



**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation respecting
its participation at the 9th Gathering of the Group of Women
Parliamentarians and the 43rd Meeting of the ParlAmericas
Board of Directors**

Canadian Section of ParlAmericas

Buenos Aires, Argentina

May 22 to 24, 2017

REPORT

A delegation of five parliamentarians representing the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas attended meetings held in Buenos Aires, Argentina from 22 to 24 May 2017, on the topic of empowering women in society and politics. The delegation was led by the Honourable Robert D. Nault, P.C., M.P., Chair of the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas. Accompanying Mr. Nault were the Honourable Michael MacDonald, Senator; the Honourable Mobina Jaffer, Senator; Ms. Julie Dzerowicz, M.P.; Mr. Randy Hoback, M.P.; and Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy, M.P.

Established in 2001, ParlAmericas is a multilateral forum that assembles and connects parliamentarians from all 35 countries of the Americas. The international secretariat of ParlAmericas is incorporated in Canada and remains the only interparliamentary forum to have its headquarters located in Ottawa.

Since ParlAmericas was established, the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean have experienced strong economic growth and increased political stability. The region is transforming from emerging markets to thriving modern democracies. Meanwhile the relationship between these countries and Canada continues to expand.

ParlAmericas gives priority in its aims and work to three subject-matter pillars: gender equality, open parliaments and climate change. In 2003, at the 2nd Plenary Assembly of ParlAmericas, a proposal to create a permanent body within the ParlAmericas organization that would advocate for gender equality was brought to the Plenary Assembly and unanimously approved. Called the Group of Women Parliamentarians (GWP), the body created an Executive Committee (composed of the president, vice-president, and secretary) in 2012, at the 9th Plenary Assembly. In 2016, Senator Jaffer was elected vice-president of the GWP.

During this year's GWP gathering held in Buenos Aires, the delegation joined parliamentarians to discuss the important gender-related topics of working toward solutions for providing women with economic security and autonomy, and social and legislative strategies for ending gender violence.

Canada–Argentina Relations

A. Background

Canada's ties with Argentina date back to at least 1911, when Canada's first trade office in South America was opened in Buenos Aires by Trade Commissioner H.R. Pousette.¹ Canada and Argentina have enjoyed uninterrupted official diplomatic relations since 1940. The current ambassador to Argentina, Mr. Robert Fry, was appointed in 2015.

The two countries have much in common, sharing like-minded approaches to promoting human rights, improving security in the hemisphere, combatting climate change and supporting peace operations. Geographically, both Canada and Argentina are countries with sparse populations inhabiting a large, diverse territory with abundant natural resources.

¹ Government of Canada, [Canada–Argentina Relations](#)

Argentina is also one of the largest economies in Latin America. It is one of four members of Mercosur,² a trade bloc that, in 2016 had a combined market with a population of 260 million people and gross domestic product of \$3.2 trillion.³ In 2016, bilateral trade between Canada and Argentina totalled \$1.9 billion, with Canadian exports to Argentina totalling \$307.7 million. That same year, bilateral merchandise trade between Canada and the members of the trading bloc totaled nearly \$8.1 billion.⁴ According to Global Affairs Canada, Argentina and the Mercosur member countries have indicated an interest in negotiating a possible free trade agreement with Canada.

Canada and Argentina have connections through cultural bridges. Indigenous leaders of Argentina have welcomed indigenous delegations from Canada to exchange views and experiences. The film industries of Argentina and Canada have worked closely in the past, with the Argentine National Film Institute, Telefilm Canada and Canada's National Film Board collaborating on a number of occasions to co-produce feature fiction films and documentaries.⁵

In the scientific field, researchers from both countries share numerous initiatives. Examples of collaboration between Canada and Argentina include joint studies in areas such as nanotechnology, biomedicine, environment and sustainable development, food science and safety and green energy. Scholarships to Canada are also offered to advanced Argentinian students who have interests in fields of scientific study.⁶

B. Briefing with Officials of the Embassy of Canada to Argentina

In the evening of 21 May 2017, the Canadian delegation met with Ambassador Fry and officials working in the Embassy of Canada to Argentina to receive a briefing on political, trade, cultural and security matters. The meeting was held in the Canadian Embassy in Buenos Aires.

