

Canada - France
Interparliamentary Association



Association interparlementaire
Canada - France

Report of the Canadian group of the Canada-France inter-parliamentary association

**34th annual meeting
Paris and tours, France
September 11 to 16, 2006**

The delegation from the Canadian Group of the Canada-France Inter Parliamentary Association has the honour of presenting its report.

Report

Members of the Canadian Group visited Paris and Tours from 11 to 16 September 2006, for the 34th Annual Meeting of the Canada-France Inter Parliamentary Association. The Canadian and French delegations were composed of the following people:

Canadian delegation

From the Senate:

The Honourable Lise Bacon, Chair
The Honourable Jean-Claude Rivest, Vice-Chair
The Honourable Gérald J. Comeau
The Honourable Claudette Tardif

From the House of Commons:

Mr. Steven Blaney
Ms. Paule Brunelle
Mr. Mario Silva
Mr. Raymond Simard

Accompanying Staff:

Mr. Jean-François Pagé, Secretary of the Association
Ms. Marie-Ève Hudon, Analyst

French delegation

From the National Assembly:

Mr. Marc Laffineur, Chair
Mr. Georges Colombier
Mr. Bernard Derosier
Mr. Marc Le Fur
Mr. François Loncle
Mr. Didier Quentin

From the Senate:

Mr. Marcel-Pierre Cléach
Mr. Louis Duvernois
Mr. Claude Saunier

Accompanying Staff:

Mr. Jacques Bouvet de la Maisonneuve, Administrative Secretary
Mr. Matthieu Meissonnier, Administrative Secretary

Purposes

The purposes of the Canadian Branch of the Canada-France Inter Parliamentary Association are to foster exchanges between Canadian and French parliamentarians, to promote better mutual understanding of national and international problems, to develop cooperation between the two countries in the political, economic, social, cultural and parliamentary fields and, as required, to propose to the respective governments and Parliaments appropriate initiatives for strengthening relations between the two countries.

Working meetings

There were four topics on the agenda for the working meetings: youth and urban violence; methods of parliamentary oversight of government; the teaching of French throughout the world; and strategies in combating the risk of epidemics.

1. Youth and Urban Violence

The delegates held their first working meeting on Tuesday, 12 September 2006, at the National Assembly in Paris. At the opening of the session, the members of the French and Canadian delegations observed a minute of silence in memory of Benoît Sauvageau, the former Vice-Chair of the Canadian Group, who died as a result of an accident a few weeks before the 34th Annual Meeting.

For the discussions of youth and urban violence Bernard Derosier, Deputy, was the rapporteur for the French group. Steven Blaney, M.P., spoke on behalf of the Canadian group, and explained the prevention mechanisms that are available and the penalties that exist in Canada for addressing this problem.

Mr. Blaney began his presentation by referring to the crimes that occurred in Toronto in December 2005, when a 15-year-old girl was killed by gunfire exchanged by young people presumed to be members of street gangs. He then offered a brief overview of legislative measures enacted by the Canadian government to respond to violence committed by young people.

Over the years, the Canadian government has used a continuum of interventions to deal with youth and violence. It has implemented measures that are based on prevention, enforcement and an emphasis on rehabilitating young people in the community. The aim of the very first Juvenile Delinquents Act, enacted in 1908, was to ensure that minors were not treated as having criminal responsibility. The Young Offenders Act, which came into force in 1984 and was subsequently amended on three occasions, created a more detailed and explicit code governing criminal procedure as it applied to young people. In 2003, the government enacted the Youth Criminal Justice System Act, which has the advantage of providing guidelines regarding the types of extrajudicial measures, how they are to be applied, and the objectives for which they are used.

Recently, the federal government undertook to strengthen the justice system and support crime prevention initiatives. The measures proposed are designed to assist in rehabilitation, support the activities of the police and strengthen existing laws. Their

objective is to deter young people and adults from committing criminal offences (in particular crimes committed with firearms) and to create safer communities.

Official statistics tell us that the rate of young people charged with violent offences has fallen in recent years. Despite those figures, the public continues to feel insecure, particularly in large urban centres. It is worth noting that the number of young people who have received a warning, a caution or a referral to a program in the community, or some other extrajudicial measure, has risen substantially since the Youth Criminal Justice Act came into force in 2003. On the other hand, it has been observed that it is mainly men and people from ethnic backgrounds, disadvantaged backgrounds or violent family situations who belong to youth gangs.

