end of 2023.

Finally, the Committee examined the draft resolution on the accession of the APF to the [Common Principles for Support to Parliaments](#) of the IPU and forwarded it to the Plenary Assembly for adoption.

## **WORK OF THE COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

The President of the APF, **Francis Drouin** and the **Honourable Éric Forest** participated in the meeting of the APF's Cooperation and Development Committee on 6 July 2023. **Francis Drouin** welcomed all the parliamentarians and emphasized the importance of the issues dealt with by the commission, which touches on human development, sustainable development and economic development. The **Honourable Éric Forest** presented the draft final report as well as the draft resolution on the impacts of climate change on island, coastal and riparian territories in the Francophone world. These drafts were endorsed by the Committee and the resolution, with some minor amendments, was forwarded to the Plenary Assembly for adoption.

The Committee also addressed the issues of the bodies of law project on climate change led by the APF, energy transition, the creation of a simplified land title for the autonomy of women in the Francophone world and the international trade negotiations conducted at the World Trade Organization. It also looked into the possibility of conducting studies on the promotion of Francophone entrepreneurship as well as on the circular economy.

## **WORK OF THE EDUCATION, COMMUNICATION AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**Darrell Samson** participated in the APF's Education, Communication and Cultural Affairs Committee's work on 6 July 2023. **Darrell Samson** presented the draft report of the Canadian Branch of the APF on the French language on the international stage as well as the associated draft resolution. These documents were simultaneously discussed in the Political Committee, as the subject touched on the prerogatives of the two committees. These drafts were endorsed by the Committee following a minor amendment and the resolution was forwarded to the Plenary Assembly for adoption.



The Committee also provided an update on the ongoing draft reports on the protection of cultural heritage, inclusion in schools for students with special needs and the restitution of looted cultural property. In addition, Committee members heard several experts on topics of interest. They first discussed UNESCO's [Creative Cities Network](#), before turning their attention to the restitution of cultural property looted during colonization. The members of the Committee also discussed the role of the [Union internationale de la presse francophone \[IN FRENCH\]](#) in the treatment of information and the fight against fake news in the Francophone world.

Furthermore, the Committee organized a round table on the [Déclaration de Djerba \[IN FRENCH\]](#), adopted at the Francophonie Summit held in Tunisia on 19 and 20 November 2022. The Summit's theme was "Connectivity in diversity: Digital technology, a vector for development and solidarity in the French speaking world." The Déclaration de Djerba highlights the role of digital technologies in the Francophone world, particularly in connecting people, disseminating the French language, promoting learning, fostering economic growth and modernizing public administration. During the round table, **Darrell Samson** briefed parliamentarians on Canadian initiatives related to the subject of the Declaration, including the recent adoption of the [Online Streaming Act](#), the [Act for the Substantive Equality of Canada's Official Languages](#) and the [Online News Act](#). On this last point, **Darrell Samson** was keen to highlight the recent actions of digital platforms blocking the sharing of news on them. Finally, he mentioned the [Digital Citizen Initiative](#) and the Digital Citizen Research Program of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

## **WORK OF THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY**

The APF Plenary Assembly met on 7 July 2023, presided by **Francis Drouin**, President of the APF. The Speaker of the Georgian Parliament, Shalva Papuashvili, delivered the first opening speech, in which he looked forward to working with the APF to achieve the democratic goals shared by both institutions. He was followed by the Prime Minister of Georgia, Irakli Garibashvili, whose opening speech, delivered entirely in French, highlighted the ties that unite his country with the Francophone world. These two opening speeches focused on the tense political situation in Georgia and the need to work for peace.

**Francis Drouin** then delivered his opening speech, in which he highlighted the work accomplished by the Georgian Parliament in organising this event, and stated that this shows that La Francophonie is going strong and that we must continue to defend the Francophone cause. He also reiterated his priorities as President of the APF, namely strengthening the place that young people and women hold in the Francophonie, limiting climate change, countering disinformation and its impact on public policy and, finally, promoting the importance of parliamentary diplomacy to bring people together.

