

Canadian Group  
Inter-Parliamentary Union



Groupe canadien  
Union interparlementaire

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**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation respecting  
its participation at the Annual Parliamentary Hearing at the  
United Nations**

**Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)**

**New York, New York, United States of America  
February 13-14, 2017**

# Report

## 1. Overview

On February 13th and 14th 2017, a delegation from the Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) travelled to New York to attend the IPU's annual parliamentary hearing at the headquarters of the United Nations (UN). It was led by **Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith**, President of the Canadian IPU Group and included the **Honourable Senator Dennis Dawson**. The hearing saw the delegation participate in various panel sessions and events. It provided an important opportunity for parliamentarians to engage in dialogue and exchange views and experiences with one another, and to hear from the UN management team. This report provides an overview of the IPU-UN parliamentary hearing.

## 2. Background

The IPU is the international organization of parliaments of sovereign states. It was established in 1889, is “the focal point for world-wide parliamentary dialogue,” and “works for peace and co-operation among peoples and for the firm establishment of representative democracy.”<sup>1</sup> The IPU “supports the efforts of and works in close co-operation with the United Nations, whose objectives it shares.”<sup>2</sup>

The IPU's annual parliamentary hearing brings parliamentarians to the UN headquarters in New York “for an interactive discussion with high-ranking UN officials, representatives of [UN] Member States and experts drawn from think tanks and civil society organizations.”<sup>3</sup>

As a joint event of the IPU and UN, the hearing reflects a commitment by the UN to hear the views of parliamentarians with regards to urgent issues facing policy-makers and legislators around the world and on the key issues on the UN agenda. The importance of the annual hearing to the ongoing work of the IPU and its engagement with the UN system and activities was underlined in the resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly in June 2012, which:

- Recalled its 2010 resolution deciding “to pursue a more systematic engagement with the Inter-Parliamentary Union in organizing and integrating a parliamentary component of and contribution to major United Nations deliberative processes and the review of international commitments”; and
- Called for “the annual parliamentary hearing at the United Nations to be more closely linked to major United Nations processes, including the preparation of

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<sup>1</sup> IPU, “Overview.” <http://www.ipu.org/english/whatipu.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> IPU, “Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations,” New York, UN Headquarters, 13-14 February 2017. See. <http://www.ipu.org/strct-e/splzconf.htm>

global conferences, so as to help to inform such deliberations from a parliamentary perspective.”<sup>4</sup>

The conclusions of the hearing are circulated to the wider UN community as well as to all national parliaments.<sup>5</sup>

The parliamentary hearing was attended by some 217 parliamentarians, and staff, from 54 countries as well as several regional parliaments.

### **3. Programme of the Parliamentary Hearing**

The main theme of the hearing that took place in New York from 13-14 February 2017 was: *A World of Blue: Preserving the oceans, safeguarding the planet, ensuring human well-being in the context of the 2030 Agenda*. The key questions that were explored during the event included:

1. What are the key commitments of Goal 14 and how can Goal 14 be integrated into national SDGs and related developmental plans? What assistance exists and what additional assistance should the UN, including its specialized agencies and funds, provide to help countries implement Goal 14? How can parliamentarians help raise awareness of the challenges as well as the opportunities of ocean preservation at the policy level and with the public at large?
2. How can consumption and production patterns be reformed to decouple the economic benefits of ocean-related products and services from environmental degradation? In addition to international law as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, what regulatory framework is needed to sustainably manage aquaculture? How can the regulatory framework for various industries – the tourism industry, fishing, and extractive industries – be strengthened to limit its impact on the ocean and coastal environment and support communities dependent on the health of the oceans?
3. What are the most important provisions in the international legal framework to address these problems and how can such provisions be translated into effective action at the national level? What are the best legislative and regulatory practices to limit pollution and waste at the source, before they end up in the water? Could the “polluter pays principle” be more effectively applied to address this challenge? What infrastructure and institutional capacities are needed to help countries address this problem and create opportunity in this field?
4. How can countries respond effectively to climate change and its specific threat to the world’s oceans, through mitigation and adaptation efforts? What risk

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<sup>4</sup> United Nations General Assembly, “Interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and the Inter Parliamentary Union,” A/RES/66/261, 7 June 2012, paragraph 7, other relevant documents and resolutions that provide the framework for the IPU’s cooperation with the UN may be accessed at <http://www.ipu.org/un-e/un-docs.htm#resolutions>.

<sup>5</sup> IPU, “Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations,” New York, UN Headquarters, 13-14 February 2017.

reduction measures need to be put in place to protect coastal areas? How can parliaments engage with citizens, civil society and the private sector to help build political will in support of climate change legislation and regulation?

5. How can international cooperation around issues of common concern be improved? How can parliaments facilitate dispute resolution concerning fish stocks and the preservation of marine life in international waters? Are additional international agreements needed to address new issues in ocean governance? What role can parliaments play?

The full programme, which includes details on the themes and case studies explored during the hearing, and the complete list of panellists, may be found online.<sup>6</sup>

#### 4. Summary of Event and Canadian Participation

**Senator Dennis Dawson and Nathaniel Erskine-Smith** were the two Canadian participants at this year's meeting. They, as well as other representatives, are pleased that Canada has confirmed its commitment to the IPU.