Mr. Blaney observed that the methods adopted for combating crime call for action to be taken by several levels of government. Different approaches must be taken to fit the context in each province and territory. As well, it seems that Aboriginal communities suffer more from crimes of violence, particularly in urban settings. The government must therefore opt for approaches that target those communities in particular.

Mr. Derosier also reported feelings of insecurity on the part of the French public. The economic hard times that France has been experiencing has exacerbated those feelings. The problem of youth and urban violence has been widely debated in the French political arena, and has been widely covered in the media for several months.

While insecurity is not a new problem, it is expressed in a new form today: urban violence. The adverse effects of this type of violence are exacerbated by the fact that there are growing numbers of people in cities and that it is young people committing these crimes. We are seeing new forms of juvenile delinquency. They involve minors who are resistant to recognizing authority, gangs, neighbourhoods or young people who are having trouble accepting the difficult economic circumstances in which they are living. Acts of violence occur in a number of places: in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, in the outlying urban areas, in the schools, on mass transit, in shopping centres and in sports and cultural facilities.

The Order of 2 February 1945 respecting minors laid the base of the model for dealing with young offenders. It has two main elements: punishment and prevention. In general, it is meant to be oriented more toward education than enforcement. There is no unanimous agreement today on the principles on which it is based. Some people are calling for more prevention, others for more punishment.

A bill respecting the prevention of delinquency has recently been introduced in the Senate, seeking to better prevent acts of violence in urban areas. The main focus of the policy is minors, and it is based on a central pillar: education. Its aim is to mobilize all actors who deal with children: the education community, the medical and paramedical community, the volunteer community and the judicial community. Mayors of communes have been identified as at the centre of this prevention policy. The policy addresses four underlying themes: [TRANSLATION] "identifying and supporting fragile families, the need for safety in housing and urban development, providing services to individuals with dangerous mental illnesses and methods of punishing and providing treatment for drug users." (1)

The Minister of the Interior has developed an indicator of urban violence. In 2005, several hundred thousand acts of urban violence were recorded. Mr. Derosier stressed the need for caution, however, in considering those figures, because they include the most minor incidents, ranging from trash can fires to homicides. As well, the involvement of educational institutions in collecting these data was a factor in the large number of incidents recorded.

The phenomenon of youth and urban violence continues to be extremely difficult to identify and deal with. It must be recalled that not all victims of acts of violence file complaints. As well, decentralization of power creates a particular dynamic in addressing delinquency in France: the central government is in charge of the justice system and the departments are responsible for youth.

In the discussions that followed, the delegates agreed that the answer to the problem of youth and urban violence may vary over time, from one country to another and depending on the government in office. Media and public pressure often mean that parliamentarians have to make hard decisions in this regard. The public expects governments to take action against crime. The trend in recent years is for the authorities to take an interest in finding a balance between prevention and punishment.

A number of delegates spoke in favour of adopting extrajudicial measures (e.g.: mandatory community service, support for community economic development, support for community organizations, joint efforts with the educational community). They stressed the importance of finding solutions that are appropriate to the particular problems experienced by Aboriginal populations, in Canada, and populations of Maghreb origin, in France. They concluded the discussion by recalling that it is essential to explore all aspects of the problem before proposing definitive solutions.

2. Methods of Parliamentary Oversight of Government

The second working meeting was held on 12 September 2006, at the National Assembly in Paris. The purpose of that meeting was to discuss methods of parliamentary oversight of government. Georges Colombier, Deputy, presented the views of the French group, and Senator Jean-Claude Rivest spoke on behalf of the Canadian group.

Mr. Colombier opened his presentation by saying that Canada and France had a lot to learn from their mutual experience in respect of the methods of parliamentary oversight of government. He noted that the French National Assembly has played a dominant role on two occasions in history: during the French Revolution and under the Fourth Republic. The concentration of power in the hands of the legislative branch was seen as being excessive, however. The Constitution of the Fifth Republic, which has been in force since 1958, provides a better balance between the executive and legislative branches.

Since the Fifth Republic was established, there have been debates and proposals to amend the Constitution to expand Parliament's control over government. It must be noted, however, that the present Constitution, and the broad principles it embodies, have not been questioned.

Under the existing rules, the government is assured of a stable majority for five years. It is in control of the agenda and can be defeated only in certain circumstances. Elected representatives, whether deputies or senators, are regarded by the public as having no power. Although the rules in effect allow elected representatives to introduce bills, such bills rarely pass. On occasion, the government may adopt the position taken in a bill presented by a deputy or senator. Generally speaking, the public regards power as being concentrated in the hands of the government alone.

