

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**

**38<sup>th</sup> Session of the APF America Regional Assembly**

**Baton Rouge, Louisiana, United States of Americas**

**September 5 to 7, 2023**

# Report

The Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (Canadian Branch) participated in the 38<sup>th</sup> Session of the Regional Assembly of the Americas of the APF in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, from 5 to 7 September 2023. The Canadian delegation was composed of seven parliamentarians:

- Francis Drouin, Member of Parliament (M.P.), President of the APF and Chair of the Canadian Branch;
- Darrell Samson, M.P., president delegate and vice-Chair of the Canadian Branch;
- René Villemure, M.P., vice-chair of the Canadian Branch;
- the Honourable Jean-Guy Dagenais, Senator;
- the Honourable Éric Forest, Senator;
- Joël Godin, M.P.; and
- Marie-France Lalonde, M.P.

The delegation was accompanied by two staff of the Canadian Branch: Julie Pelletier, Secretary and Dominique Montpetit, Advisor.

Over 20 parliamentarians from 10 APF branches were in attendance.

## CONFERENCE OF BRANCH CHAIRS

On 5 September 2023, **Francis Drouin**, President of the APF and **Darrell Samson**, president delegate, participated in the Conference of Branch Chairs (the Conference) on behalf of the Canadian Branch of the APF. The meeting provided an opportunity to share updates on the work undertaken during previous Conference meetings, to review the work accomplished during the last statutory meetings of the APF and to engage in discussions on future activities pertaining to the Americas Region.

Damien Cesselin, Secretary General of the APF, provided a detailed account of the recent work carried out by APF bodies. Conference participants also discussed the revised statutes, the new 2023–2030 strategic framework and the *Declaration on citizen mobility in La Francophonie*<sup>1</sup>, which were all adopted at the APF's Annual Session in July 2023.

Stéphane Sarrazin, Member of the Legislative Assembly (Ontario), regional delegate for the Americas, then presented highlights of the Americas Region's activities for the period from March to August 2023. In particular, he mentioned an activity to establish a closer relationship with Mexico's Chamber of Deputies and Senate that took place in March 2023. He also presented the statements of revenues and expenses for the Americas Region for fiscal years 2022–2023 and 2023–2024, as well as estimates for 2023–2024.

The Conference then discussed new parliamentary developments in the Americas Region branches. **Darrell Samson** gave an update on recent activities at the Parliament of Canada. He shared details on the adoption of Bill C-13, which amends the *Official Languages Act* to better serve official language minority communities across Canada. **Mr.**

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<sup>1</sup> [Declaration on citizen mobility in La Francophonie](#) [IN FRENCH]

**Samson** noted that the modernized *Act* strengthens bilingual obligations for federal institutions, advances the right to instruction in the minority language, improves access to justice in the official language of one's choice, and grants the Office of the Commissioner for Official Languages additional powers. **Mr. Samson** concluded his remarks with information on two other bills that were addressed in Parliament in the spring of 2023, namely, the *Online Streaming Act*, which was passed on 27 April 2023, and the *Online News Act*, which was passed on 22 June 2023.

Conference participants then discussed items on the agenda, including the timeline for reviewing the statutes of the Americas Region (approved by the participants), the addition of sustainable development to the APF's 2023–2030 strategic framework (as proposed by the Americas Region), and the *Declaration on the political situation in Haiti*, which was adopted by the APF Bureau in January 2023.

Conference participants then took part in a workshop to identify strategic directions and actions to include in the Americas Region's 2023–2030 work plan. During the discussion, **Darrell Samson** proposed that the work plan's time frame be shifted to 2023–2030 to align with the APF's strategic framework period. Participants agreed to his proposal. Further consultations will be held on priorities and activities in the fall of 2023.

Lastly, **Darrell Samson** reminded Conference participants that the next annual session of the APF will take place in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, hosted by the Parliament of Canada. He encouraged all branches of the Americas Region to attend.

### **38<sup>TH</sup> REGIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE AMERICAS**

The Regional Assembly of the Americas took place on 5 and 6 September 2023, on the theme of the "Role of French at school, at work and in politics." Mike Huval, Member of the Louisiana House of Representatives, and **Francis Drouin** opened the meeting, providing an opportunity for participants to have a discussion and expand their knowledge about La Francophonie in Louisiana and efforts to advance French in the state.

#### **Opening Presentation**

Proceedings opened with a presentation entitled "Borders and identity: Toward new horizons of belonging for La Francophonie" by Claire-Marie Brisson, a Franco-Michigander who is a French professor at Harvard University. During her presentation, Dr. Brisson stressed that language and identity are not restricted by borders. Although identity is often compared to roots, Dr. Brisson described the concept of "rhizomatic identity." It suggests that individuals are not defined by fixed identities, but that these identities are complex and fluid. To foster a sense of belonging to the francophone community in the Americas, Dr. Brisson noted that it is important to guarantee that bilateral cooperation projects are as inclusive and as vibrant as possible and that they are nurtured by the communities themselves. She added that it is important to think of new horizons of belonging and to give the francophone community in the Americas fresh visibility in order to persuade anglophones of the need to protect and advance French.