The Plenary Assembly then endorsed the recommendation of the Bureau, approving the accession of the Ukrainian Parliament to observer status of the APF and the transition of the Georgian Branch from observer status to an associate member.

The proceedings continued with the address given by Her Excellency Louise Mushikiwabo, Secretary General of the Francophonie, and the question period that followed. Present by videoconference, she first highlighted the work of the APF over the

past few years and reviewed some difficult political situations in the Francophone world. She recalled that Guinea, Mali and Burkina Faso are currently suspended from the [International Organisation of La Francophonie \(OIF\) \[IN FRENCH\]](#). Her Excellency Louise Mushikiwabo shared with the parliamentarians the willingness of La Francophonie to support these States in their transition process as well as in their return to constitutional order and thanked the APF for its role in supporting the Burkinabe authorities. Her Excellency Louise Mushikiwabo also insisted on the need to improve the protection of children in the Francophone world and called for increased collaboration on this issue.

**Darrell Samson**, on behalf of the Canadian Branch of the APF, questioned the Secretary General of the Francophonie about the actions that need to be taken to ensure that research in French, particularly in the field of artificial intelligence, shines internationally and contributes to the promotion of the French language. In response, Her Excellency Louise Mushikiwabo acknowledged that the space occupied by the French language is shrinking internationally and said she was convinced that the OIF's strategic framework will guide and strengthen its use. With regard to scientific research in French, she pointed to the important work accomplished by the [Agence universitaire de la Francophonie \(AUF\) \[IN FRENCH\]](#), as well as the recent creation of the [Réseau francophone international en conseil scientifique \[IN FRENCH\]](#). Her Excellency Louise Mushikiwabo also stressed that massive data processing is extremely important for language and that the Francophonie follows very closely all research related to artificial intelligence. She concluded by stating that the discoverability of French-language content will be one of the main orientations of the OIF's programming in the coming years.

On behalf of the Parliamentary Affairs Committee and as Chair of the Committee, **Joël Godin** questioned the Secretary General of the Francophonie on the measures taken by the OIF with regard to the implementation of the [Déclaration de Djerba \[IN FRENCH\]](#), and on how parliamentarians could be called upon to contribute to them. Her Excellency Louise Mushikiwabo highlighted the OIF's creation of a follow-up mechanism to report on the implementation of the Declaration, and identify best practices as well as challenges to be addressed. She indicated that four states have been selected for the year 2023 to receive support in their efforts to give better visibility to the French language. According to Her Excellency Louise Mushikiwabo, the role of parliamentarians is to animate public debate and use their power as legislators, an essential tool to promote language.

At the conclusion of this first day, **Francis Drouin** gave an update on the steps taken by the APF to obtain observer status at the United Nations (UN). He briefed the parliamentarians on the visits to the UN headquarters in New York, as well as the videoconference meetings with representatives of many permanent representations. **Francis Drouin** asked the APF Branches to inform their representatives so that they support the APF's candidacy, because the more support there is, the better the chances of success of these efforts. He also confirmed that a letter will be sent on his behalf to all Branches to solicit this support.

The second day of the Plenary Assembly's work, on 8 July 2023, opened with the general debate on the theme of "Mobility in the French-speaking world." Two presentations were scheduled to fuel the discussions, the first by a representative of the [International Organization for Migration](#) and the second by an AUF representative in Georgia. They discussed different aspects of mobility, including labour, students and the need for



partnerships. Subsequently, the parliamentarians were invited to share their views on mobility and to intervene on the draft declaration on this subject.

**Marie-France Lalonde**, on behalf of the Canadian Branch, intervened to present two proposed recommendations to be included in the statement. The first aims to remove barriers faced by students seeking to study in academic institutions located in a country other than their own. The second proposes to improve and develop reciprocal exchange programs for young Francophones. Both proposals were endorsed by the Plenary Assembly and are reflected in the final text of the declaration.