Mr. Colombier wondered who should have the power to initiate action and legislation. His presentation sought to show that all parliamentarians, whether they be members of the majority, the opposition or minority parties, have ways of exercising oversight over the government's actions.

The majority can use political practice and existing mechanisms for joint action to provide parliamentarians with greater freedom of expression. It can do this in parliamentary committees, which have the power to submit reports and make recommendations to the government. The opposition's mission is to criticize existing policy and propose alternative policy. It can exercise a virtually unlimited right to speak and to amend. (2) Some people believe that the opposition must be given more powers. Others think that more prerogatives must be accorded to parliamentary minorities. A number of people believe that enacting new legislation or making new regulations is the only possible solution if legislators are to be given back some genuine power of oversight of government action.

Mr. Colombier concluded his presentation by saying that cooperation among all parties is still possible today, if not in fact necessary, in France. In his view, the role of the legislative branch is not to compete with the executive branch. He said that enacting new legislation or making new regulations is not a viable solution. All parliamentarians, regardless of political allegiance, must fully play the part assigned to them by the Constitution and act by consensus. He also noted the important role played by the Conseil constitutionnel, an independent constitutional council that has the power to rule on the constitutionality of legislation and regulations.

Senator Rivest said that the Canadian situation was very similar to the situation in France. Canadian parliamentarians have a duty to participate in government by fully exploiting the methods of oversight available to them under the Constitution. The Canadian public, too, takes a very dim view of the lack of power given to members of Parliament and senators, who must therefore raise the public's awareness of their roles and of the mechanisms available to them for overseeing the machinery of government.

Canadian parliamentarians act as spokespersons for the public on a daily basis. They provide the best way of maintaining contact between the public and government authorities. Like their French counterparts, members of the opposition have excellent opportunities, within Parliament itself, for judging the actions of the government (e.g.: question period, debates, the work done in parliamentary committees, introducing private members' bills). The members of the majority in Parliament can develop excellent working relationships with ministers and deputy ministers, because they are all members of the same party.

Parliamentarians also have methods outside Parliament that can be used for criticizing government decisions. Some agencies in the public service have very specific powers in this regard. Treasury Board authorizes all budgets voted by Parliament. The Office of the Auditor General (OAG) of Canada provides parliamentarians with expert opinions they can use to judge the management practices of the government. There is a similar audit mechanism in each province.

The OAG oversees the government's activities in three ways: financial audits, special examinations of Crown corporations and performance audits. Each year, it does some thirty performance audits of federal departments and agencies. In recent years, the OAG has played an important role in the sponsorship scandal episode and in relation to a number of other important issues relating to the management of public funds. It has acquired an excellent reputation with both parliamentarians and the public, who expect that government funds will be properly managed.

In the discussion that followed these two presentations, a number of characteristics unique to the two countries were identified. First, question period (3) is a good way of exercising oversight of government actions. Growing media coverage of this event has had some negative consequences, however: in both countries, the public exhibits a lack of interest in politics. The members of the Canadian and French delegations agreed that there must be a better understanding of the work done by parliamentarians outside question period (e.g.: debates, parliamentary committees, private members' bills).

The delegations of both countries agreed that power is largely concentrated in the hands of the Prime Minister. People associated with the Prime Minister (chiefs of staff and other people) have enormous influence over decisions made by the government, even though they have never been elected. Any measure that goes against the Prime Minister's wishes has little chance of success. This is one reason for the little interest observed, in both France and Canada, in private members' bills.

The discussion also highlighted certain characteristics where there are differences between the two countries. Members of the Canadian group explained that parliamentarians have encountered particular challenges in their work in recent years in the two instances in which there has been a minority government. This encourages parliamentarians to get more involved in negotiating, because the government can fall as a result of a simple confidence vote. Parliamentarians have the feeling that they are constantly on the campaign trail. All of the policies that are debated, speeches given and decisions made are under public scrutiny. The duty to represent the interests of constituents on a daily basis is therefore heightened for all parliamentarians.

In France, elections are held on fixed dates, as a rule. This somewhat limits opportunities to defeat the government. Deputies can vote in favour of an amendment even if the government or parliamentary commission has voted against it. The government then approaches the Senate to try to influence the senators' decision. The President of the Republic sometimes also approaches parliamentarians directly to seek their votes in support of the government.

