

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

**Bureau Meeting, 49th Annual Session and 10th Edition of the
Parlement francophone des jeunes of the Assemblée
parlementaire de la Francophonie**

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

July 4 to 9, 2024

Report

The parliamentary delegation of the Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF) that attended the Bureau Meeting, the 49th Annual Session and 10th Edition of the Parlement francophone des jeunes of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, from 4 to 9 July 2024 is honoured to present its report.

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

- the Honourable Réjean Aucoin, Senator;
- the Honourable René Cormier, Senator;
- the Honourable Éric Forest, Senator;
- the Honourable Amina Gerba, Senator;
- the Honourable Clément Gignac, Senator;
- the Honourable Marie-Françoise Mégie, Senator;
- the Honourable Manuelle Oudar, Senator;
- Lena Metlege Diab, MP;
- the Honourable Mona Fortier, MP;
- Joël Godin, MP;
- Marie-France Lalonde, MP;
- Darrell Samson, MP; and
- René Villemure, MP.

The delegation was accompanied by Julie Pelletier, Association Secretary of the Canadian Branch of the APF, and Laurence Brosseau, Gabrielle de Billy Brown and Dominique Montpetit, advisors.

Nearly 400 parliamentarians from 49 branches attended the 49th Annual Session of the APF, at the invitation of the **Honourable Raymonde Gagné**, Speaker of the Senate, and the **Honourable Greg Fergus**, Speaker of the House of Commons. Representatives from several organizations related to La Francophonie were also in attendance.

BUREAU

The APF Bureau met on 5 July 2024, chaired by **Francis Drouin**, MP and 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 (PAC), and **Darrell Samson**, as President Delegate of the Canadian Branch of the APF.

During discussions on the Assembly composition, the Bureau called on the Plenary Session to ratify the membership of the National Assembly of Angola as a member branch, the House of Representatives of Cyprus as an associate branch, the Puducherry Legislative Assembly as an observer, and lastly, the upgrading of the General Council of Andorra to member branch status. **Francis Drouin** noted that the various candidacies reflect the APF's appeal and broad diversity.

During the meeting, the Bureau was briefed on the Activity Report of the Delegate General by the Interim Delegate General, Christophe-André Frassa (Senator, France), replacing Bruno Fuchs (Member of the National Assembly, France). Senator Frassa went over the APF's various activities over the past year, including efforts to expand its influence in global diplomacy and to develop common legislative standards.

The Bureau heard reports from the committee and network chairs on their recent work. As PAC chair, **Joël Godin** reported on the PAC's activities during its April 2024 meeting in Podgorica, Montenegro. In particular, he discussed the draft reports currently underway on disinformation concerning parliaments and program evaluation methods.

The Bureau discussed its cooperation programming for 2024. **Joël Godin** briefly reviewed the programming adopted at the January 2024 Bureau meeting. He also went over the various legislative corpora that the APF had launched or intends to launch in the future. **Mr. Godin** stressed the importance of effective evaluation of the cooperation programming and reiterated the PAC's work in this area.

The Bureau adopted a new version of the APF's financial rules. The members of the Bureau heard the presentation of the APF's financial report, including the accounts for the 2023 fiscal year as well as the update to the 2024 draft budget. In this respect, **Joël Godin** asked that information be added in future reports on the number of participants in the various activities and programs. He also questioned certain discrepancies between the amounts forecast in adopted budgets versus actual budgets.

The four regional delegates then presented reports on their activities over the past year. **Darrell Samson** thanked Stéphane Sarrazin (Member of the Legislative Assembly, Ontario) for his work over the past two years as regional delegate for the APF Americas Region.

The Bureau then dealt with some minor changes to be made to the Statutes of the APF. **Francis Drouin** pointed out that the adjustments, which were technical in nature, were deemed necessary at the most recent meeting of the Working Group on the Revision of the Statutes of the APF.

The Bureau members also discussed the draft Action Plan for the APF 2023–2030 Strategic Framework. **Francis Drouin** said that due to a human resources issue within the General Secretariat, the document could not be finalized on time. **Joël Godin** stressed the importance of this action plan and expressed concern over preparation delays.

Following other items of business, including the honours awarded by the APF and the dates and locations of upcoming meetings, **Francis Drouin** closed the meeting by thanking the members of the Bureau, as well as the various administrative teams who

had contributed to the meeting's success. He particularly thanked the Parliament of Canada staff for organizing the various events.

NETWORK OF WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS

Several members of the Canadian Branch of the APF's delegation attended the 6 July 2024 meeting of the Network of Women Parliamentarians. In addition to **Marie-France Lalonde**, MP and rapporteur to the Network of Women Parliamentarians, the following Canadian parliamentarians were in attendance:

- the Honourable Réjean Aucoin;
- the Honourable René Cormier;
- the Honourable Amina Gerba;
- the Honourable Marie-Françoise Mégie;
- the Honourable Manuelle Oudar;
- Lena Metlege Diab;
- Francis Drouin; and
- the Honourable Mona Fortier.