The delegation heard that Canada and Argentina were taking important steps toward renewing their longstanding bilateral relations. Argentina is a valuable regional partner for Canada; an active participant in numerous multilateral fora, it is a country that shares similar viewpoints with Canada on issues such as the promotion of human rights, diversity and nuclear non-proliferation. Argentina is also a leader in gender equality, with Argentinian women recording high rates of participation in law and politics.

The city of Buenos Aires remains a cultural hub, boasting the most theatres per capita in the world and a large number of bookstores, newspapers, playwrights and intellectuals. Approximately 50,000 Canadians visit Argentina each year.

An overview of political history in Argentina was provided to the delegation. It was noted that during the first half of the 20th century, Argentina enjoyed similar socio-economic development indicators as Canada and Australia. The country, however, endured a long

² The members of Mercosur are Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. Venezuela's membership in Mercosur is currently suspended, while Bolivia is in the process of accession into the trading bloc.

³ Government of Canada, [Background \(Mercosur\)](#).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Government of Canada, Embassy of Canada to Argentina and Paraguay, [Canada–Argentina Relations](#).

⁶ Ibid.

period under multiple military dictatorships in the second half of the 20th century, a period that finally ended in 1983 with the return of democracy.

In order to create greater economic stability in the country, the government had recently undertaken steps to reduce the annual inflation rate (the 2018 target is an inflation rate of 5%) and combat endemic corruption (Argentina recently created an anti-corruption ombudsman).

Argentina holds great potential as a trading partner to Canada, and is already a destination for Canadian investors in the fields of mining, oil and gas. It was noted that Canada built Argentina's first nuclear reactor in the 1970s.

Ninth Gathering of the Group of Women Parliamentarians

A. Workshop: Men as Allies in Parliamentary Work for Gender Equality

In the afternoon of 22 May 2017, Canadian parliamentarians attended a workshop on gender equality and women's rights issues. The facilitator for the workshop was Ms. Virginia Garcia Beaudoux. The workshop was held in the Delia Parodi Room in the Palace of the Argentine National Congress.

Welcoming remarks were provided by two parliamentarians. First, Senator Jaffer told participants that women's rights were synonymous with human rights and asked that participants in the discussion feel comfortable to take the risk and ask difficult gender-related questions. Second, Mr. José Luis Riccardo, member of the Argentine Chamber of Deputies, told participants that gender differences ought to be valued in order to strengthen the democratic system.

To lead off the discussion, Ms. Garcia Beaudoux made a number of points about her view of men as allies in parliamentary work. She noted, among other things, that globally, women parliamentarians currently make up only 22% of the membership of legislative assemblies and only 17% of cabinet members are women. She said that at the current pace, gender equality in legislative assemblies would take 200 years. Ms. Garcia Beaudoux stated that corporate boards also have large gaps in gender equality and that the media can often play a negative role in reinforcing outdated stereotypes of women parliamentarians. She cited the numerous benefits of augmenting women's participation in politics.

During the discussion that ensued, parliamentarians shared their experiences and challenges in attempting to improve gender equality in their national legislatures. For example, the percentage of women parliamentarians in Bolivia's legislature is over 50%; Haiti implemented constitutional quotas to guarantee a minimum number of women parliamentarians; and quota laws to guarantee a certain number of women parliamentarians are also in place in Chile, El Salvador and Panama. Participants also agreed that political parties play an important role in encouraging and supporting the equal participation of men and women.

Following a break, participants in the session discussed the importance of including more women in political decision-making. Mr. Nault underlined the importance of sharing power equally between men and women and noted that politics can often be a competitive business in which care needs to be taken, especially by men, to employ language and tactics that are respectful. Mr. Hoback told participants that quotas for

representation in Canada's federal Parliament did not exist and that, in his view, this promoted merit-based achievement.

B. Official Opening of the Gathering

In the morning on 23 May 2017, the ninth Gathering of Women Parliamentarians was officially opened. The ceremony, which involved greetings from three speakers followed by a keynote address, took place in the meeting room of the Chamber of Deputies in the Palace of the Argentine National Congress.

