

Canada – Africa
Parliamentary Association



Association parlementaire
Canada – Afrique

Report of the Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association

Bilateral Mission to the Republic of Cameroon

Yaoundé, Cameroon

From November 13 to 17, 2023

REPORT

BILATERAL MISSION TO CAMEROON

The Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association (the Association) conducted a bilateral visit to Yaoundé, Cameroon, from 13 to 17 November 2023. The delegation was led by the Association's Co-Chair, the Honourable Senator Amina Gerba, and included the Honourable Senator René Cormier, Joël Lightbound, M.P., Lianne Rood, M.P., Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe, M.P., and Richards Cannings, M.P. The delegation was accompanied by Freddy Bobo Mukinayi, Association Secretary, and Offah Obale, Association Advisor.

MISSION OBJECTIVES

This was the Association's second bilateral mission to Cameroon, following an initial visit in 2012. The objectives of the Association's mission to Cameroon included the following:

- strengthen bilateral relations and parliamentary cooperation;
- engage with parliamentarians on issues related to multi-party democracy, governance, human rights, official bilingualism and the rule of law;
- learn about the role played by women in Cameroon's National Assembly and Senate;
- engage with community groups about women's empowerment;
- meet with government officials to further the Association's understanding of the current political situation in Cameroon;
- discuss the insecurity crisis in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon; and
- meet with business groups to gain new perspectives on the economic situation in Cameroon and discuss how the global economic outlook is affecting the country.

In support of its objectives, the delegation met with the Prime Minister of Cameroon, the Minister Delegate at the Presidency in charge of Relations with Parliaments, and the Minister Delegate to the Minister of External Relations in charge of Relations with the Commonwealth. The delegation also met with the Speaker of Cameroon's National Assembly, the Deputy President of the Cameroonian Senate, and members of various parliamentary committees. As well, the delegation engaged with members of civil society and business groups.

This report provides background information regarding Cameroon. It also summarizes the delegation's meetings in Cameroon and offers its observations based on those discussions.

THE REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON

A. System of Government

Under Cameroon's constitution, the country is a unitary republic with a president, elected every seven years, who appoints the prime minister and members of the cabinet¹. The president is the head of state and the head of the armed forces. The constitution provides that all legislation adopted by parliament must be assented to by the president. Constitutional provisions also allow the president to dissolve parliament as well as declare a state of emergency, during which time additional powers can be assumed on a temporary basis.

The Parliament of Cameroon comprises a Senate and a National Assembly. The Senate – Parliament's upper chamber – is composed of 100 members. Each of the country's ten regions is represented by ten senators: three are appointed by the president; seven are indirectly elected by an electoral college of regional and municipal councillors. Senators are appointed or elected for five-year terms. The National Assembly's 180 members are elected by direct and secret universal suffrage for five-year terms.

In addition to introducing and passing legislation, Cameroon's parliament exercises an oversight function regarding government action. This oversight function by parliament consists of asking written or oral questions to members of government as well as establishing commissions of parliamentary inquiry with specific terms of reference.

B. Recent Political Developments

In October 2018, President Paul Biya won a seventh term in office.² The 2018 presidential election occurred in a period when Cameroon is confronting Boko Haram-related terrorist violence in the Far North region as well as insecurity crises in the English-speaking North West and South-West regions of the country.

The most recent elections for the elective seats in the Senate were held on 12 March 2023. President Biya's Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) is the largest party, holding all the 70 elective seats in the Senate.³

In the most recent National Assembly elections held on 9 February 2020, the ruling party, the CPDM, won 139 of the 167 seats contested.⁴ Its ally, the National Union for Democracy and Progress, led by Mr. Bello Bouba Maigari, came in second with seven seats. Cameroon's Constitutional Council invalidated the results in 13 constituencies of the Anglophone North-West and South-West regions, where boycotts and ongoing tensions resulted in low turnout. Reruns took place in March 2020, and the CPDM won 13 of the seats at stake. The remaining seats in the National Assembly are held by the Social Democratic Front, Cameroon Party for National Reconciliation, Cameroon Democratic Union, Front for the National Salvation of Cameroon, Movement for the Defense of the Republic, and the Union of Socialist Movement.⁵

THE DELEGATION'S MEETINGS IN CAMEROON

1. Meeting with the Honourable Joseph Dion Ngute, Prime Minister

¹ Republic of Cameroon, [The Constitution](#).