The Honourable Raymonde Gagné, Speaker of the Senate of Canada, also took part in the proceedings of the Network of Women Parliamentarians.

The Network of Women Parliamentarians meeting was chaired by Chantal Soucy (Member of the National Assembly, Quebec).

During this meeting, **Marie-France Lalonde** presented her draft report on wealth accumulation among Francophone women. This report topic had been approved at the previous meeting of the Network of Women Parliamentarians in Cotonou, Benin, in April 2024. **Ms. Lalonde** said that the scientific literature suggests that women are at a disadvantage compared to men in terms of ways in which wealth is accumulated. She added that the study of gender differences in wealth accumulation is a recent field of research and that the lack of disaggregated data for each member of a household can mask wealth differences within relationships, since wealth is not necessarily divided equally within the household.

Marie-France Lalonde then explained that her draft report presents the findings of two major studies on women's family wealth in Canada and Belgium. She shared with the members of the Network of Women Parliamentarians the findings of a December 2023 [study](#) that found that "in [Quebec's] general adult population, men have almost 30% more average net wealth than women." **Ms. Lalonde** also informed the parliamentarians in attendance of the creation of the Canada Research Chair in Family Financial Experiences and Wealth Inequality, whose [objectives](#) include documenting wealth inequalities in Canada, particularly in Quebec, by factors such as class, gender, race, ethnicity and citizenship.

Marie-France Lalonde was followed by Yves-Henri Leleu, Dean of the Faculty of Law, Political Science and Criminology and Professor at the University of Liège and the

Université Libre de Bruxelles, and lawyer. He co-chaired the 2024 study [La transmission genrée du capital familial : Étude juridique et empirique pour l'Institut pour l'égalité des femmes et des hommes](#) (the gendered transmission of family capital: a legal and empirical study for the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men). The goal of this study was to determine how wealth is passed on to a partner or family members in Belgium. He shared the study findings with the parliamentarians in attendance. He specifically pointed out that even legal rules that, on paper, promote equality actually promote inequality because of gender bias and because they are applied in ways that disadvantage women.

A discussion period followed the presentations by **Marie-France Lalonde** and Yves-Henri Leleu. The parliamentarians in attendance shared the issues observed in their jurisdictions. They stressed the importance of educating women and girls about their rights, and of parliamentarians coming up with solutions to the issues presented. **Ms. Lalonde** said that she would like the members of the Network of Women Parliamentarians to meet by videoconference in the fall to discuss this issue further.

The Network of Women Parliamentarians meeting continued with discussions on topics of interest, including:

- a presentation of the draft report by Chantal Soucy on the protection of women and girls in armed conflict, followed by a presentation on the topic by Sarah-Michèle Vincent-Wright, Ph.D. student in law at the Université de Montréal and international law expert;
- a presentation by Lucille Collard (Member of the Legislative Assembly, Ontario) of the draft report on regulatory and legislative measures to combat human trafficking in the Francophone world;
- a progress report and the adoption of the legislative corpus on gender-responsive budgeting developed by experts Claudy Vouhé and Isabelle Guéguen;
- a presentation on the *Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence* (Istanbul Convention) by Severina Spassova, member of the Secretariat of the Monitoring Mechanism of the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention; and
- monitoring of international commitments regarding gender equality and women's rights by Nathalie Roy, Speaker of the Quebec National Assembly.

After hearing a presentation by Ndioro Ndiaye, Coordinator of the Francophone Gender Equality Network, the members of the Network of Women Parliamentarians discussed the state of legislation promoting women's rights in French-speaking countries. **The Honourable Mona Fortier** said that gender equality is a principle enshrined in the [Canadian Human Rights Act](#) and the [Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#). She added that these rights are further expanded upon and protected more specifically in other statutes and regulations, including:

- the [Employment Equity Act](#);
- the [Pay Equity Act](#);
- the [Canadian Gender Budgeting Act](#); and
- the [Canada Labour Code](#).

The Honourable Mona Fortier concluded by adding that the Government of Canada is committed to applying [Gender-based Analysis Plus](#), an analytical tool to support the development of responsive and inclusive policies, programs and other initiatives.

Lastly, the Chair of the Network of Women Parliamentarians announced that the nominee of the Canadian Branch of the APF, the [Alliance des femmes de la francophonie canadienne](#), would be presented with the second Network of Women Parliamentarians Award. The award is presented to an individual or organization that has made a significant contribution to the promotion of gender equality in their field in the Francophone world. **Marie-France Lalonde** briefly presented the work and societal impact of the recipient organization. She thanked the members of the Award jury for having recognized the merits of the Alliance des femmes de la francophonie canadienne's nomination, but also for having chosen to join in the fight against gender inequality and to help promote the Francophonie in Canada.

NETWORK OF YOUNG PARLIAMENTARIANS

The 6 July 2024 meeting of the Network of Young Parliamentarians was attended by two members of the delegation of the Canadian Branch of the APF:

- the Honourable Réjean Aucoin; and
- the Honourable René Cormier.