Ms. Margarita Stolbizer, member of the Argentine Chamber of Deputies and host of the gathering, provided an overview of the political past and present of Argentina. She noted that the difficult times the country experienced under dictatorships eventually led to the country building the strong democracy of today. Ms. Stolbizer commented that the hemispheric-wide problems of inequality and poverty disproportionately affected women. She called for positive changes to be made to the social, legal and economic status quo. Senator Marcella Guerra of Mexico, president of ParlAmericas, spoke about the social ills of discrimination and gender-related violence. She stated that education was the primary to combat inequality and poverty. She also spoke about, among other things, the need to reduce wage differences between men and women and eliminate gender-related violence. Ms. Patricia Gimenez, member of the Argentine Chamber of Deputies, provided delegates with information about steps taken in Argentina's national legislature to promote gender equality. She noted that the country had established a quota that ensured 30% of the members of the legislature were women and that currently, about 33% of the legislature were women. Ms. Gimenez commented that quotas, in her view, were not as important as cultural and societal changes.

Lastly, the keynote address for the opening ceremony was delivered by Ms. Minou Tavaréz Mirabel, a former parliamentarian in the Dominican Republic. In wide-ranging comments, she stated that governments ought to set the standard of fairness and equality between genders, and that numerous societal ills (corruption, bribery, electoral fraud, impunity, greed and weak government institutions) disadvantaged women in a disproportionate manner. She also commented that, in her experience, when a lone woman enters politics, politics changes the woman; but when a large number of women enter politics, it is women who change politics.

C. Session 1 – Social Movements for Gender Equality: Experiences Engaging in Political Spaces

The first session of the gathering was held in the late morning and early afternoon of 23 May 2017. Three speakers representing social movements gave presentations about their experiences in organizing and participating in a social movement in their home communities. The presentations were followed by comments and questions by participants in the session. The session was held in the meeting room of the Chamber of Deputies in the Palace of the Argentine National Congress.

The first presentation was given by Ms. Ana Correa, an organizer of the #NiUnaMenos (or "not one less") movement in Argentina. The movement began in response to the discovery of a 16 year-old girl who had been murdered and buried in her boyfriend's garden in the province of Santa Fe. Using only social media and word-of-mouth, a

350,000-person rally was organized to raise awareness about violence against women in Argentina. #NiUnaMenos has since created petitions asking for justice and education for women, rights for victims of violence, and the creation of a single database of murdered women in the country. Ms. Correa stated that one woman is murdered every 24 hours in Argentina.

Ms. Nadeen Spence of Jamaica discussed her work as an organizer in the Tambourine Army in Jamaica, a social justice movement committed to combatting sexual violence and safeguarding the rights of girls and women. The movement began following the conviction of an Evangelical minister who had sexual relations with a 15 year-old girl. In response, the Tambourine Army held a survivor improvement march, the largest non-political march in the country's history. The group has since spread into a Caribbean-wide movement, raising awareness about sexual harassment, abuse, violence and rape. Ms. Spence also noted that the group employed the rather controversial tactic of encouraging survivors of sexual abuse to name their perpetrators, using the hashtag #SayTheirNames, before the perpetrators have gone before the courts. Recent work has been to challenge the cyber-crime law in Jamaica to call attention to the problem of information technology being used for malicious communications.

Ms. Olga Amparo Sanchez, director of the Casa de la Mujer (or "woman's house") in Colombia, told attendees about her organization's role in securing gender equality rights in the peace accord negotiations between the Colombian government and FARC (the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia). Casa de la Mujer joined lobbying efforts to include gender equality as a key principle in the final accord. Ms. Sanchez also told participants in the session about the gender-related challenges currently faced by Colombian society, including rural neglect and the insufficient provision of resources and services to women.

Following the three presentations, a wide-ranging discussion was held that covered numerous gender-related topics. Some commented that the main challenges for social movements for gender equality were to maintain their momentum, network with other groups and expand their reach and influence.

Ms. Dzerowicz provided her views to participants about gender-related social movements in Canada. She noted, among other things, that while women make up 51% of Canada's population, only 28% of members of Canada's Parliament were women; that the Canadian Cabinet was gender equal; and that important steps were being taken to fund social groups in Canada.

Other comments and suggestions made during the discussion portion of the session included the need to implement gender-based analysis in national budgets, the difficulties and challenges of raising sufficient money to allocate toward programs and social movements, the need to update laws dealing with sexual offences, and the suggestion that social media could be used to circumvent traditional media in order to remove the perceived bias the latter has toward female parliamentarians.

D. Session 2 – Social Movements: Opportunities and Challenges for Political Representation

In the afternoon of 23 May 2017, the second session was held in the meeting room of the Chamber of Deputies in the Palace of the Argentine National Congress. The session was divided into two parts: a moderated conversation with current and former parliamentarians about encouraging citizen participation in their legislative work dealing with gender equality, followed by a roundtable discussion with a facilitator posing questions about engaging with social movements to be addressed by delegates at their tables.

