

Canadian Group
Inter-Parliamentary Union



Groupe canadien
Union interparlementaire

**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
respecting its participation at the
124th IPU Assembly and Related Meetings
Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
Panama City, Panama
April 15-20, 2011**

Report

1. Background¹

The IPU is the international organization of Parliaments of sovereign states. It was established in 1889. The Union is the focal point for world-wide parliamentary dialogue and works for peace and cooperation among peoples and for the firm establishment of representative democracy. To this end, it:

- Fosters contacts, co-ordination, and the exchange of experience among parliaments and parliamentarians of all countries;
- Considers questions of international interest and concern and expresses its views on such issues in order to bring about action by parliaments and parliamentarians;
- Contributes to the defence and promotion of human rights – an essential factor of parliamentary democracy and development; and
- Contributes to better knowledge of the working of representative institutions and to the strengthening and development of their means of action.

The IPU supports the efforts of the United Nations, whose objectives it shares, and works in close cooperation with it. It also cooperates with regional inter-parliamentary organizations, as well as with international intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations which are motivated by the same ideals.

At the close of the 124th Assembly 157 national parliaments were members of the IPU and nine regional parliamentary assemblies were associate members. Most members are affiliated to one of six geopolitical groups that are currently active in the IPU.

2. Agenda for the 124th IPU Assembly

The IPU Assembly is the principal statutory body that expresses the views of the Inter-Parliamentary Union on political issues. Twice a year it brings together parliamentarians to study international problems and make recommendations for action.

The agenda for the 124th IPU Assembly, which took place in Panama City, Panama between 15 and 20 April 2011, addressed the following items:

- General Debate: General debate on the political, economic and social situation in the world with the overall theme of *Parliamentary accountability: Living up to people's expectations*;

¹ Source for this section: <http://www.ipu.org/english/whatipu.htm>.

- First Standing Committee: Providing a sound legislative framework aimed at preventing electoral violence, improving election monitoring and ensuring the smooth transition of power;
- Second Standing Committee: The role of parliaments in ensuring sustainable development through the management of natural resources, agricultural production and demographic change;
- Third Standing Committee: Transparency and accountability in the funding of political parties and election campaigns; and
- Emergency Item: Strengthening democratic reform in emerging democracies, including in North Africa and the Middle East.

A detailed report on the 124th IPU Assembly and Related Meetings is available online.²

3. The Canadian Delegation

Delegations from the parliaments of 119 countries attended the 124th IPU Assembly. Of the 1,190 delegates who attended, 615 were members of national parliaments, of which 182 were women (29.6%) and five were Canadian parliamentarians. These included:

The Honourable Donald H. Oliver, Leader of the delegation
 The Honourable Sharon Carstairs, P.C., Senator
 The Honourable Salma Ataullahjan, Senator
 The Honourable Dennis Dawson, Senator
 The Honourable Suzanne Fortin-Duplessis, Senator

4. Interventions made by the Canadian Delegation during the 124th IPU Assembly

Canadian delegates participated in a variety of Assembly meetings and activities during the 124th IPU Assembly.³ Senator Oliver spoke during the Plenary Debate; Senator Ataullahjan attended meetings of the First Standing Committee; Senator Fortin-Duplessis attended meetings of the Second Committee; and Senator Dawson attended meetings of the Third Committee and served as a member of its Drafting Committee. In addition, all delegates attended sessions of the Plenary Debate and Senator Ataullahjan attended the daylong Meeting of Women Parliamentarians.

Delegates also participated in the following side events:

- Panel session on Recent political upheavals in the world: Lessons for democracy
- Panel session on Narrowing the gaps: Achieving the Millennium Development goals with equity for children

² See: <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/124/124.pdf>.

³ Resolutions adopted by the Standing Committees that met on the occasion of the 124th Assembly may be found at <http://www.ipu.org/strct-e/stcnfres.htm#124>.

