

Section canadienne de
l'Assemblée parlementaire
de la Francophonie



Canadian Branch of the
Assemblée parlementaire
de la Francophonie

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

44th Ministerial Conference of La Francophonie

Yaoundé, Cameroon

November 4–5, 2023

and

Good Offices Mission

Libreville, Gabon

November 6–7, 2023

Report

The parliamentary delegation of the Canadian Branch that attended the 44th Ministerial Conference of La Francophonie (CMF) in Yaoundé, Cameroon, from November 4 to 5, 2023, has the honour to present its report. The members of the delegation were Mr. **Francis Drouin**, Member of Parliament, President of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF) and Chair of the Canadian Branch, and Ms. Julie Pelletier, Association Secretary.

On the margins of the CMF, the delegation also participated in a number of bilateral meetings to strengthen the APF's ties with Cameroon's political authorities. Other APF representatives—Bruno Fuchs, Delegate General; Damien Cesselin, Secretary General; Benoit Onambele, Diplomatic Advisor; and Hadjer Remili, Advisor to the Political Committee—also took part in these meetings.

The Canadian delegation then led a good offices mission to Libreville, Gabon, on November 6 and 7, 2023, accompanied by the following APF parliamentarians: Mr. Philippe Courard, Member of Parliament and Senator (Wallonia-Brussels Federation Branch) and Rapporteur for the Political Committee; Mr. Pierre Flambeau Ngayap, Senator (Cameroon Branch); and Ms. Germaine Kouméalo Anaté, Member of the National Assembly (Togo Branch). Mr. Damien Cesselin and Ms. Hadjer Remili participated on behalf of the APF Secretariat.

I- 44th CMF – YAOUNDÉ, CAMEROON

As President of the APF, Mr. **Francis Drouin** represented the APF at the 44th Session of the CMF, where he gave remarks on the meeting's theme: good governance as a formula for political, economic and cultural stability for francophone citizens. He reminded ministers of La Francophonie that parliamentarians have the crucial task of enacting legislation and overseeing government action, and that they are the guardians of the principles of good governance: accountability, the rule of law and inclusiveness. APF President **Drouin** concluded by emphasizing that these principles are at the heart of the APF's new strategic framework, and he gave examples of several initiatives that contribute to good governance in the francophone parliamentary world. The CMF ended with a change-of-command ceremony. The Honorable Chrysoula Zacharopoulou, France's Minister of State for Development, Francophonie and International Partnerships, and the new Chair of the CMF, announced that the 19th Francophonie Summit would be held in Villers-Cotterêts, France, on October 4 and 5, 2024, on the theme of creating, innovating and engaging in French.

The CMF was preceded by the 124th Permanent Council of La Francophonie, at which the APF was represented by Delegate-General Bruno Fuchs. Mr. Fuchs presented the APF's actions to rebuild peace, the rule of law and democracy in the francophone world—particularly in Burkina Faso and Gabon—and expressed the APF's concerns about the growing number of crises in French-speaking African nations.

The CMF gave the APF President the opportunity to inform Louise Mushikiwabo, Secretary General of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF), of the good offices mission he would be leading to Gabon after the CMF. The aim of the mission was to demonstrate the interest of the parliamentary Francophonie in Gabon and the readiness of the APF to support the transition back to constitutional order. Lastly, Mr. Drouin had the opportunity to exchange views with the representatives of the nations that had committed to supporting the APF's application for observer status at the United Nations—Canada, Romania and Djibouti—and to champion the APF's application with other ministers of foreign affairs in La Francophonie.

BILATERAL VISITS

Meeting with His Excellency Mr. Joseph Dion Ngute, Prime Minister of Cameroon

Mr. **Francis Drouin** met with Mr. Joseph Dion Ngute, Prime Minister of Cameroon, and took the opportunity to champion the APF, as its role speaking on behalf of francophones makes it an ideal forum for promoting democracy, dialogue, multilingualism and the fight against misinformation. APF President **Drouin** highlighted the close ties between the APF and Cameroon, stemming from the active involvement of many Cameroonian parliamentarians in various APF bodies and from Cameroon's efforts to promote peace and multiculturalism, which are values that are also upheld by the APF.