² Britannica Digital Learning, "[Cameroon](#)," Britannica Academic, Database, accessed 28 February 2024.

³ Inter-Parliamentary Union, [Cameroon – Senate](#), IPU Parline, Database, accessed 28 February 2024.

⁴ Inter-Parliamentary Union, [Cameroon – National Assembly](#), IPU Parline, Database.

⁵ Ibid.

The delegation, accompanied by Canada's High Commissioner in Yaoundé, met the Honourable Joseph Dion Ngute, Cameroon's Prime Minister. Members of the delegation and Prime Minister Dion Ngute discussed a range of topics, including Canada–Cameroon bilateral relations, multilateral cooperation, the insecurity crises in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon, and issues related to climate change.

Prime Minister Dion Ngute spoke about the national dialogue that the Government of Cameroon convened in an effort to resolve the insecurity crises in the North-West and South-West regions. He added that participants from various sectors of Cameroonian society attended the national dialogue.

In discussing climate change-related issues, Prime Minister Ngute mentioned that Lake Chad – located at the conjunction of Cameroon, Chad, Nigeria and Niger has in the past fifty years shrunk to a tenth of its size. According to him, lake Chad's shrinking waters has affected the livelihood of local fishermen.

The delegation and Prime Minister Dion Ngute exchanged views on issues of mutual interest to Canada and Cameroon. In particular, they discussed human rights, bilateral cooperation in security issues, as well as refugees and internally displaced persons. They also spoke about the rising number of Cameroonian-trained nurses emigrating to Canada.

2. Meeting with the Honourable Felix Mbayu, Minister Delegate to the Minister of External Relations in charge of Relations with the Commonwealth

The delegation's discussions with the Honourable Felix Mbayu, Cameroon's Minister Delegate to the Minister of External Relations in charge of Relations with the Commonwealth, focused on official bilingualism, as well as the political and human rights situation in Cameroon.

Minister Mbayu said that Cameroon's official languages are French and English, with 80% of the population belonging to the French-speaking majority while 20% make up the English-speaking minority. He added that hundreds of indigenous languages are spoken as well.

To ensure the implementation of constitutional provisions regarding the equal status of French and English as official languages, Minister Mbayu pointed out that the Government of Cameroon established the National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism (the Bilingualism Commission). The objectives of the Bilingualism Commission include the promotion of multiculturalism in Cameroon, with a view to maintaining peace and strengthening national unity.

Furthermore, Minister Mbayu underscored that while the government has introduced measures designed to improve civil liberties and human rights, it faces challenges in ensuring Cameroonians' right to life, food and shelter.

Delegates posed questions about how Canada could better support and engage Cameroon. Minister Mbayu expressed a desire to see stronger cooperation between Canada and Cameroon particularly in the agricultural and educational sectors. He also emphasized the importance of both countries' joint membership of the Commonwealth and la Francophonie as a way to cooperate on multilateral issues of mutual interest.

3. Meeting with the Honourable Wakata Bolvine, Minister Delegate at the Presidency of the Republic in charge of Relations with Parliament

The delegation met the Honourable Wakata Bolvine, Minister Delegate at the Presidency of the Republic in charge of Relations with Parliament, to learn about the collaboration between the executive branch of the government and the Parliament of Cameroon. Minister Wakata Bolvine explained that the legislative process in Cameroon begins when the relevant government department drafts a bill that is eventually transmitted to the President of the Republic. Following consultations with stakeholders, the President of the Republic forwards the bill to the National Assembly for scrutiny by the relevant parliamentary committees. When a bill has been passed by the National Assembly, it is forwarded to the Senate for consideration. After the Senate adopts the bill, it is forwarded to the Speaker of the National Assembly who in turn transmits it to the President of the Republic for enactment into law.

Responding to delegates' questions about parliament's oversight function regarding government action, Minister Wakata Bolvine said that the legislature oversees the executive through oral and written questions. The executive is obliged to provide answers and justifications for government policies with respect to individual ministries.