- Open Forum on the Global Parliamentary Report: Parliaments and people, a changing relationship
- Panel discussion on Twentieth-century norms and twenty-first-century realities: Protecting the stateless, refugees and civilians today
- Round-table discussion on Parliamentarians taking the lead on maternal, newborn and child health
- Side event in Thirty years of HIV/AIDS: Where are parliaments?
- Side event on The role of parliaments in disaster risk reduction

Key interventions made by Canadian delegates during these Assembly activities were as follows:

- During the General Debate on the political, economic and social situation in the world, **Senator Oliver** focused on the overall theme of “Parliamentary accountability: Living up to people’s expectations.” He said:

... that he would be talking about the relationship between the Canadian Parliament, government and people. When his government was elected in 2006, its first new bill was the Accountability Act. As Chair of the Senatorial Committee on Constitutional Matters, he was asked to study the proposed legislation.

Canada had a bicameral legislature with an appointed Senate and an elected House of Commons. The government, therefore, had to maintain the confidence of the majority of members of parliament to remain in power. The House of Commons had the sole power to initiate and amend taxation and to introduce appropriation bills. After an election, the political party with the majority of seats was called on to form the government, but if no political party had a majority, then the party with the largest number of seats would form the government. The Senate consisted of 105 senators appointed by the Governor General and it represented Canada's regions, so seats were allocated in a way that provided a relatively even number across the provinces. Senators held office until they were 75 years of age, thereby providing legislative continuity. He had served as a senator for almost 21 years.

The Westminster parliamentary system worked best with strong and stable governments. It used the first-past-the-post system, which meant that a party could get more than 50 per cent of the seats with less than 50 per cent of the votes. The past three governments had been minority governments, which meant that accountability and transparency presented challenges. Representatives were answerable to their constituents. While decisions had to be reported, access to the information on which decisions were based was more difficult. There should be open and free debate about the merits of government action and what parliamentarians were doing. However, in a minority parliament, the political stakes involved in scrutiny of government and parliamentary decision-making were higher.

Canadian federal minority governments, rather than forming coalitions, approached each issue on an individual basis and looked for support from different parties. Such minority government was, however, unstable and led to brinkmanship and strategizing. The desire of parliament to meet the expectations of the public by being transparent and accountable had to be offset by the need to withhold certain information from the public – good government required openness but also secrecy. Government and parliamentarians had to find the right balance between transparency and the need for discretion. Often, decisions were left to the personal integrity of the member of parliament concerned.

Parliamentary committees performed a central role in ensuring efficiency, transparency and accountability and that role could be expanded if committees received increased funding and staffing. Reforms had been made to the Canadian Parliament's committee system and further reform, such as increasing available resources, could be undertaken to make committees more effective in holding the government to account and strengthening their duties as non-partisan repositories of information.

- During the Standing Committee debate on “Providing a sound legislative framework aimed at preventing electoral violence, improving election monitoring and ensuring the smooth transition of power,” **Senator Ataullahjan** said that planning and preparation were critical for maintaining a stable, functioning and viable electoral process. She added that Canada, in its international cooperation efforts, had focused on establishing a stable electoral framework between elections.

When the draft resolution was presented to the Assembly she requested that the words “international interference in internal electoral processes” be deleted from preambular paragraph 6. She also requested that the words “with due regard for the principle of sovereignty, national integrity and relevant national legislation,” be deleted from preambular paragraph 8, since that provision could be misused to impede the work of independent election observers. Although these requests were not accepted by the Plenary, the final version of the resolution notes Canada’s reservations on the inclusion of these words.

- During the Standing Committee debate on “The role of parliaments in ensuring sustainable development through the management of natural resources, agricultural production and demographic change,” **Senator Fortin-Duplessis** said:

... that Canada was in a good position to ensure sustainable development, owing to its management of natural resources and its agricultural production. Canada had vast natural resources, which it must protect and use for the benefit of the whole population. Canada had adopted a number of strategies, including a Federal strategy for sustainable development, which aimed to minimise the environmental impact of policies and optimize the efficient use of resources. The Federal and regional

governments had developed a strategic framework for agricultural production, which enabled solutions to be found to problems occurring in the agricultural sector, and which enabled Canada to contribute to global food supplies while maintaining respect for the environment.