It is also worth noting that in the French Senate, current question sessions are televised, which is not the case in the Canadian Senate. This helps to make the work done by senators in France more visible, as compared to Canada.

3. Teaching of French throughout the World

The third working meeting took place on Wednesday, 13 September 2006, at the Institut d'études françaises de Touraine in Tours. The objective of that working meeting was to prepare a situation report and discuss the prospects that each country sees for promoting the teaching of French. Senator Claudette Tardif was the rapporteur for the Canadian group and Senator Louis Duvernois filled that role for the French group.

Senator Duvernois opened the meeting by describing how France has created a number of institutions to promote the teaching of French abroad (e.g.: Alliance française, Institut de langue française, Centre culturel français, Agence pour l'enseignement du français à l'étranger, Mission laïque française). Today, France has over 430 educational institutions abroad and more than 1,000 associations throughout the world that are connected with the Alliance française network.

In discussing the subject of teaching French throughout the world, two important characteristics of the French language must be kept in mind: French as a language of communication and as a language of cultural expression.

In terms of communication, French is too often regarded as a language in decline. While French does not enjoy the full recognition it deserves in international institutions, particularly as a language of work, when we consider the statistics we see that French is not in such bad shape on the international scene. The number of French speakers today is greater than it was when the French language was the language of the European elites. French is still a universal language.

In terms of culture, French is very much a language of identity. Learning the language makes it possible to combat the dominance of English and of the United States. France is a subject of considerable interest among foreigners, for whom it is the leading destination in world tourism. French is a demanding language that can be difficult to learn. Mastering the language is a source of a certain pride among those who speak it. Senator Duvernois believes that France has not yet become fully aware of the threat to its language from the spread of English. Unlike Canada, there is little discussion in France about the future of the French language.

Senator Duvernois believes that France's language policy is too focused on institutions and has its limitations. France devotes considerable amounts of money to building schools and sending teachers abroad, but investments in academic infrastructure is not sufficient. The French must learn to work with others, as part of networks. They have to use existing mechanisms such as the Fédération internationale des professeurs de français. They must draw on the example of the Alliance française, which has succeeded in incorporating flexible learning methods and which draws on the expertise and knowledge of local people. They must put more effort into increasing the presence of French in workplaces.

Senator Duvernois concluded his presentation by saying that France has to change its methods if it is to support the learning of French world-wide. It must set the example and engage in activism for French, while remaining aware of the plural and multicultural nature of the world around it. It must become more aware of the imminent threat to its language. It must defend that language and work to define a new language policy.

Senator Tardif's presentation focused on the teaching of French in Canada. She first noted that French and English are the two official languages of Canada. The number of Francophones has grown steadily over the years, but as a proportion of the population they have declined. In 2001, there were 6.78 million Francophones in Canada, nearly a million of whom were outside Quebec. There are Francophones in every province, and they make up 23% of the Canadian population.

The number of people who have a knowledge of French has grown in recent years. The popularity of second language programs (core French and immersion) has contributed to that growth. There has also been a greater commitment on the part of Anglophone parents to having their children learn French. A recent study showed that a large majority of Canadians (72%) favours bilingualism and (77%) believes that more resources should be made available for minority schools to guarantee the same quality of instruction as is provided for the majority. (4)

Education falls under the jurisdiction of the provinces and territories, under the Constitution. There are a number of legislative and legal instruments that the federal government has used in order to exercise influence in this area. The Official Languages Act made Canada officially bilingual and helped to make the English-speaking public aware of the importance of learning French. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms represented a turning point in the education of speakers of French as a first language: it entrenched the right of Francophone minorities to receive an education in their language. A program established by the federal government in the early 1970s provides for the additional costs incurred by the provinces and territories for instruction in the language of the minority, and instruction in the second language, to be covered. In a five-year plan published in 2003, the federal government identified education as a priority to give new momentum to Canada's linguistic duality.

There are great variations in how French is taught from province to province. In Quebec, the Charter of the French Language has made French the official language of instruction. There are foreign students who come to study at universities and language schools in Quebec and receive government grants for that purpose.

In other provinces, instruction in French as a second language is compulsory, in others it is optional. There are essentially two ways in which this is done: immersion programs and core French programs. In immersion programs, French is the language of instruction in a number of subjects. Enrolment in these programs has risen steadily in recent years, with nearly 300,000 students now enrolled in them. In core French programs, a certain number of hours is devoted to learning French, and over 2 million students are enrolled in those programs. There are a number of challenges in teaching French as a second language: recruiting and retaining students, hiring enough qualified teachers, guaranteeing that a similar level of acquisition and retention of language skills is achieved for all students, and so on. Senator Tardif believes that instruction in French as a second language must be made compulsory in all provinces and territories.