4. Meeting with the Honourable Cavayé Yeguie Djibril, Speaker of the National Assembly

The delegation visited the National Assembly for a meeting with the Honourable Cavayé Yeguie Djibril. The delegation engaged in discussions with Speaker Cavayé Yeguie about girl's education and women's representation in parliament. He mentioned that women account for 34% of the total membership of Cameroon's National Assembly.

5. Meeting with the Honourable Aboubakary Abdoulaye, Deputy President of the Senate

The delegation met the Honourable Aboubakary Abdoulaye, Deputy President of the Cameroonian Senate. The following Cameroonian senators were also present for the meeting: the Honourable Ndieb-Nso Tabetando; the Honourable Vanigansen Mochiggle; the Honourable Hayatou Aïcha Pierrette; the Honourable Obam Assam Samuel; the Honourable Ngayap Pierre Flambeau; the Honourable Etamè Massoma David; and the Honourable Neba Ndosiri Bridget.

Deputy President Aboubakary Abdoulaye welcomed the delegation and provided an overview of the responsibilities of the Cameroonian Senate. Mr. Justin Njomatchoua, Director of Cabinet - Office of the President of the Senate, briefed the delegation on the functioning of Cameroon's bicameral parliament, consisting of the National Assembly and the Senate. He explained that the Parliament of Cameroon meets three times a year in ordinary sessions in March, June and November. The Chairpersons' Conference is responsible for drawing up the agenda of the Senate, referring bills to relevant parliamentary committees and setting the dates for plenary sitting. It is composed of the president and deputy presidents of the Senate as well as chairpersons of parliamentary committees.

In the discussion that followed, delegates engaged with Cameroonian Senators on issues related to parliamentary processes in Canada and Cameroon, democracy, federalism,

and women representation in parliament. The delegation was told that under Cameroon's electoral law, political parties taking part in the elections must present a list of seven candidates, including at least one woman.

6. Roundtable Meeting with the Chairs of the National Assembly Standing Committees on Constitutional laws, Human Rights and Freedoms, Justice, Legislation and Standing Orders and Administration; Foreign Affairs; Cultural, Social and Family Affairs; Production and Trade; and members of the Cameroon–Canada Parliamentary Friendship Group

The delegation participated in a roundtable meeting with Cameroonian parliamentarians, including the chairs of three parliamentary committees and members of the Cameroon–Canada Parliamentary Friendship Group. In total, 17 members of Cameroon's National Assembly participated in the meeting.

The discussion began with a presentation by the Honourable Zondol Hersesse, Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Constitutional laws, Human Rights and Freedoms, Justice, Legislation and Standing Orders and Administration. He provided an overview of Cameroon's parliamentary system and the country's current political situation. In particular, he spoke about reforms to Cameroon's electoral process that resulted in the creation of the country's electoral management body – Elections Cameroon (ELECAM).

On the subject of the rights of LGBTQ+ persons, the delegation was told that same-sex sexual activity is prohibited under Cameroonian law. As a result, acts of homosexuality in Cameroon are clandestine in nature.

Discussions touched on women's representation in parliament and the role Canada can play to support vocational and technical education. The delegates also engaged with Cameroonian parliamentarians regarding the "brain drain" of Cameroonian medical personnel.

7. Meeting with Business Associations

The members of the delegation engaged with representatives of business associations during their visit. They discussed ways Canada could deepen its trade and investment relations with Cameroon. The delegation heard that opportunities exist for Canadian firms to invest in the energy, education, agriculture, and information and communication technologies sectors.

8. Meeting with the Association of Cameroonian Alumni of Canadian Universities and Colleges

The delegation met with members of the Association of Cameroonian Alumni of Canadian Universities and Colleges (the Returnees). Following introductory comments, the delegation engaged in a discussion with participants about the role they can play to enhance Canada–Cameroon relations.

The Returnees urged the Government of Canada to issue long-term visas to former members of the Cameroonian diaspora who wish to return to Canada either as visitors or as students.