- The Canadian International Development Agency had three main priority areas of action, one of which was to increase food security, by strengthening rural development policies, in particular those affecting small-scale farmers. The environment was a crosscutting theme, which was incorporated into all of the Development Agency's programmes. Canada also assessed all of its public aid for development programmes to ensure that they were environmentally friendly. The draft resolution emphasized the need to increase agricultural production to reduce poverty and meet environmental challenges. Distribution of food products and food trade at the regional and international levels should also be taken into consideration in the context of sustainable development strategies. Free trade at the international and regional levels was a means of ensuring global sustainable development, particularly since it enabled a better distribution of resources. The importance of open trade relations for improving the economy, supporting global agricultural production and improving access to food resources should be mentioned in the draft resolution.
- During the Standing Committee debate on "Transparency and accountability in the funding of political parties and election campaigns," **Senator Dawson** said:

... that Canada had been among the first to establish laws on political party financing some 40 years earlier. Controls on corporate donations to political parties had since been gradually introduced and political funding had been democratized by way of a per-vote subsidy, amounting to a few Canadian dollars, which was allocated to the voter's party of choice. The aim was to develop a level playing field in elections driven less by financial considerations than by ideas. Election spending was therefore capped, precluding situations such as in the United States, where presidential candidates now sought to raise sums as high as US\$ 1 billion to finance their election campaigns. As a result, they were more constantly involved in electioneering and fund-raising than in governing. Such issues should form part of the debate on the subject.

5. Participation by Canadian Delegates in Related Meetings and Activities

Concurrent with Standing Committee activities associated with the 124th IPU Assembly were the meetings of several related committees and working groups. This section identifies those meetings that were attended by Canadian delegates.

(a) The 260th Session of the IPU Executive Committee

The IPU's Executive Committee held its Meetings in Panama City on 12, 13, 14 and 19 April. **Senator Oliver**, who was elected to the Executive for a four year term in October 2010, participated in these meetings. The proceedings of the Executive Committee were devoted to discussing and making recommendations on agenda items to be addressed and ratified by the IPU's Governing Council. A summary of its decisions may be found online.⁴

(b) The 188th Session of the IPU Governing Council

The Governing Council is the plenary policy-making body of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Several committees and working groups are subordinated to it and report to the Council on their work. Meetings of the 188th Session of the IPU Governing Council were held on 16 and 20 April. All Canadian delegates attended at least one session of the Governing Council. A detailed report on the work and decisions of the Governing Council is available online.⁵

(c) The Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians

The IPU's Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, is comprised of five parliamentarians representing different regions of the world and is responsible for the treatment of such complaints. **Senator Carstairs** was elected to this committee in 2004. The Committee meets four times a year, including on the occasion of the IPU's statutory assemblies. It holds hearings and undertakes onsite missions. If it does not prove possible to reach a satisfactory settlement of a case during a first phase of confidential examination and communication with the authorities of the countries concerned, public reports and recommendations for specific measures are submitted by the Committee to the IPU's Governing Council.

The Committee met from 15 to 19 March. It examined a total of 374 cases in 39 countries and conducted 21 hearings with delegations from countries where it had cases pending. The Committee submitted to the Governing Council in 21 countries around the world affecting individuals from the following jurisdictions: Bangladesh, Belarus, Burundi, Cambodia, Colombia, Ecuador, Eritrea, Iraq, Lebanon, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Niger, Palestine/Israel, Philippines, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Turkey, Thailand, and Zimbabwe.⁶

(d) Geopolitical Group Meetings

Article 25 of the Statutes and Rules of the Inter-Parliamentary Union permits members of the IPU to form geopolitical groups. These groups play an important role in the functioning and activities of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

⁴ See: <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/124/124.pdf>.