Instruction in French as a first language is regarded as a means of preventing the assimilation of Francophone and Acadian minority communities. Today, there are 674 Francophone schools in minority communities. They also face a number of challenges: recruiting and retaining students, providing high quality programs, recruiting immigrants,

and so on. Senator Tardif believes that Francophone schools have an important role to play in promoting instruction in French, whether among Francophone parents or among immigrants, who sometimes choose to send their children to immersion schools rather than Francophone schools. It is important to stress the fact that minority schools provide a place not only for learning the language, but also for developing a feeling of belonging to the community.

Senator Tardif concluded her presentation by stressing the role that the federal government should play in supporting linguistic duality throughout Canada. There are several solutions to be considered in order to raise enrolment in educational programs in the minority language and instruction in the second language. The recent openness demonstrated by the government of Quebec to the Francophone and Acadian communities has been well received by those communities. The present government intends to restore Quebec to a central position in French-speaking Canada.

There were several comments made about the content of these two presentations. The French delegates argued that one of the major challenges associated with teaching French is the difficulty of learning the language. France has a big job of promotion to do if its language is to achieve genuinely universal status. French must no longer be associated only with elite groups or a few specific institutions. Actors in all fields of activity (political, economic, scientific, literary, etc.) must encourage the preservation and proliferation of French at the international level with pride.

The Canadian delegates stressed the fact that minority Francophone and Acadian communities face a daily struggle to live in French. It is impossible to take French for granted when one lives in a minority situation. Those communities face special challenges: a crying need for francization, (5) to recruit students from exogamous families, (6) to integrate students into the Francophone school system from early childhood to the post secondary level, and so on.

The support of the Anglophone majority for learning French as a second language is a major asset. More and more students who come out of immersion programs are today finding that they have greater access to university programs in French. The French delegates in fact said that they were impressed by the increasingly solid support for the French fact among Anglophones in Canada.

The Canadian delegates wondered about the role that Quebec should play in relation to Francophone and Acadian minority communities. For a long time, Quebec limited its battle for the French fact to what happened inside its own borders. Its recent positioning as the centre of French-speaking Canada has prompted both apprehension and hope. Quebec today feels that it has a responsibility to promote and defend the French language, and has a lot to learn from the daily battles waged in minority communities.

Everyone did agree that all Francophones have a duty to speak French and stand up for the French-speaking world at all times. The major victories for French on the world scene will be won through small victories at the local level.

4. Strategies for Combating the Risk of Epidemics

The fourth and final working meeting, dealing with strategies for combating the risk of epidemics, took place at the Grand Hôtel in Tours on Wednesday, 13 September 2006.

Senator Claude Saunier acted as rapporteur for the French group. Mario Silva, M.P., reported for the Canadian group on strategies that have been implemented by Canada in the battle against new pandemics.

Mr. Silva began the discussion by reviewing the events of the spring of 2003, when Toronto was struck by severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). At that time, the city suffered from widespread fear, uncertainty and suffering, and hit with major economic hardship. The event had a direct impact on the delivery of basic health care to the public and led to public health approaches being updated in Canada and elsewhere in the world.

When public health problems like this arise, we have to keep in mind how responsibilities are divided among different levels of government. The provinces and territories are responsible for delivering health care services. The federal government's role is essentially one of influence: it sets national standards for provincial health insurance plans, makes regulations, and so on.

Mr. Silva believes that in order to deal with an epidemic, whether potential or actual, there clearly be a more concerted strategy developed that can be implemented by provinces and municipalities. Diseases and viruses are no respecters of borders. When the SARS crisis was over, the various levels of government acknowledged the need to prepare a more coordinated approach to deal with public health threats. They set about modernizing public health services and the relevant regulations.

This led to the creation of the Public Health Agency of Canada in 2004. The role of the Agency is to coordinate federal, provincial and territorial approaches to public health. In 2005, the Parliament of Canada updated the Quarantine Act to enhance Canada's capacity to detect public health risks associated with air traffic. The previous Act dated from 1872 and was directed primarily at marine transportation. To accommodate the pandemic plan prepared by the World Health Organization, Canada will shortly be adopting new guidelines to improve surveillance in connection with potential epidemics and its capacity to deal with them.

