



**Report of the Canadian parliamentary delegation respecting  
its participation at the meeting of the Political Committee of  
the *Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie* (APF)**

**Canadian Branch of the *Assemblée parlementaire de la  
Francophonie* (APF)**

**Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
April 10-11, 2017**

# Report

The parliamentary delegation of the Canadian Branch that attended the meeting of the Political Committee (the “Committee”) of the *Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie* (APF) held at the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on April 10 and 11, 2017, is honoured to submit its report. The delegation consisted of Mr. **Paul Lefebvre**, MP and Vice-President of the Canadian Branch, and Pascal Tremblay, Analyst and Advisor to the Canadian Branch.

Some thirty parliamentarians from about twenty branches representing the four regions of the francophone world (Africa, the Americas, Asia and Europe) took part in this meeting. In addition to the Canadian Branch, the following branches were represented at the meeting: Belgium / French Community / Wallonia-Brussels, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, France, Gabon, Hungary, Jura, Lebanon, Madagascar, Mali, Morocco, Niger, Quebec, Democratic Republic of Congo, Senegal, Switzerland, Chad and Togo.

The meeting was convened by Senator Jacques Legendre, Committee Chair, from the French Branch. At the start of the meeting, the Committee adopted an amended agenda, as well as the record of decisions and minutes from the previous committee meeting held in Antananarivo, Madagascar, on July 10, 2016, during the Annual Session.

## Political developments

The Chair invited the members from the various branches to participate in a round table and summarize the political issues in their respective legislatures. In his presentation, Mr. **Lefebvre** briefly outlined some of the priorities set out in Budget 2017. He also gave an overview of other issues of current interest associated with Canadian parliamentarians, such as the *Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement* and the expected introduction of the Government of Canada’s bill on the legalization of cannabis.<sup>1</sup> He further informed Committee members that 2017 marked Canada’s 150th anniversary and that festivities would be held to celebrate the event.

## Report and declarations on political situations

The Committee then considered the draft report reviewing the political situations in the francophone world submitted by the Gabonese Branch representative. The report addressed the situation in Syria, Egypt, Gabon, Haiti, Central African Republic, Burundi, and Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as the situation in the Sahel. Following the study of the political situations discussed in the report, the Committee adopted the following six declarations:

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<sup>1</sup> Bill C-45, An Act respecting cannabis and to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, the Criminal Code and other Acts (Cannabis Act) had not yet been introduced in the House of Commons at the time of the meeting.

- A declaration on the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, the [Déclaration sur la situation en République arabe syrienne](#), confirming the continued suspension of the Syrian Branch for violations of the fundamental principles set out in the Bamako and Saint-Boniface declarations, as well as massive human rights violations;
- A declaration on the situation in the Central African Republic, the [Déclaration sur la situation en République centrafricaine](#), condemning the rising number of clashes between armed groups and the violence committed against the Central African people, and identifying certain opportunities that might lead to a possible peaceful resolution;
- A declaration on the situation in Burundi, the [Déclaration sur la situation au Burundi](#), keeping the Burundian Branch under preventive observation and maintaining the suspension of institutional cooperation with that branch. The declaration also announces that the Committee will consider the possibility of recommending at the next Plenary Assembly that the Burundian Branch be suspended, primarily on the grounds of serious, widespread and systematic violations of human rights and restrictions on civil liberties by the Burundian government and individuals associated with it;
- A declaration on the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the [Déclaration sur la situation politique en République démocratique du Congo](#), calling on all Congolese political and social stakeholders to help implement and uphold the December 31st agreement, particularly with respect to the organization of free and transparent legislative and presidential elections before the end of 2017;
- A declaration on the situation in Lebanon, the [Déclaration sur la situation au Liban](#), calling on the international community to help the Lebanese legal authorities fight terrorism and manage the refugee crisis affecting the country;
- A declaration on the situation in Egypt, the [Déclaration sur les attaques terroristes en Égypte](#), strongly condemning the attacks against two Coptic churches in the country on April 9, 2017.

Discussions on the *Déclaration sur la situation en République arabe syrienne* led to the passage of two amendments proposed by Mr. **Lefebvre**. The first amendment stipulated that only a negotiated political agreement could lead to a lasting resolution to the conflict. The second amendment called on all parties involved in the conflict to uphold international humanitarian law, so as to ensure that workers from humanitarian organizations have full, safe and unhindered access to victims.

The *Déclaration sur la situation en République centrafricaine* also reflects amendments proposed by Mr. Lefebvre highlighting the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic and calling on the international community to make a concerted effort to respond promptly and effectively to the humanitarian needs of the Central African people.

As in the previous meeting, the Committee discussed the political crisis in Burundi. Despite the objections of the Burundian delegation, which argued that the declaration

was based on false allegations, parliamentarians agreed to keep the Burundian Branch under preventive observation and to suspend all institutional cooperation activities. The meeting proceedings did not make it possible for the parliamentarians engaged in this debate to propose amendments to the declaration on the situation in Burundi.

The Lebanese Branch delegate questioned why Lebanon had been left out of the Committee's consideration of political situations. He also proposed a draft declaration on Lebanon to the parliamentarians at the meeting. The Committee adopted the declaration, but several members questioned the hastiness of studying a declaration they had not had the opportunity to examine beforehand.

### **The fight against radicalism and terrorism**

The Committee discussed the Quebec Branch's draft report on the fight against religious radicalism. The Quebec delegate pointed out that religious radicalism is a global phenomenon that has been more acutely felt in the Francophonie over the past few years. He said that countering violent extremism requires diversifying efforts, responding earlier and tackling the causes of the problem. He also said that any repressive action must absolutely be complemented by preventive measures.