The first speaker in the moderated conversation was Ms. Sandra Moran, member of the Guatemalan Congress of the Republic. She told delegates that she had been exiled during Guatemala's military dictatorship, which reigned from 1960 to 1996. Ms. Moran spoke of the importance of the inclusion of women in the peace agreements that concluded the conflict in 1996. She emphasized the importance of having rights as a citizen and as a woman and knowing what these rights are. She lastly told delegates her current focus was on helping to strengthen institutions. Next, Mr. Alberto de Belaunde, member of Peruvian Congress of the Republic, discussed his experience as one of the few openly gay members of the Congress of the Republic. He described his work in passing a civil union bill, which he considered an intermediate step to eventual legislation recognizing same-sex marriage in Peru. Ms. Guerda Benjamin, member of the Haitian Chamber of Deputies, told delegates about her youth growing up in a Haitian farming community during the time of the dictatorship of President François Duvalier. She is currently one of only four female members of the Chamber of Deputies; she noted there is only one female senator. She noted a large gulf still existed in Haiti with respect to gender equality. Ms. Benjamin continues to collaborate with grass roots community groups, seeking to translate their ideas for amendments into legislation. Lastly, Senator Jaffer spoke about the empowering of women through improved economic opportunities. She noted that many women in Canada are well-educated but have not been given equal opportunity to gain meaningful professional experience. She provided a brief summary about harassment issues in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Canadian military, noting that generally, it is the woman who quits and the men who stay. She concluded by stating that, in her view, only under true gender harmony can both men and women flourish.

During the discussion portion of the moderated discussion with current and former parliamentarians, Senator Jaffer underlined that women needed the opportunity to succeed in senior positions; to do so, they required the help and goodwill on the part of men. Mr. Benjamin told delegates that he had not set out to be an activist but had become one. He mentioned that he also had a bill passed promoting rights of persons with disabilities and that he often works closely with social movements and activists. The discussion turned to the reasons for the underrepresentation of women in positions of power and privilege. Some noted that the difficulty in changing the well-engrained cultural and societal roles of men and women, others noted men were reluctant to cede their positions to women, and still others noted that women have numerous competing roles to balance. The desirability of instituting minimum quotas for women for seats in national legislatures was also discussed, with some speaking strongly in favour of their use, and others speaking strongly against their use.

As the first part of the second session overran its allotted time, most delegates did not participate in the roundtable part. Only one table provided responses to the following question: how can demands and proposals put forward by social movements and civil society organizations be translated into concrete inputs to strengthen legislative work?

On behalf of this table, Mr. Nault reported the following answers: adequate funding needs to be provided to women's organizations, notwithstanding whether or not they are critical of the government; a formal process needs to be put in place to incorporate the ideas of social movements and civil society into legislation; national budgets need to be evaluated using gender-based plus analysis; training for parliamentarians needs to be encouraged; the use of quotas ought to be considered; women's economic participation needs to be made a focus; an independent news media needs to be supported; and wealthy countries need to provide more support for countries with fewer economic resources.

E. Session 3 – Challenges to Empowerment: Economic Autonomy and Gender Violence

The third and final session of the gathering was held in the morning of 24 May 2017, in the meeting room of the Chamber of Deputies in the Palace of the Argentine National Congress. The session featured a presentation by Ms. Mercedes D'Alessandro of Argentina, an expert on gender violence and economic empowerment, followed by a general discussion on the topic of economic autonomy and gender violence, and concluding with a workshop session in which delegates responded to questions posed to them through discussions at their tables.

Ms. D'Alessandro's presentation covered the disparity between men and women in the workplace, in domestic work and in the national political sphere. She told delegates that a 2013 survey conducted in Argentina on the use of time by men and women found that 76% of non-remunerated domestic tasks were performed by women. She argued that this burden prevented women from gaining remunerated work. Ms. D'Alessandro also noted that the terms and conditions under which women worked in Argentina were markedly different from men. She cited as evidence the existence of a 26% wage gap between men and women, that women rarely received work-related benefits and that most of the jobs performed by women were considered to be precarious employment. Lastly, she told delegates that in the political sphere, currently only three women were Cabinet ministers and that since 1983, only 16 women have served in Cabinet. In her view, the only institution in which women have excelled was in the National Congress, due to the imposition of a quota reserving a certain amount of seats for women.