The Government of Canada has also taken steps to combat new threats, in particular the avian flu virus. The threat presented by that virus, if it becomes capable of human to human transmission, is enormous. To prepare for that possibility, Canada has entered into contracts with suppliers of vaccines, to protect Canadians in the event of a pandemic, and has also committed to funding the development of a vaccine prototype, a measure that would expedite the production of such a vaccine were it to become necessary.

In conclusion, Mr. Silva noted that national solutions are needed to address crises like SARS. Public health is not the business of the provinces alone. Canada, like all other countries, must be more vigilant than ever, given the threats that loom. Canada learned a lot from the 2003 SARS crisis and has taken action accordingly.

Senator Saunier continued the discussion, focusing his presentation on food safety, which is a growing concern in societies like France and Canada. In recent years, France has had to face a number of health crises: SARS, contaminated blood, mad cow disease, heat waves, avian flu and many more.

Senator Saunier said that there have been major improvements in food safety in recent decades. The industrialization of the food supply is largely important for those improvements, because it calls for a higher degree of safety and quality. There has also been a growing awareness on the part of the authorities about the importance of legislating, monitoring and regulating this problem.

In France, food safety is subject to central jurisdiction. The central government is responsible for customs, which controls the movement of goods. It is in charge of the Direction de la concurrence, de la consommation et de la répression des fraudes [competition, consumer affairs and fraud enforcement branch], which oversees the nature and quality of food products. The government imposes rules on industry, and businesses themselves regard those norms as a standard of quality for their operations. There is therefore no conflict between the public authorities and the private sector: the government impose rules that protect industry.

France has created various health agencies, which are separate from and independent of the government. Each agency specialises in a particular field (e.g.: food, health products, environment, nuclear safety). The creation of these agencies coincided with the construction of Europe and the creation of the European Food Safety Authority. Generally speaking, their track record has been good.

However, Senator Saunier pointed to several problems associated with the creation of these agencies. First, there is some jurisdictional overlap between agencies, and this can lead to conflict when important decisions are to be made. Second, there is tension between the newly created agencies and the existing government ministries, which have had their former prerogatives taken away. Those conflicts call for ongoing monitoring and vigilance in relation to the work that is done.

One of the major challenges facing France is the assistance that it is having to provide to other European Union countries. Because not all those countries are at the same stage in terms of food safety, France has to help them define food safety standards and implement tools they can use to raise the quality of their food industries. Another challenge comes from the porous nature of European borders, which is a potential source of danger in terms of food safety.

Senator Saunier concluded his presentation on strategies for combating the risk of epidemics by stressing the importance of biological threats. Diseases and viruses no longer respect biological borders: they can now be transmitted from one species to another. The density of human and animal populations, and population transfers throughout the world, have multiplied the risk of pandemics.

In the discussions that followed these presentations, delegates remarked on the growing media coverage of problems associated with food safety and the risk of epidemics. The work done by the media can have positive effects by putting pressure on governments to act. However, information is not always transmitted to the public clearly and reliably. In a crisis, politicians have to answer questions from the media and explain what the issues are, when quite often they have neither sufficient knowledge nor sufficient expertise to do that. Identifying a resource person whose job it would be to disseminate clear and reliable information to the public is something to consider. In non-

crisis situations, the media could provide information about the work of prevention being done by agencies, laboratories and other actors in the area of health security.

A French delegate also pointed out that the risk of human to human transmission is not yet present for avian flu. Governments are merely informing the public of the possible risk and adopting plans that can be used if they need to react in the event of a pandemic. It is important to take action, to consider the potential risks and to mobilize the public to deal with them, but without providing excessive fuel for the fire of unfounded fears.

The Canadian delegates reiterated the importance to Canada of properly coordinating actions taken by all actors involved in public health: the federal government, the provinces, public health authorities, hospitals and specialists. It is important for all of them to be familiar with and to meet their responsibilities so that they can respond appropriately in the event of a crisis.

Meetings, visits and official receptions

The French Government had convened a special session of the National Assembly in September 2006, and so only a few members of the French delegation were able to participate, sporadically, in the activities organized for the 34th Annual Meeting. During their stay in France, parliamentarians had an opportunity to visit several sites of interest and to meet well-known personages on the French political scene, including Ms. Brigitte Girardin, Minister Delegate for Cooperation, Development and la Francophonie.