The opening presentation was followed by a discussion session. **Francis Drouin** asked Dr. Brisson whether she had studied the issue of youth who are learning multiple languages, and whether there were any differences between Europe and North America

in that area. Dr. Brisson noted that, in order to encourage young people to learn and use French, it is important to be proud of bilingualism and to promote French as a language of trade, education and dialogue.

**Darrell Samson** mentioned the important role of the education system in teaching history and in fostering a sense of belonging to the francophone community. Dr. Brisson added that, while school is important in developing a sense of belonging, the same goal can be achieved through other resources, such as radio and television. She added that living in French is not just an academic reality; it is also experienced outside the classroom. Schools should promote the long-term benefits of learning another language.

**Joël Godin** asked Dr. Brisson what the top priorities should be for parliamentarians in the Americas in terms of advancing and championing the French language. Dr. Brisson said that it was important to be open to all francophone communities, including those outside traditional francophone geographical areas.

Dr. Brisson then asked the parliamentarians in attendance what actions they planned to take to advance the French language. The Honourable **Éric Forest** noted that it is crucial to strengthen the sense of belonging for the francophone community in North America and to develop a sense of pride in being a francophone. The Honourable **Jean-Guy Dagenais** emphasized the importance of culture, including music, in achieving this goal. Lastly, **René Villemure** noted that one of the challenges facing francophone communities around the world is the attractiveness of English and how easy it is to use by default. Dr. Brisson noted that it is important to promote French as a language of the future and a language of opportunities.

## **Working Sessions**

### ***Reviving French in Schools: The Situation in Louisiana***

The theme of the first working session was “Reviving French in schools and the situation in Louisiana.” Guest panellists were Michèle Braud, supervisor for language programs with the Louisiana Department of Education, and Peggy Feehan, Executive Director of the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana, Director of the Centre de la francophonie des Amériques and Louisiana’s lead on francophonie. The panellists gave an overview of language history in Louisiana, highlighting French and Spanish exploration, as well as the arrival of Acadians, Haitians and slaves from West Africa in Louisiana. They then focused on the development of various language initiatives to preserve and promote “heritage languages,” including French. For example, they highlighted the mandate of the law on teaching French and the arrival of the first French-language teachers in the early 1970s. They also mentioned the importance of the Louisiana International Associate Teacher Program in implementing Louisiana’s language vision for education.

Following their presentation, **Francis Drouin** noted that there were similarities between Louisiana and Ontario in terms of the history of teaching French, as teaching in French was once prohibited in Ontario as well.

### ***The Growth of Francophone Cultural Tourism***

Joseph Dunn, entrepreneur and Director of Public Relations and Marketing for Laura Plantation, and Lawson Ota, founder of Tours by Marguerite, moderated the second

working session. The theme of the session was “The Growth of Francophone Cultural Tourism.” Millions of francophone tourists visit Louisiana each year. The goal of this session was to address various ways to advance the use of French in Louisiana’s tourism sector. In their presentations, the panellists underscored the importance of providing a francophone experience for visitors. Offering service in French and developing materials in French (and not just a translation of existing materials) can have significant benefits for tourism sites. At Laura Plantation, expanding the services offered in French drove up the number of French-speaking visitors to the site (an increase of almost 10% between 2022 and 2023). However, the panellists identified some gaps in Louisiana’s tourism industry that are affecting the capacity to increase the offer of services in French, including the lack of university and occupational training in French, lack of priority given to hiring applicants with French language skills or lack of policies giving these applicants an advantage, and lack of French-speaking staff in tourism administrations (at both the state and city levels).

Following the presentation, **René Villemure** noted that the lack of tourism services in French could be an obstacle for potential visitors to Louisiana. In response, the panellists noted that there is no political will to ensure that services are available in French, and that it was unfortunately difficult to increase the services offered if there is no official demand for these services.

The Honourable **Éric Forest** sought clarification on the importance of the tourism industry in Louisiana and on existing data to measure the influence of French on Louisiana’s economy. He explained that these data could inform policy makers and persuade them that it would be beneficial to invest in francophone tourism. The panellists noted that a survey on this issue was underway. A survey on cultural economy was conducted in 2008–2009, but at the time, no questions on languages were included. They clarified that it is not easy to have language considered as an economic resource in the United States.

