



**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation respecting
its participation at the 47th Regular Session of the OAS
General Assembly**

Canadian Section of ParlAmericas

Cancun, Mexico

June 18 to 21, 2017

REPORT

THE DELEGATION: COMPOSITION AND OBJECTIVES

A delegation from the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas attended the 47th Regular Session of the General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS) in Cancun, Mexico, from June 19 to June 21, 2017. The theme of this meeting was “Strengthening Dialogue and Concerted Action for Prosperity”. Led by Robert D. Nault, MP, Chair of the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas, the delegation was made up of Peter Kent, MP, and David-Andrés Novoa, the Association Secretary.

The Canadian delegates joined parliamentarians from other member states of ParlAmericas, who had also been invited to participate in the Assembly. The visit by the delegation of parliamentarians from ParlAmericas had two main objectives: first, to allow the parliamentarians to learn more about the issues being debated within the OAS, and, second, to spread awareness among the government missions and the senior levels of the OAS at the Assembly of the importance of parliaments in achieving the objectives set by the Member States.

MEETING WITH THE CANADIAN DIPLOMATIC CORPS BEFORE THE 47th REGULAR SESSION

On Sunday, June 18, 2017, before the General Assembly began, the Canadian delegation attended a briefing given by the diplomats of Canada’s permanent mission to the OAS. They were: Jennifer Loten, Ambassador and Permanent Representative; Sébastien Sigouin, Deputy Head of Mission and Counsellor; and Amanda Klamann, Second Secretary and Alternate Representative.

At this meeting, the diplomats explained the way in which the Assembly would proceed and summarized the issues on the agenda. They also discussed the resolutions that would be submitted to Member States, such as the one dealing with the Falklands/Malvinas Islands. The political crisis in Venezuela was also raised in terms of the country’s process of withdrawing from the OAS, and the diplomatic efforts to pass a resolution to address the situation in that country.

Participants also discussed issues that Canada and Latin America have in common. They identified two themes that ParlAmericas and Canada could promote in the hemisphere simultaneously: improving the situation of indigenous communities and gender equality.

DIALOGUE WITH CIVIL SOCIETY REPRESENTATIVES AND OTHER ACTORS

On Monday, June 19, the members of the Canadian delegation attended an OAS session entitled “Dialogue with civil society organizations and other actors”. Luis Videgaray, Mexico’s Secretary of Foreign Affairs, and Luis Almagro, the Secretary General of the OAS, welcomed 30 civil society representatives who had been invited to make proposals to the heads of OAS delegations on the following themes: i. Integral Development and Prosperity in the Hemisphere; ii. Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law; and iii. Multidimensional Security.

Participants in the dialogue were from a number of sectors of civil society. They expressed their views on how to address the region’s many challenges. On the topic of

development, the organizations stressed the importance of strengthening political institutions in order to tackle corruption. Others pointed to the importance of the family as a pillar of development. For others, in order to ensure equitable economic growth in the region, it is essential to implement policies designed to include women in the workforce, especially through more education.

The issue of human rights gave minority groups the opportunity to voice their claims. For example, the Indigenous Peoples and Nations Coalition demanded that they be allowed to participate fully in OAS deliberations, given that the American Declaration on Indigenous Peoples was approved in 2016. Another group, Coalición LGTBTTTI, deplored the fact that 10 countries of the Caribbean still criminalize and ban homosexuality, and that most countries in the region have no laws that recognize different gender identities. They are demanding that OAS Member States pass legislation to foster inclusion and to uphold the human rights of these minority groups.

The issue of women's reproductive rights was raised by some organizations, but from different perspectives. The Coalición de Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos [coalition for sexual and reproductive rights] pointed out that, in Latin America and the Caribbean, 33% of births are to mothers younger than 18 years of age. To address this situation, measures like better sex education, greater access to contraception, and the decriminalization of abortion were recommended. Others, like the Dignity of the Person Coalition emphasized the respect for human life from conception, and recommended helping women by fighting poverty and discrimination.

WELCOME ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF PARLAMERICAS

The ParlAmericas delegation's official program began with a presentation by Senator Marcela Guerra of Mexico, the President of ParlAmericas. Her focus was to repeat the objectives of the visit for the benefit of the delegates and to discuss the program that had been prepared for the delegation on the margins of the General Assembly of the OAS.

Ms. Guerra described the participation of ParlAmericas members in the General Assembly as an "observation mission". Its goal was to understand the functioning of the Assembly, the supreme organ of the Organization of American States. She said that the three days of meetings would allow delegates to take the pulse of the political issues in the hemisphere. In that context, Robert Nault, the Chair of the Canadian Section and Vice-President of ParlAmericas, pointed out that it was also a good opportunity to sound out the Member States about the political crisis in Venezuela.