The Prime Minister of Cameroon highlighted the importance for his country of hosting the CMF, whose mission includes promoting unity within La Francophonie. He spoke of the challenges involved in reconciling Cameroon's French-speaking and English-speaking regions, a situation that bears some similarities to the linguistic situation in Canada. He also affirmed his support for APF action and parliamentary diplomacy seeking to build capacity and ensure peace in the sub-region.

Meeting with His Excellency Mr. Lejeune Mbella Mbella, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Cameroon

Mr. **Drouin** met with Cameroon's Minister of Foreign Affairs and congratulated him on the success of the CMF. He emphasized that Cameroon serves as an example to other African nations, particularly due to its stability and restrained approach, which has enabled the country's political, economic and cultural development. He also mentioned the good offices mission he would be leading in Gabon after his mission to Cameroon, notably with the support of Cameroonian Senator Pierre Flambeau Ngayap. In closing, he asked for Cameroon's support for the APF's bid to obtain observer status at the United Nations.

The Minister stressed that his country promotes non-interference in nations' affairs, as well as peace, equality for women and the inclusion of young people in Cameroonian society. He spoke of what makes Cameroon unique: it is known as "Africa in miniature," in particular due to its geographic location in Central Africa, with three distinct ecosystems, and due to its linguistic diversity, with over 200 different African ethnic groups and dialects. Lastly, he drew a parallel between Cameroon's linguistic situation

and that of Canada: in both nations, English and French coexist as official languages, and both countries are members of La Francophonie and the Commonwealth.

Meeting with His Excellency Mr. Hilarion Étong Ndzok, Senior Vice-President of the National Assembly of Cameroon

The delegation had the privilege of meeting with Mr. Étong Ndzok, the Chair of the Cameroon Branch of the APF and Senior Vice-President of the National Assembly. He mentioned that Cameroon was a founding member of the APF and that it remains an active member and a firm believer in parliamentary diplomacy, as demonstrated by the large number of parliamentarians from the Cameroonian branch present at the meeting: senators Pierre Flambeau Ngayap, Obam Assam and Pierrette Hayatou, and Member of the National Assembly Cabral Libii.

The APF President took the opportunity to talk about the issues that have been identified as priorities by the APF and that are reflected in its new strategic framework: improving mobility, sharing best practices for legislation and engaging youth in the international francophone community. He also invited the Vice-President to the APF's Annual Session to be held in Montreal in 2024, and he encouraged the Cameroon Branch to choose two young representatives for the Francophone Youth Parliament that will be held at the same time.

Meeting with His Excellency Mr. Laurent Ezzo, Minister of State, Minister of Justice, Keeper of the Seals

Both participants discussed the challenges associated with the linguistic situation in Cameroon and the source of tensions between the French-speaking and English-speaking populations in particular. Their discussion also touched on the challenges of addressing both languages in legislation, given their different cultural and legal traditions. APF President **Drouin** highlighted Cameroon's efforts to respect local cultures and linguistic diversity in a spirit of peace and dialogue.

OTHER MEETINGS

APF President **Drouin** met with youth representatives from the Cameroon Branch who had taken part in the regional francophone youth parliament (PFRJ). Organized by the APF, the PFRJ had been held at the National Assembly in Cotonou, Benin, in July 2023, bringing together 36 young francophones of the APF Africa Region, with a view to promoting the model of parliamentary diplomacy throughout La Francophonie. They also discussed the recommendations of the francophone youth and civil society forum held in Yaoundé in October 2023.

The objectives of attending the CMF were met: the APF was one of the only members of the Charter of La Francophonie to have an official voice at this francophone meeting. Having the APF President attend this meeting was a key opportunity for the APF to be involved in making recommendations on the future direction and governance of La Francophonie. Lastly, the CMF was an ideal opportunity to extend the APF's soft

diplomacy through bilateral meetings with the various political players and state representatives present.