This year's meeting focused primarily on environmental concerns, most predominantly preserving the ocean, safeguarding the planet and ensuring human well-being. **Senator Dawson and Mr. Erskine-Smith** conquered that human activity was linked to resource overexploitation, marine life deterioration, and biodiversity loss, which taken together are destabilizing the world's oceans. The conference members concluded by outlining the importance of enforcing Goal 14 of the *Sustainable Development Goals* in order to ensure all countries are putting their best foot forward in conserving oceans, seas and marine life.

Moreover, **Senator Dawson and Mr. Erskine-Smith** also outlined the economic benefits of oceans. Oceans and seas not only provide food to the world's population, but they also provide jobs and livelihood to millions of people around the globe. They recognized that the market value of marine and coastal resources accounts for 5 percent of the global GDP. In order to prevent the harmful impact to coinciding industries, the conference members encourage the careful management of oceans and support balancing exploitation with environmental preservation. As such, they underpin the importance of mobilizing both public and private investments within a regulatory framework, in order to secure these ends.

Furthermore, the panelists spoke about the disruptive effects of pollution, marine debris and other waste and how they are the main contributors to the deteriorating ocean environment. They acknowledge that fertilizers and pesticides used in agriculture, sewage and industrial chemicals flow into rivers and oceans, ultimately contaminating sea life. Debris of all sorts, from construction materials to consumer items like cans and water bottles pose a threat to shipping traffic and deface the coastal environment when they land ashore. In these respects, the members of the conference encourage that the costs associated with pollution be accounted for into the production or consumption

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<sup>6</sup> IPU, "Provisional Programme," 13-14 February 2017.

processed upstream rather than transferred onto local communities and industries that depend on the marine environment.

A paramount concern for **Senator Dawson and Mr. Erskine-Smith** was how all these factors are connected to climate change. The council members recognized how rising sea levels, acidification, increased salinity and stratification are damaging our coastal wetlands and ultimately contributing to global warming. They discussed how these conditions can disrupt marine life; including fish stocks, and causes irreversible ecosystem loss, as is the case with coral reefs. They also discussed how extreme weather circumstances like hurricanes and tsunamis are more common and that marine life degradation endures with global warming.

Taken together, the members of the conference suggest that the difficulties facing oceans and marine life as well as the consequences of climate change need to be dealt with on a global scale. While countries need to individually do their part, they require unity in the fight against preserving the oceans, safeguarding the planet and ensuring human well-being. As such, both **Senator Dawson and Mr. Erskine-Smith** support the 1994 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) as it provides for the freedom of high seas and its provisions reflect customary international law. However, since its implementation, new technologies have developed and have led to new discoveries with economic potential, making it possible to exploit living marine resources, oil and minerals in areas beyond national jurisdictions. Therefore, the panelists are advocating for enhanced international cooperation with a view of preventing disputes and avoiding further harm to the ocean ecosystem. They also suggest that the effects of climate change on oceans need to be better understood in order to reduce and potentially eliminate its negative impact. International cooperation is further needed to manage depleting fish stocks and to understand national marine sanctuaries in order to protect the marine environment.

Conversely, **Senator Dawson and Mr. Erskine-Smith** also took the opportunity to discuss the upcoming IPU Global Conference of Young Parliamentarian taking place in Ottawa on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> of November 2017. This conference is a great incentive for parliaments to involve their young members in international parliamentary affairs. It represents a great networking opportunity for young parliamentarians and allows them to learn and engage in topics related to youth. Senator Dawson and Mr. Erskine Smith also extended to the President of the IPU, Saber Chowdhury, an invitation to visit the Canadian Parliament this spring in order to promote the event and solidify the renewed relationship between the IPU and Canada.

At the official reception, **Senator Dawson** met with the Canadian ambassador to the United Nations, Marc-André Blanchard. He offered him his support in hopes that Canada regains a seat on the UN Security Council.

Respectfully submitted,

David McGuinty, M.P.

President,

Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

## Travel Costs

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| <b>ASSOCIATION</b>                           | Canadian Group of the<br>Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) |
| <b>ACTIVITY</b>                              | Annual Parliamentary Hearing at the<br>United Nations    |
| <b>DESTINATION</b>                           | New York, New York, United States of<br>America          |
| <b>DATES</b>                                 | February 13-14, 2017                                     |
| <b>DELEGATION</b>                            |  |
| SENATE                                       | Hon. Dennis Dawson                                       |
| HOUSE OF COMMONS                             | Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith                              |
| STAFF  |  |
| <b>TRANSPORTATION</b>                        | <b>\$ 2,228.00</b>                                       |
| <b>ACCOMMODATION</b>                         | <b>\$ 1,057.20</b>                                       |
| <b>HOSPITALITY</b>                           | <b>\$ 0.00</b>   |
| <b>PER DIEMS</b>                             | <b>\$ 277.07</b>   |
| <b>OFFICIAL GIFTS</b>                        | <b>\$ 0.00</b>   |
| <b>MISCELLANEOUS /<br/>REGISTRATION FEES</b> | <b>\$ 0.00</b>   |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                 | <b>\$ 3,562.27</b>                                       |