



**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
to the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Network of
Women Parliamentarians of the *Assemblée parlementaire de
la Francophonie* (APF)**

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

**Brussels, Belgium
February 19-20, 2008**

Report

The parliamentary delegation of the Canadian Branch that participated in the meeting of the Steering Committee of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the *Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie* (APF) held in Brussels, Belgium, on February 19 and 20, 2008, has the honour to present its report. Composed of the Honourable Rose-Marie Losier-Cool, Senator and Chair of the Network, the delegation was accompanied by Mr. Jean Michel Roy, Executive Secretary of the Branch.

The following Branches were represented: Belgium/French community of Wallonia-Brussels, Benin, Cameroon, Canada, France, Gabon, Macedonia, Québec, Togo, and Tunisia.

Tuesday, February 19, 2008

The work of the Steering Committee of the Network of Women Parliamentarians began on Tuesday, February 19, chaired by Senator Losier-Cool.

Communication from the Chair of the Network

After thanking the French community of Belgium Branch, particularly the first Vice-Chair of the Network, Françoise Bertieaux, for inviting and welcoming the participants, Senator Losier-Cool, Chair of the Network, briefly summarized the Network's two activities since its annual meeting in Libreville in July 2007.

During the America Region Mission in Haiti from November 5 to 8, in which Senator Losier-Cool participated as a Canadian parliamentarian and as Chair of the Network, the Senator organized a meeting with Haitian women parliamentarians. The purpose of the meeting was to remind them of the existence and importance of the Network, and to explain its three priorities as determined in Libreville: children's rights, the implementation of the United Nations *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW), and human trafficking. This was the Senator's second meeting with Haitian women parliamentarians: she had chaired CEDAW seminar that the Network held in Port-au-Prince in May 2007. This second meeting provided an opportunity to promote a more structured re-launch of the Haitian Branch of the APF, and to encourage greater participation of Haitian women parliamentarians in the Network's activities.

The Network's second activity since Libreville was its participation in the meeting of the APF Bureau in Burundi in February 2008.

The Network's upcoming activity was to be its participation in New York City in a meeting of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, to discuss progress since the international conferences on women's rights held in Beijing in 1995 and in New York City in 2000.

Report on the Action Plan and discussion of the upcoming cooperation program

Senator Losier-Cool then reported on the Network's cooperation activities.

Since 2004, with financial and logistical support from the *Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF)*, and with additional financial support from the Parliamentary Centre of Canada, the Network has been organizing seminars in various APF regions to discuss the United Nations *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)*. The purpose of these seminars is to raise awareness of the Convention among male and female parliamentarians in order to facilitate its implementation in their respective countries.

The first seminar, which was held in Bamako, was for women parliamentarians from western Africa; the second, in Madagascar, was for women from the Indian Ocean; the third, in Libreville, was for women from central Africa; the fourth, in Tunis, was for women parliamentarians from northern Africa and the Near East, and the fifth, in Port-au-Prince, was for Haitian women parliamentarians. This most recent seminar was held in response to a request from the APF Bureau to prioritize working with countries emerging from crises. This priority also justified the choice of location for the next seminar in Mauritania in May 2008. The Port-au-Prince seminar focused on CEDAW, and it also opened the door to a theme of interest to the Haitian Branch, male-female equality, as chosen by the Haitian Parliament.

The 2009 seminar will most likely be held in the Democratic Republic of Congo, in accordance with the APF Bureau's request to prioritize countries emerging from crises. The 2010 seminar may take place in Hungary, because that country's Branch submitted a request to the General Secretariat.

The following themes were then discussed by the Steering Committee:

Children's rights: following up on the implementation of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*

Geneviève Colot (France) presented the report. She noted that States that ratified the Convention committed to complying with a series of obligations to all children that fall into three general categories:

- Civil and political rights: right to life; right to a name and a nationality; right to freedom of expression, association and assembly; right to respect of the child's interest, privacy, and opinion; right to protection from torture and deprivation of liberty; right to a family or alternative care;
- Economic and social rights: right to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development; right to access to care and protection (particularly for children with disabilities); right to protection from separation from parents; right to protection from maltreatment, sexual exploitation, economic exploitation and abduction;
- Cultural rights: right to education; right to leisure and culture; right to material not injurious to his or her well-being.