Elsa Schalck (Senator, France), Vice-Chair of the Network, presided the meeting of the Network.

The meeting began with an address by **Francis Drouin** as APF President. During his address, he pointed out that young people are not just the future, but also the present of the Francophonie. He said that one of the youth initiatives he undertook during his mandate was to participate in two sessions of the Francophone Youth Parliament, first in Albania in 2022, and second in Montreal, on the margins of the 49th Annual Session of the APF. He also pointed to the APF's organizing the first regional Francophone Youth Parliament in Benin in July 2023.

During the discussion period with Network members, Vice-Chair Schalck made a point of mentioning how fortunate the APF was to have a president, himself a young parliamentarian, able to lead the organization with a youth focus.

At the request of the Quebec Branch, **Francis Drouin** concluded with an update on the APF Secretariat's efforts to obtain observer status with the United Nations.

The Network proceedings continued with the presentation of last year's activity report. **The Honourable René Cormier** asked for further details about the diplomatic class offered by Senghor University in Alexandria, which was attended by five young parliamentarians.

Network members then participated in the training workshop "Développer ses réflexes éthiques et déontologiques" (developing ethical reflexes) delivered by the Réseau francophone d'éthique et de déontologie parlementaires. During this workshop, Network members were asked to determine the best possible response to situations involving ethical and code of conduct issues by two experts:

- Jean-Éric Gicquel, Ethics Officer with the French National Assembly; and
- Lyne Robinson-Dalpe, Director, Advisory and Compliance, with Canada's Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner.

The Honourable René Cormier asked how he could prevent the appearance of a conflict of interest in his role as a parliamentarian. The experts suggested a number of possible solutions, depending on the situation.

The Network meeting continued with a follow-up of reports underway. First, Vice-Chair Elsa Schalck presented her draft questionnaire on access to parenthood for young parliamentarians, prepared as part of her forthcoming report. The branches were then asked during a roundtable discussion to share the measures in place within their parliaments.

Network rapporteur Madwa-Nika Cadet (Member of the National Assembly, Quebec) then provided an update on her draft report on employability and youth. In connection with this report, she brought in two experts:

- Hélène Drainville, the new chief executive officer of Les Offices jeunesse internationaux du Québec (LOJIQ); and
- Hadrien Parizeau, Director, Partnerships, Public Affairs and Communications of Youth Fusion, whose [mission](#) is to be an organization “that contributes to the perseverance, orientation, employability and civic engagement of youth by implementing innovative experiential learning projects that create ongoing links between school systems and the community.”

Hélène Drainville discussed the work of LOJIQ, which has been providing young Quebecers aged 18 to 35 years with mobility experiences around the world since 1968. Following this presentation, **the Honourable Réjean Aucoin** congratulated Ms. Drainville on LOJIQ's work and asked for more information about the experiences that would enable young Quebecers to connect with Canada's Francophone communities.

She was followed by Hadrien Parizeau, who presented Youth Fusion's extensive work in Quebec, Ontario, New Brunswick, France and Senegal. **Senator Cormier** asked to hear more about the organization's activities in Fredericton, New Brunswick.

Network members then discussed the draft APF Opinion to be presented at the following Summit of La Francophonie. This opinion, “Améliorer la mobilité citoyenne et promouvoir la création, l'innovation et l'entrepreneuriat dans la Francophonie” (“Improving citizen mobility and promoting creation, innovation and entrepreneurship in the Francophonie”), includes a series of recommendations for Francophone states and governments, as well as the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie. The draft Opinion was produced by two Network rapporteurs: Madwa-Nika Cadet (Member of the National Assembly, Quebec) and Pierre-Yves Lux (Member, Wallonia-Brussels Federation, until 9 June 2024). They held consultations over several months to compile the views of the various APF branches, including Canada. This draft Opinion had been submitted to the Plenary Session for approval.

The Network proceedings concluded with members raising the possibility of an annual follow-up on the state of youth in Francophone parliaments; in response, Vice-Chair Schalck proposed holding a roundtable discussion on the topic at the following meeting.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

On 7 July 2024, several members of the Canadian Branch of the APF's delegation attended the meeting of the Economic, Social and Environmental Affairs Committee (ESEAC). In addition to **the Honourable Amina Gerba**, Senator and ESEAC rapporteur, the following Canadian parliamentarians were in attendance:

- the Honourable Réjean Aucoin; and
- the Honourable Marie-Françoise Mégie.

The Committee meeting was presided by His Excellency Mohammed Reda Lahmini (Councillor, Morocco).

The ESEAC meeting began with a roundtable discussion during which participants discussed the economic, social and environmental news from their branches. **The Honourable Amina Gerba** took part in this discussion on behalf of the Canadian Branch of the APF. In particular, she spoke about economic growth and productivity, unemployment and the Government of Canada's recent announcements in the 2024 budget.