Finally, Ms. Guerra indicated that members would also have the opportunity to network with permanent representatives to the OAS and the foreign affairs ministers who would be present, all with a view to promoting ParlAmericas and the importance of parliaments and parliamentarians in the democracies of the region.

DIALOGUE ON THE RULE OF LAW AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Before the General Assembly of the OAS, the Supreme Court of Mexico and the General Secretariat of the OAS organized a session on the rule of law and environmental justice, entitled "Solid institutions, peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development". The objective of the session was to stress the importance of

the power of the judiciary in conserving the environment and in safeguarding the rights of those involved. In addition, the intent was to foster dialogue between the highest courts on the importance of the rule of law in environmental matters.

The invited panellists were judges from high courts in Latin America. They spoke about how, in their view, justice influences environmental law. Ricardo Lorenzetti, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Argentina, dealt with the issue of economic development and the environment. He indicated that, for a number of years, there has been a proliferation of disputes over the use of mine, forest and water resources. In his opinion, when the State is not able to manage these disputes, the courts play a major role since their intervention stimulates dialogue between the executive, legislative and judicial powers. Along the same lines, Antonio Herman Benjamin, a Supreme Court judge from Brazil, mentioned that States that pass environmental legislation simultaneously impose obligations that they then have to honour themselves. Alfredo Gutierrez, a Supreme Court judge from Mexico, said that, in the absence of federal legislation, some federal judges are turning to the international environmental treaties that Mexico has signed in order to render their decisions.

Javier Ortega, a Member of Parliament in Panama and Chair of ParlAmerica's Network on Climate Change, then pointed out the importance of parliamentarians in environmental matters. In fact, because legislators adopt, or can propose, environmental legislation, it is important for social actors, institutions and legislative authorities to coordinate their efforts in order to fight climate change.

BRIEFING BY THE SECRETARY FOR STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY

The ParlAmericas delegates attended a briefing by Francisco Guerrero, the OAS Secretary for Strengthening Democracy, dealing with the main hemispheric issues to be debated at the General Assembly. This session provided a specific opportunity to explain the steps taken by OAS countries to come up with a resolution on the crisis in Venezuela.

Mr. Guerrero explained that the negotiations that had taken place in Cancun with a view to making a declaration on Venezuela followed from the negotiations that had begun in Washington on May 31, 2017. The foreign affairs ministers who had come together in May to discuss the situation had not managed to reach an agreement at that time and had agreed to come up with a consensus before the General Assembly in Mexico. The negotiations were still going on in the absence of an agreement. The declaration being studied focused mainly on demanding that the government of Venezuela abandon its plans to hold a Constituent Assembly on July 30, 2017. For the resolution to be able to be adopted, the support of at least 23 OAS Member States was required.¹

Mr. Guerrero also reminded delegates that, in the coming months, the hemisphere would be very busy with elections. At least five presidential elections will be held in the next 12 months (Costa Rica, Paraguay, Colombia, Mexico, Brazil), not to mention the elections at legislature level that will be held in other countries. According to Mr. Guerrero, voters will probably tend to become polarized, which will produce very close

¹ Later, when the resolution was put to a vote at the General Assembly, only 20 States voted in favour. The resolution therefore failed to be adopted.

results, as was the case with the presidential elections in Ecuador in April 2017. In his opinion, the robustness of democratic institutions in the countries of the region will be very much put to the test in the coming months.

OPENING OF THE 47th GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE OAS

In the evening, Enrique Peña Nieto, the President of Mexico, opened the 47th General Assembly of the OAS with a speech in which he asked Member States to commit themselves to the democratic ideals and goals that gave birth to the Organization. In his view, social, economic and political paradigms are rapidly changing. In addition, regional challenges are putting the organization and its leadership to the test. The best way to face those challenges is with multilateralism, because it allows governments to confront the challenges through concerted actions.

Luis Almagro, Secretary General of the OAS, also reminded participants that democracy is a right of the people and that the OAS has built its coexistence on the fundamental freedoms of its citizens. In his view, democracy is a work that is always in progress, requiring us to recommit ourselves to those rights and to the political participation of our citizens.

The final speaker, Luis Videgaray, Mexico's Secretary for Foreign Affairs, stressed that the 47th General Assembly was a place for dialogue and concerted action towards greater prosperity. The Assembly was designed to permit dialogue on a variety of issues, such as women in leadership in the Americas, financial exclusion, migration, and the strengthening of the Inter-American Human Rights System. He also stressed the importance of civil society and the private sector participating on the margins of the Assembly in order to discuss those issues.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE OAS – DAY ONE

On Tuesday, June 20, the members of the delegation attended part of the morning's working session at the beginning of the General Assembly. The first items on the agenda were the presentation of various reports from the Secretary General on the organization's activities and finances, as well as the report from the Inter-American Council for Integral Development. Members of the Permanent Council (the Member States of the OAS) also had the opportunity to comment on the annual reports from the OAS' agencies and entities.