II- GOOD OFFICES MISSION, LIBREVILLE, GABON

Gabon, a member-country of the APF, was the scene of a military coup on August 30, 2023, following the announcement that President Ali Bongo had been re-elected. The coup d'état led to the annulment of the election results, the dissolution of government institutions and the creation of a Committee for the Transition and Restoration of Institutions (CTRI). Overseen by General Brice Oligui Nguema, head of the Republican Guard, the CTRI drew up a Transition Charter leading to the appointment, on October 7, 2023, of 98 members to the Transitional National Assembly and 70 members to the Transitional Senate.

An initial APF fact-finding mission, led by Delegate-General Bruno Fuchs, took place in Libreville from September 20 to 24, 2023, several weeks after the breakdown of democratic order in Gabon. The purpose of that mission was to assess the credibility of the transition in Gabon prior to a subsequent parliamentary good offices mission carried out by the APF President, Mr. **Drouin**.

The purpose of the good offices mission on November 6 and 7, 2023, was to meet with various Gabonese political, security, civil and business stakeholders in order to gain a better understanding of the various issues relating to parliamentary democracy at stake in this transition, and to maintain a dialogue with the APF.

BILATERAL VISITS

Meeting with His Excellency Mr. Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguéma, President of the Transition, Head of State

During his meeting with the APF President and the delegation, the President of the Transition described the political situation in Gabon prior to the coup d'état of August 30, 2023, and the main events leading up to it.

The President of the Transition described the events of August 30 as the “Coup de la Libération,” a coup leading to freedom, and outlined the next stages of the transition.

The APF President reiterated the APF's unwavering commitment to support French-speaking populations facing complex political situations. He stressed the crucial importance of maintaining a dialogue with Gabon in this context, provided that its political authorities agree to join the international francophone community and adhere to the normative framework set out in the Bamako Declaration. He also emphasized the need for Gabon to publish a roadmap and respect the announced timelines in order to maintain the confidence of the population and international partners.

Meeting with His Excellency Mr. Jean-François Ndongou, President of the Transitional National Assembly

APF President **Drouin** met with Jean-François Ndongou, President of the Transitional National Assembly, and vice-presidents Francois Ndong Obiang, Admiral Gabriel Mali Odjoua, Florentin Moussavou and Geoffroy Fouboula Libeka Makosso. The APF

President underlined Gabon's active involvement in La Francophonie as well as the APF's desire to establish a dialogue and support the Transitional Assembly with interparliamentary cooperation programs aimed at building the capacity of civil servants, and to provide constitutional expertise. Mr. Ndongou described the features of the transition government, the events that led to the formation of a new National Assembly and the key events to take place during the transition period: (a) the drafting of a roadmap that will ensure a return to constitutional order; (b) a national dialogue between government institutions and the Gabonese people, scheduled for April 2024, which should lead to the drafting of a new Constitution by the members of the Transitional National Assembly, meeting as a Constituent Chamber, and which will be the subject of a referendum in fall 2024; and (c) the opening of the project to overhaul electoral legislation, to be considered by both Chambers.

The meeting also provided an opportunity to meet newly appointed parliamentarians from various groups: Mr. Mesmin Ngabikoumou Wada, Member of the Transitional National Assembly and former rapporteur of the APF Political Committee; Mr. Alexandre Awassi, Member of the Transitional National Assembly and former rapporteur of the APF Young Parliamentarians Network; Ms. Angélique Ngoma, Member of the Transitional National Assembly and former chair of the APF Economic, Social and Environmental Affairs Committee, as well as a former minister; and Mr. Faustin Boukoubi, former president of the National Assembly and former first vice-president of the APF.

Meeting with Her Excellency Ms. Paulette Missambo, President of the Transitional Senate

The delegation met with Ms. Paulette Missambo and vice-presidents Luc Oyoubi, General Jean Ekoua, Marc Ona Essangui and Georges Bruno Ngoussié. She explained that the membership of the Transitional Senate was designed to be participatory, inclusive and representative of Gabon's diversity. She herself is from the Opposition, and the Senate includes other groups from the army, employers' organizations, trade unions, civil society and public administration. The delegation also learned about how Gabon's bicameral parliament works, in particular the process for introducing bills, which is similar to that of the Canadian Parliament.

The APF President underlined the APF's desire to open a dialogue with the Gabonese Parliament with the aim of accompanying this Transition and supporting the current parliamentary players according to the needs they identify, particularly as regards their first major project, which is to draft a new Constitution.