**Darrell Samson** noted that collecting data on the value of francophone tourism in Louisiana could help make the argument that developing a tourism offering in French could generate more economic benefits for Louisiana. He gave the example of communities in Nova Scotia, where francophones are hired in summer during the peak tourism season.

### ***The role of politics and diplomacy in sustaining La Francophonie in the Americas***

Philippe Gustin, a former director with the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana and the Centre international de Lafayette, moderated the third working session. The theme of the session was “The Role of Politics and Diplomacy in Sustaining La Francophonie in the Americas.” Panellists underscored the need for Louisiana to have politicians at all municipal, regional and state levels advance La Francophonie. Each panellist shared personal stories about their work to contribute to advancing La Francophonie in Louisiana. Following the presentations, **Darrell Samson** noted that the French language is an ongoing concern for francophone politicians, affecting all aspects of their work, unlike anglophone politicians in Canada who do not always share these concerns. In this situation, francophone community leaders play a key role in raising politicians’ awareness to the francophone reality and in sustaining a francophone dialogue.

## Concluding the Session of the Regional Assembly of the Americas

At the end of the conference, the Regional Assembly of the Americas adopted the following three declarations:

- *Declaration to Promote French and Creole Languages;*
- *Declaration of Solidarity with the Africa Region;* and
- *Declaration of Commitment by the Americas Region.*

The *Declaration of Solidarity with the Africa Region* was tabled by **Darrell Samson** on behalf of the Canadian Branch of the APF. In the declaration, the Regional Assembly of the Americas:

- reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the principles of democracy, the rule of law and human rights, which are enshrined in the Bamako and Saint-Boniface declarations;
- condemns coups d'état and the use of force to resolve conflicts and seize power, as well as all forms of violence against parliamentarians, and calls for a return to democratic constitutional order in all member branches of the APF; and
- recommends that the regional delegate for the Americas establish a dialogue with the regional delegate for Africa to enhance cooperation and that the regional delegate for the Americas report on the results of this dialogue.

The participants then adopted the statement of revenues and expenses for the Americas Region for 2022–2023 and 2023–2024 and the amended estimates for 2023–2024.

The meeting concluded with participants discussing the upcoming activities of the Americas Region. Lucille Collard, Member of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, invited participants to attend the next session of the Regional Assembly of the Americas, which will take place in Toronto in August 2024. **Darrell Samson** also reminded participants at the 38<sup>th</sup> Regional Assembly of the Americas Region that the next Annual Session of the APF will take place in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, hosted by the Parliament of Canada. He encouraged all branches of the Americas Region to attend. He also mentioned that the Francophone Youth Parliament would take place alongside the annual session.

## CULTURAL COMPONENT

On 7 September 2023, participants attending the Regional Assembly of the Americas had the opportunity to visit several Cajun sites in Louisiana and to broaden their knowledge of the ties between Acadia and Cajuns in Louisiana. Specifically, participants had the opportunity to meet with Mike Huval, a member of the Louisiana House of Representatives, and to meet with Cajun artists during a luncheon hosted by the Louisiana Branch of the APF.

Participants also visited the NUNU Arts and Culture Collective, where they met with members of the local francophone community. The Collective, which is based in Arnaudville, Louisiana, fosters the development of a living culture using a combination of

art, music, dance and French. The Collective's website states that 40% of people in the area speak French daily.<sup>2</sup>

Participants also visited Maison Stéphanie, which is also located in Arnaudville, where they learned more about francophone and Cajun history in the region and about the property. Maison Stéphanie was built around 1795 and was given by the Spanish government to Martin Milony Duralde, a Frenchman from the Basque region.<sup>3</sup> Over the years, the house has been home to several francophone families.

Respectfully submitted,

Francis Drouin, M.P.

President of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie

Chair of the 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>	38 <sup>th</sup> Session of the APF America Regional Assembly
<b>DESTINATION</b>	Baton Rouge, Louisiana, United States of Americas
<b>DATES</b>	September 5 to 7, 2023
<b>DELEGATION</b>	
SENATE	Hon. Jean-Guy Dagenais Hon. Éric Forest
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Francis Drouin Joël Godin Marie-France Lalonde Darrell Samson René Villemure

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<sup>2</sup> NUNU Arts and Culture Collective, [History](#).

<sup>3</sup> Maison Stéphanie, [About Maison Stéphanie](#)

STAFF

Julie Pelletier  
Dominique Montpetit

<b>TRANSPORTATION</b>	\$16,366.14
<b>ACCOMMODATION</b>	\$6,952.59
<b>HOSPITALITY</b>	\$0.00
<b>PER DIEMS</b>	\$5,290.18
<b>OFFICIAL GIFTS</b>	\$0.00
<b>MISCELLANEOUS</b>	\$2, 639.40
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$31,248.31</b>