The Plenary Assembly then adopted nine resolutions and one declaration:

- [Résolution relative à l'adhésion aux « Principes communs en matière d'assistance aux parlements » de l'UIP \[in French\]](#);
- [Résolution sur l'impact des changements climatiques sur les territoires insulaires, côtiers et riverains dans l'espace francophone \[in French\]](#), stemming from a project of the Canadian Branch of the APF and presented by **Darrell Samson**;
- [Résolution sur la transition énergétique: défis et perspectives de la décarbonisation \[in French\]](#);
- [Résolution sur la promotion et l'usage du français au sein de l'espace francophone \[in French\]](#), stemming from a project of the Canadian Branch of the APF and presented by the **Honorable Éric Forest**;
- [Résolution sur le sport et la Francophonie \[in French\]](#);
- [Résolution relative au respect de l'intégrité territoriale de la Géorgie \[in French\]](#);
- [Résolution sur la précarité menstruelle dans l'espace francophone \[in French\]](#), stemming from a project of the Canadian Branch of the APF and presented by **Marie-France Lalonde**;
- [Résolution sur la promotion du choix des filières d'éducation pour les filles \[in French\]](#);
- [Processus délibératifs comme source d'enrichissement de la démocratie représentative \[in French\]](#);
- [Déclaration relative à la mobilité citoyenne dans l'espace francophone \[in French\]](#).

After several exchanges, and following the discussions held during its first day of work, the Plenary Assembly also adopted the [Cadre stratégique 2023–2030 de l'APF \[in French\]](#), which will guide the organization's actions for the years to come. One of the main changes is to increase the duration of the framework from four to seven years.

Finally, **Darrell Samson** invited the parliamentarians to meet again in Montréal, Québec (Canada) for the 49<sup>th</sup> Annual Session of the APF in July 2024.

After the adoption of a motion of thanks to the organizers of the Annual Session, the proceedings concluded with a speech by **Francis Drouin** who, as Chair of the APF, thanked the members of the General Secretariat of the APF for their work.

## CONCLUSION

By participating in the 48<sup>th</sup> Annual Session of the APF, the Canadian Branch of the APF made a significant contribution to the work of the organization's various bodies, whether through the presentation of draft reports and resolutions, by sharing information with other parliamentarians or by raising important issues that stimulated discussions.

In this respect, the topics addressed in the reports and resolutions presented by the Canadian Branch of the APF demonstrate a desire to better identify the global issues facing the Francophonie: whether it is the promotion of the French language at the international level, the impact of climate change on vulnerable territories or menstrual precariousness, each of these themes has a particular and distinct importance for APF members.

Through its participation in the work of the 48<sup>th</sup> Annual Session, the Canadian Branch of the APF was able to achieve its goals, namely, to promote the influence of the French language, contribute to the study of cultural, economic and social issues of common interest in order to encourage cooperation between APF parliamentarians, and establish a dialogue of cultures. In addition, the Canadian parliamentarians were able to forge ties with their Francophone colleagues on five continents and promote Canadian democracy on the international stage.

Finally, the organization of the Bureau meeting and the 48<sup>th</sup> Session of the APF in a parliament where French is not a working language demonstrates the attractiveness of the Francophonie as a space for dialogue and sharing that promotes democracy, the rule of law and human rights. Through its involvement, the Canadian Branch plays a crucial role in achieving the objectives of the APF.

Respectfully submitted,

Francis Drouin, MP

President, Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie

Chair, Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie

### **Travel Costs**

<b>ASSOCIATION</b>	Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie
<b>ACTIVITY</b>	Bureau Meeting and 48 <sup>th</sup> Annual Session of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie
<b>DESTINATION</b>	Tbilisi, Georgia
<b>DATES</b>	July 4 to 8, 2023

**DELEGATION**

SENATE Hon. Éric Forest

HOUSE OF COMMONS Francis Drouin  
Joël Godin  
Marie-France Lalonde  
Darrell Samson

STAFF Julie Pelletier  
Gabrielle de Billy Brown

**TRANSPORTATION** \$47,879.71

**ACCOMMODATION** \$9,174.92

**HOSPITALITY** \$0.00

**PER DIEMS** \$4,990.72

**OFFICIAL GIFTS** \$0.00

**MISCELLANEOUS** \$255.00

**TOTAL** **\$62,300.35**