⁵ See: <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/124/124.pdf>.

⁶ The resolutions of public cases adopted by this committee may be found at: <http://www.ipu.org/iss-e/hr-cases.htm>.

There are six geopolitical groups formally recognized by the IPU: the African Group (42 members), the Arab Group (17 members), the Asia-Pacific Group (26 members), the Eurasia Group (7 members), the Latin American Group (19 members) and the Twelve Plus Group (45 members). Each group decides on working methods that best suit its participation in the activities of the Union and informs the Secretariat of its composition, the names of its officers, and its rules of procedure.

Canada belongs to the Asia Pacific Group and the Twelve Plus Group. Since Canada belongs to more than one geopolitical group, it submits candidatures for vacant positions within the Union through the Twelve Plus Group.⁷

A meeting of the Asia-Pacific Group (APG) was held on 15 April. Agenda items considered included:

- Briefing by the Group's representatives on the work of the Executive Committee
- Report from the ASEAN+3 Group
- Emergency Item
- Vacancies to be filled
- Nominations to drafting committees
- Subject items for the 126th Assembly
- IPU Strategic Plan for 2010-2015
- Future meetings of the APG and its Working Group

Meetings of the Twelve Plus Group were held on 17-20 April. Agenda items considered included:

- Report on work of the Group's Steering Committee
- Report from Group representatives on the work of the Executive Committee and its subsidiary bodies
- Meetings of the Women Parliamentarians and the Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians
- Emergency item
- Reports and draft resolutions of Standing Committees
- Appointments to drafting committees
- Positions to be filled
- Panel discussions
- Matters relating to the Twelve Plus Group
- Schedule of Group meetings for the 125th Assembly (Berne, October 2011)

(e) Field visits organized by the IPU and UNICEF on child-related issues

On 7 April, 30 delegates, including Senator Ataullahjan, participated in one of two field visits on child-related issues organized in cooperation with UNICEF. One group visited Panama City's Santa Ana/Chorrillo area, a marginalized urban community near the newly regenerated Casco Viejo, or Old Town. A second group visited indigenous areas

⁷ Minutes of the meetings of the Asia Pacific Group and the Twelve Plus Group are available from the Canadian IPU Secretariat upon request.

in which nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) were equipping indigenous women with the skills they needed to make the transition to a more modern lifestyle.

At the close of the Assembly on 20 April, Senator Ataullahjan reported briefly on these visits. She expressed the emotion she had felt upon meeting such proud people, helping each other but in need of a boost. She said it was up to parliamentarians to define policies to improve life in the most vulnerable communities and to help children in difficulty. She also voiced her appreciation for the excellent cooperation between the IPU and UNICEF.⁸

6. Follow-up

Following each statutory IPU Assembly the Canadian IPU Group prepares this report, which is tabled in the House of Commons and the Senate. It also forwards relevant IPU reports and resolutions to parliamentary committees and government departments and sends letters to Ottawa-based diplomatic missions concerning the IPU's report and recommendations on the human rights violations of former or serving parliamentarians.

Respectfully submitted,

The Honourable Suzanne Fortin-Duplessis, Senator
Canadian Group of the IPU

⁸ See: <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/124/124.pdf>, page 22-23, for further details.

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
ACTIVITY	124 th IPU Assembly and Related Meetings
DESTINATION	Panama City, Panama
DATES	April 15-20, 2011
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Donald H. Oliver, Q.C. Hon. Sharon Carstairs, P.C. Hon. Salma Atallahjan Hon. Dennis Dawson Hon. Suzanne Fortin-Duplessis
HOUSE OF COMMONS	
STAFF	Mr. Serge Pelletier, Secretary to the Delegation Mr. Joseph Jackson, Advisor Mr. Frédéric Forge, Advisor
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 16,481.55
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 18,407.99
HOSPITALITY	\$ 283.02
PER DIEMS	\$ 5,058.66
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 702.75
MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES	\$ 140.71
TOTAL	\$ 41,074.68