The Convention included a mechanism to follow up on the application of its provisions by State parties by requiring them to regularly report on their implementation of the Convention's provisions. State parties agreed to submit regular reports on measures taken to implement the Convention and on progress made toward ensuring children's rights. These reports include legal, social, economic and other measures taken by States to implement the Convention: general measures of implementation and definition of the child; procedural rights, freedoms and civil rights, protection of the child in the family or alternative environment; health and welfare, education and leisure; and finally alternative care for minors.

Follow-up is not binding: there is no penalty for failing to produce periodic reports. However, there are three reasons for follow-up:

- It requires States to regularly assess the status of their legislation and their society with respect to the requirements of the Convention, and to identify the challenges they face in implementing the Convention and setting specific goals and priorities for the future;
- It promotes dynamic dialogue between States and the Committee on the Rights of the Child because the Committee addresses its concerns and recommendations to the State party in its "concluding observations" and publishes its interpretation of human rights provisions.
- Reports and concluding observations are made public and are intended to be widely disseminated to promote national dialogue within the State party among all stakeholders in the protection of children's rights.

Finally, Ms Colot added that in many countries, the Convention initiated or accelerated social changes, including lower infant mortality, better access to education, progress in protecting children, and better ways for young people to express themselves.

Strategic objectives and implementation of the new ten-year strategic framework

Fadia Nassif, director of the Gender Equality for Development Unit of the Strategic Planning Directorate of the *Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF)*, reported on gender equality. Ms Nassif emphasized that the Francophonie has supported gender equality and women's independence since 1994, when the Peking Conference was in preparation.

Ms Nassif noted that between 2000 and 2005, the Francophonie was active in three areas:

- Improving the status of women: 40 projects were undertaken in 30 countries belonging to the Francophonie. These projects related to information, training, and awareness of women's rights.
- Fighting violence against women, more specifically through awareness campaigns to encourage the cessation of female genital mutilation: 15 projects in some 10 countries.
- Encouraging the full participation of women in the socio-economic process: funding 25 projects, mostly entrepreneurial training and management of micro-businesses, in 21 countries belonging to the Francophonie.

Human Trafficking

Lise Thériault (Québec) presented the report. Ms Thériault began by noting that human trafficking may involve the transnational relocation of people, but that it can also occur within a country's borders.

Ms Thériault discussed a report of the U.S. Department of State estimating that each year, approximately 800,000 people are trafficked across national borders. According to the report, approximately 80% of transnational victims are women and girls, and up to 50% are minors. This does not include thousands trafficked within their own national borders. Moreover, according to the International Labour Organization, no fewer than 2.45 million people are victims of forced labour related to internal and external trafficking in persons.

Ms Thériault explained parliamentarians' role and what they can do. Internationally, as many States as possible must ratify the United Nations *Convention against Transnational Organized Crime* and its protocol against the trafficking of persons. Legislative powers can influence executive powers to that effect.

In conclusion, Ms Thériault indicated that it would be a good idea for the Network to follow up with APF observers, as well as member and associate Branches with respect to the ratification of the United Nations *Convention against Transnational Organized Crime* and its protocol against the trafficking of persons.

Follow-up on the implementation of the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)*

Lise Thériault (Québec) presented the report. By way of introduction, she reminded participants that in 2003, the Network had decided to focus its efforts on CEDAW and its protocol, seeking implementation of the Convention and the intervention of parliamentarians from all Branches to support its effective application. Furthermore, given the commitment by State parties to submit periodic reports on actions taken to ensure the implementation of CEDAW and on progress achieved in that respect, women parliamentarians have an important role to play in raising their governments' awareness and promoting compliance with this requirement.

Ms Thériault also noted that during the XXXIInd Session of the APF, held in July 2006 in Rabat, the Network presented a resolution opposing violence against women and children, which was adopted. In light of numerous violations of the rights of women, the Network Steering Committee then decided that it was time to move forward with the report on the implementation of CEDAW.

Finally, the Network held five information seminars on CEDAW for women parliamentarians. Over 150 parliamentarians participated in these seminars.