On Monday, 11 September, the members of the Canadian delegation, accompanied by a member of the French delegation, began their day with a visit to the head office of Dassault Aviation, a major world player in the aeronautics industry. Mr. Jean François Barth explained the major characteristics of the company: a family-controlled operation with a presence in 70 countries, which is involved in both civil aviation (airline and business aircraft) and military aviation. The aeronautics industry has experienced major crises world-wide, and on the anniversary of the events of 11 September 2001, the delegates took a great interest in their discussions with Mr. Barth about the goals and aims of the company. The delegates then attended a live demonstration of CATIA technology, a computer tool used throughout the industry, including by the leading aeronautics and automobile manufacturers. It makes it possible to simulate all phases of production, from design to analysis, assembly and maintenance. At the luncheon provided on Dassault Aviation's private boat the delegates had an opportunity to continue the discussions about the company and other related matters.

The delegates began the afternoon of 11 September by a meeting with Ms. Brigitte Girardin, Minister Delegate for Cooperation, Development and la Francophonie. The Minister noted that la Francophonie is a political force that France and Canada should put to use. It provides an invaluable tool for defending French and promoting cultural diversity. The Minister argued for admitting Ghana as a full member (and not merely an observer) of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie. She said that she was concerned about Canada's reluctance on that point. The delegates also reminded the Minister that it is important for France, in its relations with Canada, to engage in dialogue not only with Quebec, but with all of the Francophone and Acadian communities throughout Canada. The delegates also stressed the importance of

preserving cooperation agreements between France and Canada, to promote exchange visits by young people to work in the other country. The Minister also observed that there could be greater cooperation between the two countries in the area of the teaching of French.

The delegates then visited the home offices of the Alliance française and met with Mr. Alain Marquer, Director of International Relations, and Mr. Jean-Claude Jacq, Secretary General. They had an opportunity to learn more about this network of some 1,075 associations in 130 countries, and about its characteristics and current developments. As was noted at the working meeting on teaching French throughout the world, Mr. Marquer wished to point out that one of the major strengths of the Alliance française is that it draws support for its teaching methods from the expertise and knowledge of local people. The Canadian delegates were very interested to learn of the achievements of members of the network in Canada and their openness to the Francophone and Acadian communities.

Following that meeting there was a visit to the Agence pour l'enseignement français à l'étranger (AEFE). The assistant director, Ms. Jocelyne Collet-Sassère, gave an overview of the organization and of its mission and network of institutions abroad. While the primary aim of AEFE is to offer a public service by providing education for French young people abroad, it also contributes to propagating French language and culture by providing services for students in the host country. Canada has seven AEFE institutions with an enrolment of 6,500 students, only 30% of whom are of French origin. Some provincial governments, including Quebec and Alberta, support the development of these institutions within their provinces.

That evening, the Canadian delegates, accompanied by three French delegates, attended a dinner hosted by Mr. Claude Laverdure, Ambassador of Canada in France, at his residence in Faubourg Saint-Honoré, in Paris. Mr. Laverdure reiterated the importance of France and Canada maintaining their bonds of friendship and recognized the need to establish groups like the Canada-France Inter-Parliamentary Association to promote mutual understanding and respect for the other's views. The delegation was joined by Ms. Sandelle Scrimshaw, Minister Plenipotentiary, and Mr. Richard Hêtu, Minister-Counsellor.

On Tuesday, 12 September, the delegates paid a short visit to the National Assembly after the working meetings. They attended a luncheon at the Senate, met briefly with Mr. Christian Poncelet, Speaker of the Senate, and were given a guided tour of the Palais du Luxembourg. They then set off for Tours.

On Wednesday, 13 September, the Canadian delegates, accompanied by three French delegates, met with Mr. Christophe Tissot, Director of the Institut d'études françaises de Touraine. That location, which serves some 2,500 students with 90 different nationalities, was perfectly designed for holding the working meeting on the teaching of French throughout the world. The delegates then visited the site of the Communauté d'agglomération de Tours and the community council chamber. They met with Ms. Valérie Secheret, Director of Economic Development, who explained the city's broad economic development focuses and talked about the challenges associated with urban

development in France. The assistant to the Mayor, Mr. Alain Goudreau, joined the delegation for an outdoor luncheon at the Parc de la Gloriette.