Following D'Alessandro's presentation, a wide-ranging discussion on gender and economic empowerment ensued. Some delegates brought up the pros and cons of legislating a salary to be paid by the government for housework. Others were of the view that the person who received the benefit of the housework ought to pay for its provision. Ms. D'Alessandro noted that housework as a good or service does not generally count towards a country's national accounts. She stated that housework could account for 10 to 30% of a given country's gross domestic product, and that the burden of housework is increasing with demands for greater care giving in an aging society. Ms. D'Alessandro told delegates that they needed to reconsider current societal norms and

place greater importance of improved data collection. Also discussed was how to improve women's access to financial tools, financing and credit instruments.

Next, Ms. D'Alessandro posed two questions to delegates and asked that participants work together at their tables in order to prepare responses. These questions were:

- What are the main connections between economic inequality, dependence and gender violence?
- What are the key elements that a comprehensive public policy response to these questions should include?

Responses to these questions varied from table to table, but included: allowing women to access a fair salary, equity in the job market and education will strengthen their role in society; data ought to be collected on women's unpaid labour; entering into trade agreements can create greater equality; educational programs need to be put in place, starting at a young age, to teach gender equality and combat sexual harassment; tax incentives ought to be legislated to provide for better employment prospects for women; and programs ought to be instituted to improve the mental health of women (boost self-esteem and combat depression).

Several speeches were made to close the ninth gathering of ParlAmericas group of women parliamentarians.

ADDITIONAL MEETINGS

A. 43rd Meeting of the ParlAmericas Board of Directors

On 22 May 2017, ParlAmericas held its 43rd meeting of the Board of Directors in the meeting room of the Chamber of Deputies in the Palace of the Argentine National Congress. The meeting began by passing through a series of brief agenda items, including approving the agenda and approving the minutes from the 42nd Board of Directors meeting. The following board activities, among other things, were discussed:

- A briefing about the forthcoming GWP meeting was given and its agenda was reviewed.
- Updates were provided about a forthcoming meeting of the ParlAmericas Open Parliamentary Network, along with a forthcoming workshop on citizen participation in open budgeting.
- A report was given about the work of the ParlAmericas Parliamentary Network on Climate Change. The next meeting of this network was scheduled for the first week of August 2017.
- An update was provided regarding the 2017 Annual Plenary Assembly to be held in Medellin, Colombia from 14 to 17 November 2017.
- A report was provided by the finance committee regarding the revenues and expenses of the organization.
- The ParlAmericas International Secretariat gave a budget update, a report on staffing and provided a calendar of events for 2017.
- The on-going political and economic crisis in Venezuela was discussed.

B. Meeting with the Canada–Argentina Friendship Group

On the afternoon of 24 May 2017, the delegation, accompanied by Ambassador Fry, met with members of the Canada–Argentina Friendship Group, a group composed of members of the Argentine Chamber of Deputies. The group’s president provided welcoming remarks and stressed the importance of held strengthening bilateral relations. She noted the many similarities between Canada and Argentina and recognized that Canada has been a world leader in the promotion of democratic culture. She also thanked Ambassador Fry for his work at bolstering ties between Canada and Argentina. Mr. Nault extended an invitation to the group to visit Canada and he also thanked ParlAmericas for its role in bringing countries together.

Respectfully submitted,

Hon. Robert Nault, P.C., M.P.

Chair

Canadian Section of ParlAmericas

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Section of ParlAmericas
ACTIVITIES	9th Gathering of the Group of Women Parliamentarians 43rd Meeting of the ParlAmericas Board of Directors
DESTINATION	Buenos Aires, Argentina
DATES	May 22 to 24, 2017
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Michael MacDonald, Senator Hon. Mobina Jaffer, Senator Hon. Robert D. Nault, P.C., M.P.
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Ms. Julie Dzerowicz, M.P. Mr. Randy Hoback, M.P. Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy, M.P.
STAFF	Mr. David-Andrés Novoa Mr. André Barnes
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 57,731.87
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 4,850.58
HOSPITALITY	\$ 1,889.94
PER DIEMS	\$ 2,928.03
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 148.42
MISCELLANEOUS	\$ 1,926.96
TOTAL	\$ 69,475.80