The Council members who spoke used the opportunity to raise regional or bilateral issues. Bolivia, for example, raised the issue of the legal dispute with Chile over access to the sea. A number of other countries brought up the crisis in Venezuela, urging the opposing sides to remain calm and to seek a peaceful solution to the political tensions through dialogue. Canada asked the government of Venezuela, for example, to release its political prisoners and to respect the human rights of its citizens. Canada also expressed its humanitarian needs. On the same theme, the United States stated that the crisis in Venezuela was a time to demonstrate the relevance of the OAS and to apply its Charter on behalf of the Venezuelan people.

Ecuador and Chile expressed their support for the peace process in Colombia between the government and the FARC [revolutionary armed forces of Colombia]. They also supported the dialogue that has begun between the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional*

(ELN) [national liberation army] and the government of Colombia. Part of the address from The Bahamas dealt with climate change because rising sea levels are threatening the very existence of the country. The Bahamian representative urged members to make concrete commitments. Finally, Peru announced the theme of the Summit of the Americas, which will be held in Lima in 2018: *Democratic Governance Against Corruption*.

BRIEFING BY THE SECRETARY FOR HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS

The OAS Secretary for Hemispheric Affairs, James Lambert, met the members of the delegation to explain the responsibilities of his secretariat within the organization and to discuss the delegation members' various views on the role of the OAS.

One of the functions of the Secretariat for Hemispheric Affairs is to support Member States through all phases of the Summit of the Americas process. Mr. Lambert sees the Summits as a tool with which to promote democratic values and human rights throughout the hemisphere. As an example, he recalled the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City in 2001, where Member States officially enshrined the organization's values by adopting the Inter-American Democratic Charter. Another responsibility of the Secretariat is to coordinate the actions of the inter-American institutions as a way to promote the ideas and initiatives that come from the Summits.

Mr. Lambert spoke about the next Summit of the Americas, to be held in Peru in 2018, whose main focus will be on the impact of corruption on democratic institutions. He said that one of the Summit's objectives could be the creation of an Inter-American Court against corruption. In fact, although the OAS already has the Inter-American Convention Against Corruption, the Odebrecht scandal has highlighted the increasingly transnational nature of corruption and its ability to reach the highest levels of government.

After the presentation by the Secretary for Hemispheric Affairs, delegates discussed a range of issues. One was the role of the OAS when countries undergo changes in their democratic order. Mr. Lambert reminded the delegates that Member States can turn to measures established in the Inter-American Democratic Charter and that they should try to work by consensus in seeking a solution in each case.

Robert Nault, MP, mentioned the lack of effectiveness for which the OAS is sometimes criticized. Mr. Lambert pointed out that, for a number of years, the OAS's budget has been limited, which has prevented the organization from modernizing. Any perception of a lack of effectiveness is probably because there is an emphasis on the differences within the OAS not on the cooperation projects it establishes. He gave as an example the work in promoting human rights in the region, such as the registration of children with no "civil identity" or the registration of former FARC combatants in Colombia. The organization is also working with NGOs to advance the rights of women in the hemisphere.

Finally, Mr. Lambert also stated that, even if the OAS exists mainly to serve the executives (the governments) in the hemisphere, more discussion should be held about a greater participation in the OAS by legislators because they are essential in passing legislation to meet the objectives agreed on by the Member States. Institutions like

ParlAmericas, which are established to promote parliamentary diplomacy, could encourage greater cooperation between the executive and legislative powers as a way to achieve those objectives.

MEETING WITH THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OAS

The delegation held a bilateral meeting with Luis Almagro, the Secretary General of the OAS, to discuss the current political challenges facing the region and the work in progress at the OAS. The Secretary General explained the important role of normative instruments like the Inter-American Democratic Charter and of bodies like the OAS's Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. He spoke about the way in which they help the organization to stand out from the other regional organizations that have emerged in the last decade, such as the Community of Latin-American and Caribbean States. He also mentioned the Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia (MAPP) and the Mission to Support the Fight against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (MACCIH) as illustrations of the valuable work done by the OAS in addressing complex problems in the region