The discussion was followed by presentations by the following two experts:

- Hervé Agbodjan Prince, Director of the Observatoire de la Francophonie économique (OFE), who presented the OFE's research priorities and spoke about its interest in working more closely with the APF; and
- Olivier Rukundo, expert from the *Convention on Biological Diversity* Secretariat, who presented the highlights of this international convention.

The Honourable Amina Gerba praised the OFE for the excellent job it was doing and was pleased with the research priorities for the next three years, particularly the work to be done on entrepreneur mobility. She added that small and medium-sized businesses are the lifeblood of most economies in the Francophone world, and that it is important to support them in a structured and serious way.

During the meeting, **the Honourable Amina Gerba** presented her draft report on promoting Francophone women's entrepreneurship for their empowerment. This report topic had been approved at the preceding ESEAC meeting in Luang Prabang, Laos, in April 2024. **Senator Gerba** said that this draft report presents an overview of the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs and some of the commitments made to remove the barriers they face. Certain initiatives implemented by member states and governments of La Francophonie were also presented. She added that entrepreneurship can help women improve their economic status and empower themselves, which is essential for fully achieving women's rights and gender equality.

During her presentation, **the Honourable Amina Gerba** shared some statistics on the representation of women as entrepreneurs and the challenges they face:

- in Canada, less than 20% of businesses are majority-owned by women;
- 30% of small and medium-sized businesses in Africa are run by women;
- women are less likely than men to say that they want to start a business in the near future;
- women run smaller businesses than men; and
- women focus on local markets more than men.

Senator Gerba concluded by announcing that she was looking to send the APF branches a questionnaire to gather information on national initiatives and programs to promote women entrepreneurship. She also said that a second draft report would be tabled during the following ESEAC meeting, during which she hoped subject matter experts would be heard. The ESEAC members welcomed the draft report and shared ideas on how to improve it for the following meeting.

The parliamentarians attending the ESEAC meeting then adopted the final report and draft resolution on the protection and preservation of biological diversity, presented by Virginie Dufour (Member of the National Assembly, Quebec). The draft resolution was forwarded to the Plenary Session for final adoption. The ESEAC members were also briefed on the progress of two reports:

- the draft report on the circular economy, presented by a parliamentarian from Benin; and
- the follow-up report on international trade negotiations conducted at the World Trade Organization, presented by Virginie Dufour (Member of the National Assembly, Quebec).

The ESEAC discussed potential topics for future meetings. These included resilient agriculture and the eradication of plastic pollution. ESEAC participants were also informed of the call for applications for the certification course “Parlement et entrepreneuriat, le rôle du Parlement dans le développement d’un écosystème entrepreneurial national dans l’espace francophone!” (Parliament and entrepreneurship, the role of Parliament in the development of a national entrepreneurial ecosystem in the Francophone world).

PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Many members of the Canadian Branch of the APF’s delegation attended the PAC meeting on 8 July 2024. The Committee meeting was presided by **Joël Godin**, PAC Chair, with the following Canadian parliamentarians in attendance:

- the Honourable Manuelle Oudar;
- Lena Metlege Diab;
- the Honourable Mona Fortier; and
- Darrell Samson.

The meeting began with a roundtable discussion on current parliamentary affairs within the APF. **Darrell Samson** spoke on behalf of the Canadian Branch of the APF. He presented certain recent developments in the Parliament of Canada since the last PAC meeting. **Mr. Samson** started by informing the members of the adoption on 20 June 2024

of *An Act respecting countering foreign interference*. He said that a foreign influence registry was created and would apply to anyone acting on behalf of a non-Canadian entity or government. **Mr. Samson** made a point of mentioning that several parliamentary committees were studying the matter of foreign interference in order to make recommendations to the federal government. He concluded by announcing two recent appointments at the Parliament of Canada: the appointment of Christine Ivory as Parliamentary Librarian, and the renewal of Patrick McDonnell's term as Sergeant-at-Arms of the House of Commons.

Following this roundtable discussion, the PAC heard updates on current draft reports, starting with the final version of the report by Geneviève Hébert (Member of the National Assembly, Quebec) on the impact of disinformation in the parliamentary environment. The report includes resources and tools to help Francophone parliamentarians deal with disinformation. Once the report was adopted by the PAC, Ms. Hébert then presented her next report topic: the ethical responsibility of parliamentarians with respect to disinformation. She did this by holding a consultative workshop to hear the opinions of PAC members on this issue.

Darrell Samson then presented the final draft of the report, along with the draft resolution on the evaluation of APF's cooperative activities. Although the Canadian Branch of the APF does not hold a rapporteur position within the PAC, in 2023 it volunteered to manage the project. **Mr. Samson** outlined the changes made to the report since the last PAC meeting and asked the Committee to approve the draft resolution, which calls on the APF General Secretariat to establish a framework for evaluating its cooperative programs that is consistent with the standards set by a recognized program evaluation association or associations. The draft resolution also calls for the systematic evaluation of APF cooperative programs to be included in the Assembly's reference texts. Following **Darrell Samson's** presentation, **Joël Godin** took the floor as chair to thank the branches that had participated in this process. The draft resolution was approved by the PAC and the text was submitted to the Plenary Session for final adoption.