Meeting with His Excellency Mr. Dieudonné Aba'A Owono, President of the Constitutional Court of Transition

The delegation was received by Mr. Dieudonné Aba'A Owono, President of the Constitutional Court, and eight of the Court's magistrates. The President of the Court explained its mission, which includes ensuring compliance with the Transition Charter, advising the new government, interpreting the future Constitution and verifying the legal consistency of these various provisions. He expressed the hope that the APF would note

the stability that has prevailed in Gabon since the coup d'état and that the APF would advocate for Gabon.

APF President **Drouin** expressed the APF's desire to support this inclusive transition upheld by the Gabonese people, while reiterating the importance of respecting timelines, which would increase the international community's confidence.

Meeting with His Excellency Mr. Abdellah Sbihi, Chair of the Group of French-speaking Ambassadors in Gabon

The delegation met with Abdellah Sbihi, Chair of the Group of French-speaking Ambassadors (GAF) in Gabon, as well as with GAF member ambassadors in Libreville or their representatives (Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, France, Guinea, Korea, Lebanon and Senegal). The GAF in Gabon was established in June 2020, and it currently has 12 ambassadors. The GAF Chair briefly described the reasons why the Gabonese regime had been overthrown in August 2023, and he highlighted that public support for the regime change was very strong, as demonstrated by the absence of incidents following the coup. As a francophile and a francophone, he spoke of the appeal of French to the Gabonese people and suggested that the international francophone community could take on an important role in offering support during the transition phase. The GAF Chair congratulated the APF on its valuable contribution to the prosperity and influence of La Francophonie. He stated that Gabon needs support and that the GAF will remain vigilant regarding the duration and end date of the transition, which has yet to be determined by the transition government.

APF President **Drouin** explained the role of his good offices mission and reiterated that the APF would like Gabon to set a time frame towards a return to constitutional order and the re-establishment of democratically elected institutions and respect it. He affirmed the APF's willingness to accompany Gabon in the transition. He also informed the GAF that the APF has taken steps to obtain observer status at the UN.

Meeting with the Network of Free Civil Society Organizations of Gabon

The delegation met with Mr. George Mpage, Chair of the Gabonese Network of Free Civil Society Organizations, accompanied by 15 leaders and activists from the Network's member associations.

The meeting revealed that all participants shared the view that the political situation in Gabon had gotten worse in the lead-up to the 2023 election. The resulting series of events demonstrated that there was a public consensus in favour of the transition and its authorities, that there was a sincere desire for the transition to lead to the re-establishment of democratic institutions and the holding of transparent elections, and that the Gabonese authorities in place remain committed to La Francophonie.

According to the political authorities and civil society stakeholders who met with the delegation, this consensus on the specific situation in Gabon is due primarily to the lack of violence following the coup, the improvement of the individual rights and freedoms of the Gabonese population, the spirit of collaboration and inclusion between the various

civil and institutional parties to date, and signs indicating a desire for a short transition period.

The objectives set for the good offices mission were achieved, thanks to the variety of the people who met with the delegation. The mission provided an opportunity to carry out an in-depth assessment of the situation and of issues relating to democracy in Gabon, a better appreciation of public support for the transition process, and new ideas of ways the APF can engage in technical cooperation with Gabonese parliamentarians, as well as with officials from both chambers of parliament, with a view to accompanying Gabon through to the end of the transition, thereby contributing to the country's democratic stability and consolidation.

Respectfully submitted,

Darrell Samson, Member of Parliament
Chair, Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie
ACTIVITY	44th Ministerial Conference of La Francophonie and good offices mission
DESTINATION	Yaoundé, Cameroon, and Libreville, Gabon
DATES	November 4 to 7, 2023
DELEGATION	
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Francis Drouin
STAFF	Julie Pelletier
TRANSPORTATION	\$16,294.52
ACCOMMODATION	\$2,813.63
HOSPITALITY	\$0.00
PER DIEMS	\$1,251.12

MISCELLANEOUS	\$692.46
REVENUE	\$(8,127.48)
TOTAL	\$12,924.25