9. Visit to TechWomen Factory

The delegation visited the TechWomen Factory project. The Government of Canada funds this project in partnership with the Cameroon Youth School Tech Incubator (CAYSTI). Ms. Arielle Kitio – CAYSTI’s Executive Director – provided an overview of the project, its history and objectives, and some of its main programs. The project provides training to women between the ages of 18 and 35 in coding, robotics, digital art and website design.

The students presented an app they developed that analyses patient data to predict preeclampsia in pregnant women. They also shared the details of their work creating a database to better understand the nutritional composition of local foods to promote a healthy diet.

10. Visit to Local Youth Corner Cameroon

The Local Youth Corner Cameroon (LOYOC) is a civil society organization created in 2002 to respond to the socio-political and economic challenges facing young people in Cameroon. Achaleke Christian Leke – LOYOC’s Executive Director – said that the organization focuses on issues related to youth unemployment, gender-based violence, corruption, and exclusion in the decision-making processes.

The delegation heard about LOYOC’s prison initiative project. This project facilitates the rehabilitation and reintegration of youth offenders by transforming them into “prisonpreneurs.” One participant told the story of his journey from spending thirteen years in prison, learning to sew at the Bamenda prison as a participant of the prison initiative project, to owning a workshop in Yaoundé.

The delegation toured LOYOC’s premises and posed questions to staff. The delegation heard that the organization is creating a network of peace and change agents to enhance social cohesion in Cameroon.

The High Commission of Canada in Yaoundé, Cameroon took the opportunity of the delegation’s visit to announce that LOYOC is the recipient of its 2023 Human Rights Defender in Cameroon Award.

11. Roundtable Discussion with Women Peace Builders in Cameroon

The delegation visited the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES Cameroon) office in Yaoundé for a discussion with Women Peace Builders in Cameroon. The FES Cameroon’s Resident Representative moderated the session and introduced the twelve women participating in the discussion including Witness M – a victim of conflict-related violence in the South-West region.

Regarding the situation in the Far North region, the coordinator of Action Locale Pour un Developement Participatif et Autogere, explained that the region is confronting Boko Haram-related terrorist violence. She said that the group, which originated in Nigeria, spread to Cameroon in 2014. According to the coordinator, Boko Haram has been responsible for the forcible recruitment of children, kidnappings for ransom, sexual violence, arson attacks on villages and raids against students and schools.

As well, the Executive Director, Common Action for Gender Development, spoke about the causes of the conflict in the North-West and South-West regions that began in October 2016 and exacerbated in October 2017 when separatist forces declared the unilateral

secession of the so-called republic of “Ambazonia.” According to the participants, about 6,000 people have died as a result of the conflict and more than a million have been displaced.

Delegates engaged in a wide-ranging discussion with the participants on issues related to peace building, internal displacement, and the exclusion of women in official peace processes. Participants urged Canada to collaborate with Cameroonian authorities to establish new – and reinforce existing –centres for psychological support and trauma-healing. They also suggested measures to strengthen linkages between Cameroonian women peace builders and their international counterparts. To ensure their physical protection, the participants expressed the desire for Canada to issue visas to women that are victims of conflict-related violence.

12. Meeting with LGBTQ+ Groups

The delegation met with LGTBQ+ people to learn about the challenges they face. The delegation heard that because same-sex sexual activity is prohibited under Cameroonian law, LGBTQ+ groups do not have legal status.

The delegation was informed that since 2020, an increasing number of LGBTQ+ individuals have been arrested by Cameroon’s forces of law of order. While in custody, these individuals often undergo degrading treatment and face the maximum five years imprisonment sentence. LGBTQ+ individuals also spoke of the social violence and lynchings they sometimes face from members of the public because of their real or perceived sexual orientation. They said that the government tolerates these forms of violence against LGBTQ+ people.

Furthermore, the LGBTQ+ groups pointed out that the stigmatization that results from the prohibition of same-sex sexual conduct also creates inequity in access to sexual and reproductive health services. They also told delegates that the Cameroonian legal system does not recognize a third gender status for individuals who do not identify as either a man or a woman. As a result, these individuals face barriers accessing certain social and health services.