The third draft report to the PAC was presented by Hussein Bourgi (Senator, France), who is interested in best parliamentary practices for promoting the French language. As the first follow-up since this topic was selected in April, Mr. Bourgi presented some of the current practices in Francophone parliaments, including the Parliament of Canada. **Darrell Samson** took the floor and, referring to **Lena Metlege Diab's** work in her previous roles in provincial politics, spoke to PAC members about the status of minority official languages in Canada. In particular, **Darrell Samson** spoke about how difficult it is in certain provinces to access education in French.

The PAC then focused on two partnerships under its responsibility: a pilot framework agreement with Senghor University in Alexandria, adopted at the previous Committee meeting, and the agreement between the APF and the Réseau francophone de déontologie et d'éthique parlementaires. The PAC heard from two presenters:

- Thierry Verdel, Rector of Senghor University; and
- Jean-Éric Gicquel, President of the Réseau francophone d'éthique et de déontologie parlementaires.

The PAC meeting continued with a presentation by Nadia El Yousfi (Senator, Belgium/Wallonia-Brussels) and Philippe Poirier, Research Chair in Parliamentary Studies at the University of Luxembourg, on the draft legislative corpus on whistleblower protection. They provided a progress update on the work, which is slated to run from March 2024 to July 2025.

EDUCATION, CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION COMMITTEE

On 7 July 2024, several members of the Canadian Branch of the APF'S delegation attended the meeting of the Education, Culture and Communication Committee (ECCC):

- the Honourable Réjean Aucoin;
- the Honourable René Cormier; and
- the Honourable Marie-Françoise Mégie.

The Committee meeting was chaired by Laurent Wehrli (Member of the National Council, Switzerland).

The meeting began with the presentation of the ECCC's activity report for the previous year, as well as that of the Parliamentary Network to Fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Regarding the latter report, **Senator Cormier** asked for details on the achievement of UNAIDS objectives and spoke about the importance of prevention and education for young people.

The Committee took stock of the two draft reports underway, the first on inclusive education for students with special needs, and the second on the restitution of looted cultural property. The draft reports are being presented respectively by the APF's Quebec Branch rapporteur and the Swiss Branch rapporteur. The ECCC also heard from experts on topics related to the reports underway:

- Caroline Erdos, speech-language pathologist and special education consultant, gave a presentation on bilingualism and biliteracy as catalysts for inclusive education. Following the presentation, **Senator Cormier** questioned Ms. Erdos on how research addresses the cultural aspect of language and wondered about the role of parents in providing a cultural environment for maintaining active bilingualism.
- Dr. Emile Zida, Head of the Culture Division at the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), discussed the challenges of colonial property restitution for ECOWAS member countries.
- Alain Godonou, Director of the Museums Program at the Agence nationale de promotion des patrimoines et de développement du tourisme and heritage expert, spoke about the post-restitution, conservation and valorization of cultural property.

The ECCC then held a roundtable discussion on disinformation. The aim of the roundtable was to discuss current legislation and best practices in the fight against disinformation in the various branches of the APF. **Senator Cormier** took part in the discussion. He brought up recent Canadian initiatives in the fight against disinformation, provided an update on the work of the Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference in Federal Electoral Processes and Democratic Institutions, and praised the work of Senator Éric Forest in the

Political Committee on the fight against disinformation and alternative funding models for the media.

At the invitation of the Canadian Branch of the APF, the ECCC then heard a presentation by Martine Peters, Director of the Partnership on University Plagiarism Prevention and Full Professor in the Department of Educational Studies at the Université du Québec en Outaouais, on the impact of artificial intelligence on postsecondary education.

She was followed by Jennifer Maccarone, Quebec Branch rapporteur, who presented her report on the UNESCO Convention on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. Similarly, the ECCC heard from Marie-Julie Desrochers, Executive Director of the Coalition for the Diversity of Cultural Expressions and Secretary General of the International Federation of Coalitions for Cultural Diversity, on the role of civil society in implementing the Convention. **Senator Cormier** stressed the importance for parliamentarians to collaborate with civil society and the cultural industry on the development of public policy.

Then, at the invitation of the Canadian Branch of the APF, the ECCC heard from Benoit Beaudoin, Director, Innovation et Lab numérique at TV5 Québec Canada, on the roles and challenges facing Francophone media in the Americas.

Lastly, the ECCC heard a presentation on the Francophone Youth Parliament's ECCC resolution by the two youth parliament representatives. The resolution dealt with the regulation of influencer activity. **Senator Cormier** congratulated the representatives on their work and asked them whether the issue of freedom of expression had been discussed during the drafting of the resolution.