In the afternoon, the delegates visited the facilities of the Laboratoire de Touraine, where they were guided by Mr. José Delaval, the Assistant Director General. The laboratory has been identified as one of the six French laboratories responsible for detecting avian flu. It is also responsible for doing chemical, microbiological and environmental analyses for the Department as a whole. Because the strategies deployed for managing health crises was one of the key themes of the 34th Annual Meeting, this visit was of particular interest. That evening, the delegates attended a cocktail party at the seat of the Department government, hosted by the general council of Indre and Loire. Representatives of the general council, the Communauté d'agglomération and the Université de Tours joined the delegation for that event.

On Thursday, 14 September, the delegates travelled to the Chinon nuclear station for a guided tour led by Mr. André Laurent, mission head for Sustainable Development and Communications. Nuclear energy accounts for 17% of global production, 32% of European Union production and 80% of production in France. It is worth noting that hydraulic energy accounts for only 15% of production in France, while it accounts for nearly two thirds of the electricity produced in Canada. The Canadian delegates had an opportunity to learn more about the facts and challenges associated with nuclear energy. They were particularly interested in this event in view of the major political debates taking place in France about energy. Five representatives of the nuclear station joined the delegation for a luncheon.

In the afternoon, the delegates were given a private tour of the Château de Chambord. The château was built by François I and is one of the jewels of French history. It is surrounded by hunting grounds where several species of deer live alongside wild boars. The delegates enjoyed a moment of wonderful serenity as they listened to the bugling deer in the woods. They then had the honour of dining with several representatives of the hunting reserve on the site of the château itself.

On Friday, 15 September, the Canadian delegates visited two other Loire Valley Castles: Chenonceaux and Azay-le-Rideau. The delegates also travelled to Cravant-les-Côteaux to visit Domaine Beaudry, a vineyard specializing in production of "Chinon" appellation contrôlée wines. They then proceeded to a tasting of five products, which they enjoyed immensely. Saturday, 16 September, was taken up by the return trip to Paris. The Canadian delegates met for one last lunch at the bar in the Hôtel Lutetia in Paris.

Conclusion

The topics addressed at the 34th Annual Meeting provided a forum for discussing various aspects of problems currently affecting both Canada and France and to identify opportunities for joint examination and action in those areas. Year after year, these working meetings and official meetings and visits prove to be excellent places for dialogue, for learning and for strengthening the bonds of friendship between Canadian and French parliamentarians.

A summary of the expenses for the 34th Annual Meeting is set out in the attached appendix.

Respectfully submitted,

The Honourable Lise Bacon, Senator
Canadian Branch of the Canada-France
Inter-Parliamentary Association

End notes

- (1) Senate Internet site, section entitled "Projet de loi relatif à la prévention de la délinquance," <http://www.senat.fr/dossierleg/pjl05-433.html>.
- (2) During the present debate of the bill respecting energy, which seeks to privatize Gaz de France and merge it with Suez, 137,449 amendments were introduced by opposition parties. This situation tends to show the potential excesses in the mechanisms available to the opposition. Following an extraordinary session that was convened, some delegates in the Canada-France Inter Parliamentary Association were in fact detained in the National Assembly, during the 34th Annual Meeting, to debate amendments in connection with that bill.
- (3) In France, "questions d'actualité."
- (4) Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, The Evolution of Public Opinion on Official Languages in Canada, Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, September 2006.
- (5) That is: learning French by adults and children who have never learned it or who have lost the use of the language.
- (6) That is: families where only one of the two parents has French as his or her mother tongue.

Travel Costs

NAME OF ASSOCIATION	Canada-France Inter-Parliamentary Association
ACTIVITY	34th Annual Meeting
DESTINATION	Paris and Tours, France
DATES	September 11 to 16, 2006
NAMES OF SENATORS	Hon. Lise Bacon, Chair, Hon. Jean-Claude Rivest, Vice-Chair, Hon. Gérald J. Comeau, Hon. Claudette Tardif
NAMES OF MEMBERS	Mr. Steven Blaney, Ms. Paule Brunelle, Mr. Mario Silva, Mr. Raymond Simard
NAMES OF STAFF	Mr. Jean-François Pagé, Secretary of the Association, Ms. Marie-Ève Hudon, Analyst
TRANSPORTATION	AIR TRANSPORTATION \$22 401.62 GROUND TRANSPORTATION \$308.70
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 399.93
HOSPITALITY	\$ 1 426.88
PER DIEMS	\$ 2 764.68
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 1 487.05
MISCELLANEOUS/REGISTRATION FEES	\$ 177.14
TOTAL	\$ 28 966.00