In the discussions that followed, the participants explained their advocacy strategy at the national, regional and international levels regarding the human rights of the LGBTQ+ population.

13. Visit to Ape Action Africa

The delegation visited Ape Action Africa – a non-for-profit organization working to protect Cameroon’s endangered primates. The organization manages a sanctuary in the Mefou National Park that is home to groups of chimpanzees, western lowland gorillas and monkeys. The delegation learned that Ape Action Africa rescues orphaned or injured primates, providing rehabilitation and long-term care in a protected environment.

OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The Association chose to visit Cameroon to follow up on a previous bilateral mission in 2012 and to gain an up-to-date picture of the situation in the country. Through meetings with government officials, parliamentarians and civil society organizations, the delegation

was able to reflect on ways that Canada can deepen its partnership with Cameroon from parliamentary, bilateral and multilateral perspectives.

The delegation believes that parliamentary ties provide an important mechanism for strengthening Canada–Cameroon relations. In meetings with the Speaker of the National Assembly, Deputy President of the Senate and other Cameroonian parliamentarians, the delegation heard about the interest that exists for enhancing such cooperation through the sharing of best practices. The Association believes that Canada and Canadian parliamentarians could discuss best practices in the areas of pluralism, women’s political empowerment, democratic governance and legislative oversight of the executive branch of government as part of Canadian engagement with Cameroon.

The visit also allowed the delegation to learn about the insecurity crises and conflicts in the North-West, South-West, and Far North regions of the country. While these crises remain a concern, the delegation was encouraged to hear about the ongoing efforts of the Government of Cameroon to find long-term peaceful solutions to the crises. Regarding Boko Haram-related violence in the Far North region, the delegation heard that cooperation with regional partners is required to create a secure environment around the Lake Chad Basin and in the areas affected by the activities of the terrorist group.

As well, promoting youth employment, entrepreneurship and civic engagement were issues that Cameroonian interlocutors spoke about during the delegation’s mission. Cameroon has a large youth population. According to the World Bank, in 2022, 42% of the total population was between the ages 0 to 14⁶. Delegates were pleased to hear about the project that Canada is supporting through TechWomen Factory, which provides training to Cameroonian youth in the information and communication technologies sector. The Association believes that projects of that kind are important and worthy of continued Canadian support.

Finally, the Association thinks that the Government of Canada should explore ways to build stronger trade ties with Cameroon. Canada exported \$58.5 million in merchandise to Cameroon in 2022, a 32.8% decrease from 2021 when they were \$87.1 million⁷. During its mission, the delegation heard about the many commercial opportunities that exist for Canadian firms in Cameroon, including in the agricultural, mining, energy and infrastructure sectors. The Association believes that the Government of Canada should increase its efforts to support Canadian firms looking to export to Cameroon.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The delegation wishes to thank High Commissioner Lorraine Anderson, Marcus Davies, Political Counselor, and the rest of the team at the High Commission for Canada in the Republic of Cameroon for their support prior to and during the mission to Cameroon.

The delegation also expresses its gratitude to all the interlocutors with whom it met with in Cameroon for taking the time to share their valuable insights and experiences.

⁶ World Bank, [World Development Indicators](#).

⁷ Global Affairs Canada, [“Canada’s Merchandise Exports,”](#) *Annual Merchandise Trade*.

Respectfully submitted,

The Honourable Amina Gerba,
Senator,
Co-Chair,
Canada-Africa Parliamentary
Association

Brenda Shanahan, M.P.,
Co-Chair,
Canada-Africa Parliamentary
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Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association
ACTIVITY	Bilateral Mission to Cameroon
DESTINATION	Yaoundé, Cameroon
DATES	From November 13 to 17, 2023
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Mobina S.B. Jaffer Hon. René Cormier Hon. Amina Gerba
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe Richard Cannings Joël Lightbound Lianne Rood Brenda Shanahan
STAFF	Freddy Bobo Mukinayi Offah Obale
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 70,910.74
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 16,259.79
HOSPITALITY	\$ 4,184.39
PER DIEMS	\$ 5,447.09
MISCELLANEOUS	\$ 5,546.42
TOTAL	\$ 102,348.43