POLITICAL COMMITTEE

On 7 July 2024, the Canadian Branch of the APF's delegation attended the meeting of the Political Committee. In addition to **the Honourable Éric Forest**, Senator and Political Committee rapporteur, the meeting was attended by the following Canadian parliamentarians:

- the Honourable René Cormier; and
- Marie-France Lalonde.

The meeting of the Political Committee, chaired by Christophe-André Frassa (Senator, France), began by reviewing the political situations in the Francophone world. Pierre Flambeau Ngayap (Senator, Cameroon), Political Committee rapporteur, presented the current situation in certain regions of the Francophone world. In particular, he highlighted certain situations of interest to the Committee. He was followed by a presentation by Nicolas Walder (Member of the National Council, Switzerland), rapporteur responsible for monitoring the fight against the death penalty in the Francophone world. Lastly, Nicolas Guinard, Director of Political Affairs and Democratic Governance at the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF), presented the OIF's recent initiatives in this area, particularly its focus on peacekeeping and the protection of human rights, as well as its electoral observation missions.

Following the political situation review, the Committee moved on to a roundtable discussion of current political events: each branch was invited to share the latest news

from their respective territories. **The Honourable Éric Forest** spoke on behalf of the Canadian Branch of the APF. In his address, he mentioned the creation of the Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference in Federal Electoral Processes and Democratic Institutions. **Senator Forest** also informed the Committee of the increase in support for journalism in the most recent federal budget.

The Political Committee then heard from Éric Blanchot, President of Promediation, a non-governmental organization specializing in mediation in armed conflicts and political crises. Mr. Blanchot was asked to present the work of his organization, particularly in the Sahel, Mali, Libya and Sudan.

Following that, the Committee heard a presentation by Oussama Benachour, Program Officer at the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT). In his presentation, Mr. Benachour cited Marie-France Lalonde's participation in the UNOCT Global Conference of Women Parliamentarians in Doha, Qatar, on 26 and 27 June 2024 as an example of how Francophone parliamentarians can get involved in the fight against terrorism.

The Political Committee then went on to study the draft reports underway. First, Marilyne Picard (Member of the National Assembly, Quebec) presented her final report on cybersecurity and electoral interference in the Francophone world. She invited Mohamed Chérif Benabderrahmane, Director of Resilience and Information Security at the Quebec National Assembly, to speak to the Committee about what his team is doing to better protect parliamentarians in their work. Philippe Courard (Member of the House of Representatives, Belgium) then presented his final report on the role of multilateralism in promoting democracy and peace.

The Honourable Éric Forest took the floor to update the Committee on his draft report on efforts to counter disinformation and alternative funding models for the media. **Senator Forest** said that the main objectives of his report are to study how news organizations are adapting to the transforming media landscape, how they are combating misinformation and how these new funding models could affect the work of journalists and the quality of information available. **Senator Forest** added that a new section on artificial intelligence had been added to the draft report. He noted that given its ability to process large amounts of information, artificial intelligence can have a positive impact on journalism. However, generative artificial intelligence tools can also complicate the work of journalists in their quest for reliable and verifiable information.

Senator Forest then called on journalist and author Alain Saulnier to address the issues raised in the report. Mr. Saulnier, who attended by videoconference, presented an overview of the situation in Canada and current measures to support the media, including the recent adoption of the *Online Streaming Act* and *Online News Act*. When asked about the responsibility of parliamentarians in the fight against misinformation, Mr. Saulnier said that it is "immense" but also shared, particularly with the public, the media and the education system. At the end of the presentation, **Senator Forest** thanked Mr. Saulnier for his insights, which he said would guide the Political Committee in its study. Several Committee members thanked **Senator Forest** for putting this item on the agenda.

The Committee examined and approved two draft resolutions: one on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the other on the situation of the Armenians of

Nagorno-Karabakh and the territorial integrity of the Republic of Armenia. Both draft resolutions were then submitted to the Plenary Session for adoption. **Senator Forest** thanked Senator Frassa for his work in securing the adoption of the resolution on the Democratic Republic of Congo, which had been discussed extensively since the Political Committee's previous meeting.

PLENARY SESSION

The APF Plenary Assembly met on 8 July 2024, presided by **Francis Drouin**, President of the APF and Chair of the Canadian Branch of the APF. **The Honourable Raymonde Gagné**, Speaker of the Senate of Canada, delivered the first opening address, in which she said she was delighted to introduce the participants to the Canadian Francophonie, a strong and vibrant community from coast to coast to coast. She added that the Francophone identity, in addition to being the language spoken on every continent, is also a vision of the world and shared values.

The Speaker of the Senate was followed by the Speaker of the House of Commons, **the Honourable Greg Fergus**, who spoke about how the work of the APF helps defend the rights of all people throughout the Francophone world. He stressed how cultural diversity within La Francophonie enriches societies and the French language.

The Honourable Randy Boissonnault, MP and Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages, said a few words during the opening ceremony. He focused on the theme of the Annual Session, artificial intelligence, and shared some of the Government of Canada's initiatives, including the Pan-Canadian Artificial Intelligence Strategy.