The discussion then turned to the permanent dialogue between the Member States of the OAS about the situation in Venezuela and the organization's role in supporting a peaceful political solution. The delegates spoke about the important role that parliamentarians could play at a meeting like the General Assembly of the OAS. Robert Nault, MP, emphasized the important role of parliaments in the hemisphere's governance and legislation. As a former Minister of State with responsibility for the Americas, Peter Kent, MP, restated the importance of multilateralism, of the OAS, and of a possible collaboration with ParlAmericas. The participants agreed that it could be beneficial for the parliamentary branch to become more involved with the inter-American system. The Secretary General also expressed the desire for relations with ParlAmericas to become consolidated on a permanent basis.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE OAS – DAY TWO

On the morning of Wednesday, June 21, the delegation of parliamentarians attended the continuation of the OAS General Assembly session before taking part in the day's other meetings. Argentina raised the issue of the Falkland/Malvinas Islands by means of a resolution calling for the resumption of negotiations between the United Kingdom and Argentina on the sovereignty dispute over the islands. The Assembly also discussed other resolutions, including promoting hemispheric initiatives in integral development, the promotion and protection of human rights, and the strengthening of the OAS' agencies, organizations, entities, initiatives and mechanisms.

MEETING WITH THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OAS

In a desire to explore concrete avenues that would allow parliamentarians and ParlAmericas to participate more formally in the deliberations of the OAS, the delegation met with Nestor Mendez, the Assistant Secretary General of the OAS. The President of ParlAmericas, Senator Marcela Guerra, and other members of the delegation, discussed the benefits that the participation of parliamentarians could bring to the OAS.

Discussion therefore revolved around the experience of the parliamentarians of ParlAmericas in gender equality, climate change, and government transparency in

terms of their participation in the Association's networks that focus on those topics. That experience was presented as a helpful contribution that the legislators of ParlAmericas could make to the variety of discussions taking place at the OAS.

Members also indicated some ideas about the space that could be created for them. They suggested an alternate forum of parliamentarians or a dialogue session between the Member States of the OAS and parliamentarians, modelled on what already exists for civil society.

The Assistant Secretary General said that the OAS is prepared to collaborate at all levels, including with parliamentarians. However, he did provide some reminders about the organization. First and foremost, the OAS is a forum for State executives to discuss hemispheric issues. In addition, ParlAmericas is not the only association representing the region's legislators with which the OAS interacts. Finally, the OAS Secretariat is not in a position to create a formal space for legislators, because its mandate does not provide for it. Member States would have to agree to doing so themselves.

Mr. Mendez advised the members of ParlAmericas to establish a formal dialogue with the OAS in order to set the parameters of a relationship between the two organizations. In the meantime, he suggested contacting the foreign affairs ministries of countries hosting General Assemblies in order to discuss the possibility of organizing an event for parliamentarians on the margins in order to begin to forge ties. He also indicated that Member States could include parliamentarians in their delegations and allow them to make contact with members of the Assembly. He concluded by repeating that the OAS is ready to have discussions with ParlAmericas with a view to improving relations and capitalizing on the points they have in common.

MEETING WITH MEXICO'S SECRETARY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

For its final bilateral meeting, the delegation met with Luis Videgaray, Mexico's Secretary of Foreign Affairs. At the meeting, the Secretary reviewed the three days of the meeting. He expressed regret that, despite a majority of Member States having voted for the resolution on the crisis in Venezuela, the organization's rules of procedure meant that it had not been adopted as he wished. Nevertheless, the Secretary highlighted some successes, such as the Assembly's decision to double the budget of the two main organs of the Inter-American Human Rights System. He also pointed to the fact that the Assembly had been held openly, since civil society, business and parliamentarians had been able to take part.

Discussion followed between the delegates and the Minister. The delegates mostly repeated the importance of parliamentarians participating in OAS Assemblies in order to better understand the organization's priorities, to encourage dialogue with the executives, and to bring various political perspectives together. The members also recognized the Minister's work in chairing the 47th General Assembly of the OAS and congratulated the host country for the successful welcome.

At the end of the dialogue, it was agreed that the ParlAmericas delegation would formally ask the government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to guarantee the physical integrity and security of the members of the National Assembly of Venezuela who participated in the 47th Assembly of the OAS.

Respectfully submitted,

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

Chair

Canadian Section of ParlAmericas

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Section of ParlAmericas
ACTIVITY	47th Regular Session of the OAS General Assembly
DESTINATION	Cancun, Mexico
DATES	June 18 to 21, 2017
DELEGATION	
SENATE	
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Hon. Robert D. Nault, P.C., M.P. Hon. Peter Kent, P.C., M.P.
STAFF	Mr. David-Andrés Novoa
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 6,195.86
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 6,049.12
HOSPITALITY	\$ 0.00
PER DIEMS	\$ 472.11
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 0.00
MISCELLANEOUS	\$ 120.57
TOTAL	\$ 12,837.66