Since the XXXIInd Session of the APF, two CEDAW seminars have been held. The most recent was held in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on May 3 and 4, 2007. Senator Losier-Cool participated as speaker and chair. Haitian women parliamentarians, including senators and members of Parliament, as well as representatives of political parties and civil society and parliamentary public servants participated in the seminars.

Members of the Steering Committee agreed in principle that a seminar be held in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2009.

Wednesday, February 20, 2008

Women Refugees

Marie-Rose Nguini-Effa (Cameroon) presented the report. She noted that over the past few decades, numerous conflicts throughout the world have displaced countless numbers of people either within their own countries or to neighbouring countries. Women and children, the main victims of displacement, have been subjected to all manner of abuses and have often been killed.

Several countries, including Canada, have developed recommendations concerning gender-based persecution and have officially recognized that genital mutilation is a form of persecution that justifies seeking refugee status.

In her report, Ms Nguini-Effa made several recommendations, including international recommendations addressed to the United Nations. The UN should:

- Immediately adopt measures to increase the number of women in all of its organizations and at all decision-making levels, including as military observers, police officers, peacekeepers, human rights specialists, and humanitarian aid field agents. It should also appoint women as special representatives and special envoys of the Secretary-General.

- Take concrete measures to ensure that a gender-specific perspective is included in all of its activities, including activities that involve the physical safety of women and girls, such as in field operations, peacekeeping operations, armed forces and police forces.
- Take specific measures to ensure that peace officers who violate human rights or humanitarian law, particularly against women and girls, be penalized for their actions.
- Ensure that women are involved in all cease-fire and peace negotiations and that gender equality issues are taken into consideration as part of these processes.
- Launch programs to inform entities other than States of their obligations under international humanitarian law and of the specific consequences that the creation of the International Criminal Court may have for them.

At the national level, the report recommends that, among other things, States do the following:

- Ratify pertinent international instruments, ensure that the legal standards they institute are fully respected, and ensure that violators are penalized for their actions.
- Guarantee the safety of camps housing refugees and displaced persons.
- Offer protection and assistance to displaced persons within their countries and ensure free, unconditional access for national and international humanitarian organizations assisting displaced persons.
- Refuse to supply arms or financial or political support to governments or non-State actors that violate international humanitarian law.

CONTRIBUTION OF THE NETWORK OF WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS OF THE ASSEMBLÉE PARLEMENTAIRE DE LA FRANCOPHONIE TO THE OPINION THAT THE APF WILL SUBMIT DURING THE SUMMIT OF LA FRANCOPHONIE IN QUEBEC CITY IN 2008

Senator Losier-Cool noted that the *Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie* (APF), through its Political Committee, provides its opinion on the programs of the *Organisation internationale de la Francophonie* (OIF). The Network of Women Parliamentarians will contribute to this opinion by focussing on issues of gender equality both within the OIF and in the organization's external programs.

Declaration concerning violence against civilians in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo

The Steering Committee adopted a declaration:

- Condemning without reservation the resumption of conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, where vulnerable populations, including women, children and the elderly, are subjected to the worst atrocities;
- Denouncing sexual violence against women and children, which is being used as a weapon of war in this conflict;

and by which the Steering Committee:

- Commits to raising awareness among all Branches of the APF, to drawing the attention of the governments of those Branches and of the international community to the problem in order to achieve a peaceful solution as quickly as possible, to ending massacres and brutality, and to helping victims.

The next meetings of the Steering Committee and the Network of Women Parliamentarians will take place on July 4, during meetings of the XXXIVth Session of the APF in Quebec City.

Respectfully submitted,

Rose-Marie Losier-Cool, Senator
Member of the Canadian Branch of the
Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF)

Travel Cost

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Branch of the <i>Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF)</i>
ACTIVITY	Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the APF
DESTINATION	Brussels, Belgium
DATES	February 19 and 20, 2008
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Rose-Marie Losier-Cool
HOUSE OF COMMONS	
STAFF	Jean Michel Roy
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 7,824.29
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 1,715.27
PER DIEMS	\$ 772.60
TOTAL	\$ 10,312.16