APF President **Francis Drouin** concluded by providing a brief overview of his presidency, particularly his support for youth and parliamentary diplomacy. He spoke about the role of parliamentary diplomacy in preventing and managing crises in the Francophone world. He also pointed out that, during his term, the APF undertook the process of obtaining observer status at the United Nations and the African Union.

The Plenary Session began with the adoption of the APF's new democratic oversight mechanisms. With this document, the APF established five escalating democratic oversight mechanisms: precautionary standby, observation, alert, transition and suspension. As well, an oversight committee was established to review all political situations, apply the mechanisms and ensure ongoing constructive and inclusive dialogue.

Following the adoption of the democratic oversight mechanisms, the Plenary Session validated the new status of 10 branches:

- Burkina Faso, Haiti, Mali, Niger and Syria were suspended;
- Gabon, Guinea and Chad were put in transition;
- the Central African Republic was put on alert; and
- Tunisia was reinstated as a full member.

In addition, the Plenary Session admitted three new branches and approved the change of status of one branch:

- Andorra became a member branch;
- Angola joined as a member branch;
- Cyprus joined as an associate branch; and
- Pondicherry joined as an observer.

The signature event of the APF Plenary Session is the general debate period, which gives the branches an opportunity to express their views on a selected topic. This year, the Canadian Branch of the APF chose to innovate and develop a new formula. The general debate took the form of an expert panel discussion, followed by question and answer sessions. The selected topic for this debate was “l’intelligence artificielle au service du législateur : potentialités et risques associés à son intégration dans les parlements” (artificial intelligence in the service of parliamentarians: potential and risks of its incorporation into parliaments). The discussion was moderated by Nathalie de Marcellis-Warin, Full Professor at Polytechnique Montréal in the Mathematics and Industrial Engineering Department. The panellists were:

- Christophe Abrassart, Full Professor at the Université de Montréal’s School of Design, specializing in planning, design, the environment and sustainable development;
- Steve Jacob, Full Professor and Director of the Research Laboratory on Public Policy Performance and Evaluation at Université Laval;
- Jeffrey LeBlanc, Deputy Clerk, Procedure, House of Commons of Canada; and
- Ulrich Tan, Head of the DataLab at France’s Direction interministérielle du numérique.

During this discussion, participants were able to:

- explore the benefits of artificial intelligence (AI) for parliaments;
- identify the risks associated with AI use; and
- discuss the regulations necessary to regulate AI.

The panel discussion raised many questions among parliamentarians.

The Plenary Session continued with an address by Her Excellency Louise Mushikiwabo, Secretary General of La Francophonie. She underscored the natural cooperation between the APF and the OIF, as well as the objectives shared by both organizations. She pointed out how much more effective the APF and OIF are when the two organizations work together. The Secretary General of La Francophonie also detailed the new mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the situations of states and governments subject to measures or sanctions by OIF bodies. She explained that the aim of the new approach is to not distance the OIF from Francophone populations and to preserve the integrity of La Francophonie in the overall geopolitical context. This new approach strikes a balance between firmness and flexibility. Her Excellency Louise Mushikiwabo then went over the political situations of interest in La Francophonie, particularly in Gabon and Guinea.

On behalf of the Canadian Branch of the APF, **Darrell Samson** asked the Secretary General of La Francophonie about the organization's strengths and weaknesses in its efforts to consolidate democracy and human rights around the world. The Secretary General of La Francophonie responded that the weakness of La Francophonie is that its avenues for action are limited compared to the executive powers of member states and governments, which potentially are unwilling to listen. In her view, the strength of La Francophonie lies in the trust that Francophone states and populations place in the organization, which means that the OIF has broad access to all actors, from executive bodies to civil society, even when there is a democratic breakdown and human rights are not respected.

On behalf of the PAC and as Chair of the Committee, **Joël Godin** asked the Secretary General of the Francophonie about the measures the OIF is taking to ensure that Francophone governments are more supportive of parliamentary diplomacy, and to promote the use of digital tools in order to provide greater access to the work of political institutions. The Secretary General of La Francophonie answered by saying that she wished to see more rapid and effective action and response to provide greater access to the work of political institutions. In this respect, she said that efforts to reform the United Nations Security Council are promising.

Afterward, the four Regional delegates presented an overview of the political situations in their respective regions. These presentations were followed by a discussion among the branches at the Plenary Session. Among the topics discussed were the political situations in Haiti, Ukraine, New Caledonia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Sahel.

The branches taking part in the Plenary Session also adopted the APF Opinion, which will be tabled at the next Summit of La Francophonie in autumn 2024. This Opinion, under the theme "Améliorer la mobilité citoyenne et promouvoir la création, l'innovation et l'entrepreneuriat dans la Francophonie" (improving citizen mobility and promoting creation, innovation and entrepreneurship in the Francophonie), was developed by the Network of Young Parliamentarians.