The Quebec delegate pointed out that the information he has received from the various APF branches shows that all of them recognize the importance of the radicalization problem and most have legislative instruments aimed at preventing and countering radicalism. He said that a survey would again be sent to the various branches of the APF asking, more specifically, the Africa Region branches to respond, with a view to drawing a more representative portrait of the situation in the francophone world.

A number of parliamentarians spoke about what they thought were the best ways to gain a deeper understanding of the causes of terrorism. Others mentioned examples of initiatives implemented to prevent radicalization. One parliamentarian stressed the importance of education in preventing radicalism while several others focused on related issues, such as the reintegration of radicalized youth returning from abroad, the consequences of a perverted interpretation of Islam, or the fact that radicalized groups often target poor populations for recruitment.

Discussions about the report on radicalism were followed by exchanges on the fight against religious and political terrorism in the francophone world. Parliamentarians called on their colleagues to reflect about the issues they believe fuel terrorism in some countries, including the sources of terrorist financing, interference by foreign countries in the radicalization of certain groups or the persistence of political problems that remain unresolved. The lack of a concerted pooling of efforts in the fight against terrorism was also raised.

A parliamentarian described Mali as the "hub" of terrorism in the Sahel region and claimed that certain actions taken by Western countries and MINUSMA in Mali could have negative repercussions on the Malian government's authority over the region. This comment generated a debate among members, with some saying that parliamentarians have a duty to explain to voters the reasons for the common fight against terrorism in the Sahel.

## **Legalization and decriminalization of cannabis**

Mr. **Lefebvre**, who was replacing Senator **Dennis Dawson**, the rapporteur for the Canadian Branch of the APF to the Committee, presented a revised version of the report on the legalization and decriminalization of cannabis in the Francophonie. He reminded the Committee that the report was intended only to provide an overview of the debate and not to inform a possible declaration or resolution concerning cannabis control policies.

Mr. **Lefebvre** said that the Canadian report provided a concise overview of the regulatory frameworks on the legalization and decriminalization of cannabis established by various countries. He explained that the countries or U.S. states that have legalized cannabis regulate such things as the minimum age of the consumer, the possibility or interdiction of producing cannabis for personal use, limits on possession for personal use, authorized distributors, advertising, licensing of production, taxation, and the types of cannabis products that are made legal.

In closing, Mr. **Lefebvre** said that the responses returned by some branches of the APF suggested that, to date, the issue of legalization or decriminalization of cannabis did not seem to have led to specific initiatives or generated major debate in the vast majority of the legislatures concerned. He alluded to the situation in Canada, mentioning that the government had indicated it wanted to introduce a bill to legalize and regulate access to cannabis. The Canadian delegate noted that parliamentarians in Canada should be studying this bill in depth and debating it in the coming year.

## **APF's democratic oversight process**

During the meeting, delegates approved a draft standard on the review of the APF's democratic oversight process. The document had been prepared by the Belgium / French Community / Wallonia-Brussels Branch with the support of a working group made up of other branches of the APF. The Belgian parliamentarian reminded members that it had seemed necessary for the APF to examine its democratic oversight and sanctions mechanisms precisely because of the difficulties it faced in suspending the Syrian Branch (on the grounds of violence against the civilian population rather than respect for the constitutional order of a State).

The Committee, however, agreed that the working group should review the definition of "massive violation of human rights" before the document was adopted by the APF Bureau in July 2017. Some considered the definition to be too restrictive because it covered only genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, which sometimes take a long time to prove under international law. The members expressed their concern that this could limit the APF's ability to impose sanctions.

## **Other themes**

Lastly, the parliamentarians at the meeting discussed two other items on the agenda, namely membership in the International Criminal Court and application of the death penalty in the Francophonie. With respect to the first item, it was noted that the subject had become more relevant of late, as some nations, especially in Africa, were now

expressing their willingness to withdraw from the *Rome Statute*.<sup>2</sup> Some parliamentarians who spoke on the subject mentioned that the International Criminal Court was weakened by the fact that several influential countries had not joined and that it was mainly African countries that were put on trial. They also said, however, that the Court had a deterrent effect on dictators and that it might have helped improve the human rights situation in Africa.

There were brief discussions on the status of the death penalty in some of the countries represented at the meeting, but the issue was deferred for later consideration because the Swiss Branch parliamentarian scheduled to present a report on the subject was not present.

Respectfully submitted,

Darrell Samson, MP President of the Canadian Branch of the *Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie* (APF)

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<sup>2</sup> Burundi officially withdrew from the Rome Statute on October 27, 2017.

## **Travel Costs**

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| <b>ASSOCIATION</b>    | Canadian Branch of the <i>Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie</i> (APF)                    |
| <b>ACTIVITY</b>       | Meeting of the Political Committee of the <i>Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie</i> (APF) |
| <b>DESTINATION</b>    | Addis Ababa, Ethiopia   |
| <b>DATES</b>          | April 10 and 11, 2017   |
| <b>DELEGATION</b>     |   |
| SENATE                |   |
| HOUSE OF COMMONS      | Mr. Paul Lefebvre   |
| STAFF                 | Pascal Tremblay, Analyst  |
| <b>TRANSPORTATION</b> | \$13,243.83   |
| <b>ACCOMMODATION</b>  | \$1,031.08  |
| <b>PER DIEMS</b>      | \$659.53  |
| <b>MISCELLANEOUS</b>  | \$17.99   |
| <b>TOTAL</b>          | <b>\$14,952.43</b>  |