The Plenary Assembly then adopted four resolutions:

- [Résolution sur la protection et la préservation de la biodiversité dans l'espace francophone](#) (Resolution on Protecting and Preserving Biodiversity in the Francophone World);
- [Résolution sur l'évaluation des actions de coopération menées par l'APF](#) (Resolution on the Evaluation of the APF's Cooperation Initiatives), submitted by **Darrell Samson**;
- [Résolution sur la situation des Arméniens du Haut-Karabak et l'intégrité territoriale de la République d'Arménie](#) (Resolution on the Situation of the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh and the Territorial Integrity of the Republic of Armenia); and
- [Résolution sur la situation en République démocratique du Congo](#) (Resolution on the Situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo).

The Plenary Session also validated three framework agreements between the APF and external organizations: the Fédération internationale des professeurs de français, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and Senghor University in

Alexandria. The agreement with Senghor University in Alexandria was officially presented to members of the Plenary Session by **Joël Godin** in his capacity as Chair of the PAC.

After the adoption of a motion of thanks to the organizers of the 49th Annual Session, **Francis Drouin**, as outgoing president of the APF, thanked the Parliament of Canada staff and the members of the General Secretariat of the APF for their work during his term.

In conclusion, the APF's governing bodies were renewed for 2024–2026. Hilarion Etong, First Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Cameroon, was elected President, and Nathalie Roy, Speaker of the Quebec National Assembly, was elected First Vice-President.

RELATED ACTIVITIES

A. francophone youth parliament

The 10th [Francophone Youth Parliament](#) (FYP) [in French only] was held on the margins of the 49th Annual Session of the APF. The FYP is a model parliament organized by the APF. Its aim is to “promote representative democracy and legislative work, while bringing together young people from around La Francophonie through model parliaments [translation].”

Over 80 young people from every region of La Francophonie took part. The Canadian participants at the 10th FYP were Marianne Arseneau and Mathieu Lebon-Volia.

The FYP is modelled on the APF. During the event, participants are divided into four committees and focus on a pre-selected topic. Participants at the 10th FYP worked on and adopted resolutions on the following topics:

- Economic, Social and Environmental Affairs Committee: The fight against youth poverty;
- Parliamentary Affairs Committee: Promoting the official and societal use of the French language in the 21st century;
- Education, Culture and Communication Committee: Regulation of influencer activity; and
- Political Committee: Promoting civic engagement among young people in real life rather than on social media.

Each FYP committee appointed rapporteurs who went on to present the resolutions to the affiliated APF committees. This gave the parliamentarians the opportunity to meet the young people taking part in the FYP and discuss ideas. The two FYP co-spokespersons also presented these resolutions at the APF Plenary Session on 9 July 2024.

The participants had the opportunity to speak with **the Honourable Greg Fergus**, Speaker of House of Commons of Canada, **Francis Drouin**, Chair of the Canadian Branch of the APF and President of the APF and **Joël Godin**, PAC Chair. Mr. **Fergus** and M. **Drouin** welcomed participants to the FYP in Montreal at the event's opening ceremony. **Francis Drouin** also chaired the FYP plenary session. Mr. **Godin** met with the members of the FYP Parliamentary Affairs Committee. He gave an overview of his

work as a Canadian parliamentarian and as PAC Chair. He then answered participants' questions about his two roles.

B. Meeting of the Association des secrétaires généraux des parlements francophones

The Association des secrétaires généraux des parlements francophones also met on the margins of the 49th Annual Session of the APF. More than 30 participants were in attendance. The Bureau Meeting took place on July 5. The Annual General Meeting was held on July 6, followed by a seminar on July 6 and 7. The seminar covered the following three topics: artificial intelligence in parliamentary administration, corporate communications, and public access to and tours of parliaments.

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	Bureau Meeting, 49th Annual Session and 10th Edition of the Parlement francophone des jeunes of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie
DESTINATION	Montreal, Quebec, Canada
DATES	July 4 to 9, 2024
DELEGATION	
	Hon. Réjean Aucoin Hon. René Cormier Hon. Éric Forest Hon. Amina Gerba Hon. Clément Gignac Hon. Marie-Françoise Mégie Hon. Manuelle Oudar
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Lena Metlege Diab Francis Drouin

Hon. Mona Fortier
Joël Godin
Marie-France Lalonde
Darrell Samson
René Villemure

STAFF

Laurence Brosseau
Gabrielle de Billy Brown
Dominique Montpetit
Julie Pelletier

TRANSPORTATION¹	\$ 1,045.89
ACCOMMODATION²	\$ 21,070.27
HOSPITALITY	\$ 250.00
PER DIEMS³	\$ 906.94
MISCELLANEOUS	\$ 360.00
TOTAL	\$ 23,633.10

¹ *Parliamentarian's transportation expenses were covered by another parliamentary budget.*

² *Some of the parliamentarian's accommodation expenses were covered by another parliamentary budget.*

³ *Parliamentarian's per diems were covered by another parliamentary budget.*