



**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
respecting its participation at the Annual Gathering of the
Group of Women Parliamentarians**

Canadian Section of ParlAmericas

**Paramaribo, Suriname
May 16 and 17, 2013**

Report

INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Section of ParlAmericas attended the Annual Gathering of the ParlAmericas Group of Women Parliamentarians, entitled “**Women in Power: Recent Changes in the Political Arena**” focused on the leadership and political participation of women and the progress made in these areas in the Americas in recent years. The Canadian parliamentary delegation was led by Ms. Susan Truppe, M.P., and was accompanied by the Honourable Suzanne Fortin-Duplessis, Senator, Ms. Djaouida Sellah, M.P. , and Ms. Guyanne L. Desforges, Association Secretary to the Canadian Section.

Held annually, the meeting has grown steadily in popularity in recent years and underscores the continued importance and relevance of strengthening the roles of women in Parliament and society. The Group includes representatives from each sub-region in the Americas, namely, North America, Central America, South America and the Caribbean. The objectives of the 2013 Annual Gathering were to discuss achievements in the political participation of women, the passing of laws related to women’s rights, female leadership in the region, and to propose actions to maintain and further progress. A total of 53 parliamentarians, 38 women and 15 men, from 23 countries attended the 2013 Annual Gathering.

THE MEETING

Opening Ceremony

The Gathering began with several inaugural addresses. Ms. Jennifer Simmons, Speaker of the National Assembly of Suriname, Acting President of the Group of Women Parliamentarians (GoWP) and host of the Annual Gathering opened the meeting with welcoming remarks. She expressed her gratitude to the parliamentarians and experts present and voiced her happiness at the large attendance at the Annual Gathering. She shared her hope that the Gathering will provide an opportunity to exchange ideas and would serve as inspiration to parliamentarians to continue their work on issues related to women’s rights and the representation of women in Parliament, and in national decision making processes.

A video address followed with Ms. Linda Machuca Moscoso, Representative of the National Assembly of Ecuador, and President of the ParlAmericas Group of Women Parliamentarians. She reflected on the value of providing such a forum to women and men and the importance of the discussions that would be held. Ms. Machuca Moscoso recognized that much progress has been made in the past one hundred years and noted that legislation for gender equality and equity, based on the human rights of both men and women, help build democracies in the hemisphere, respect the Rule of Law and build a world of peace and solidarity.

Following Ms. Machuca, Mrs Monica Zalaquett, Member of the Chamber of Deputies of Chili and Secretary to the Group of the Women Parliamentarians welcomed all delegates and recognized the achievements that have been made in closing the gaps in education,

political inclusion in electoral processes, and the integration of women into the workforce. However, she noted there are still many grey areas and problems such as violence against women and children, human trafficking, enslavement and sexual exploitation which continue to plague societies. She acknowledged that women's roles have become crucial in assuring that development processes be inclusive of all citizens of our countries, and that we move from words to actions and proposals to facts.

Session 1— Women Presidents of National Legislatures

The objective of the first session was to analyze the experiences of women who have reached formal positions of power, and to share lessons learned in the hope that they will be used as an example and as inspiration to other female politicians. The session also sought to highlight the importance of having women exercise formal politics from a female perspective without resorting to traditional, patriarchal models. This session examined the struggle of groups committed to gender equality, as well as other factors that have contributed to progress, how progress can be stepped up, how changes can be measured, and the results of such an evaluation.

Two female Speakers of Parliament: Dr. Jennifer Simons, Speaker of the National Assembly of Suriname and Gisele Isaac-Arrindell, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Antigua and Barbuda were the main presenters. They spoke on their experiences to shed light on the challenges that women face when entering politics. They focused on why female leadership is necessary, and strategies for increasing women's presence in positions of political power.

Speaker Simons made the participants reflect on the importance of having more women in politics as they make up half of any society and therefore must be present in all decision making processes. She stated that increased involvement of women in politics and in decision making roles adds to the quality of democracies and societies, and helps address the lack of sustainability in political and economic systems. Increased female perspective in Parliament is necessary to improve governance and to adjust the present economic model that is currently centred on maximizing gains and growth, so that space is made for other issues such as the environment.

Speaker Isaac-Arrindell followed by stating that women comprise 50% of the population but only one woman has ever been elected to the House of Parliament in Antigua and Barbuda. As appointed Speaker, her role is important as it gives women the visibility they need and reminds men that the inclusion of women is crucial to the success of democracy. There are still many psychosocial and financial barriers to overcome and it's important to continue to encourage young educated women towards leadership roles and the need for more activism by women of all ages and backgrounds. She suggests that women who are in the position to inform and educate must work towards closing the knowledge gap.

Regional rapporteurs from Canada, Mexico, Nicaragua and Paraguay addressed the strategies that have been followed in their countries that effectively prevent women from reaching the highest position in Parliament.

Susan Truppe (Canada) explained that in Canada, there are no rules, laws or institutional barriers that prohibit women from being candidates for Speaker of the House of Commons. She noted, however, that in reality, women continue to be

under-represented in key decision making roles in politics and business in Canada. She commented that all Canadians benefit when women and girls are full participants in every aspect of daily life, from the grassroots level all the way to the boardroom, and including government at every level. She informed the group that there was increased funding for the Women's Program at Status of Women Canada to its highest level ever, supporting more than 600 projects at the community level. More than \$21 million in funding has been approved for projects to promote women's leadership and democratic participation. She added that through Status of Women Canada, the government is supporting projects that engage young women and girls in being leaders from the start.

Delfina Elizabeth Guzmán Díaz (Mexico) informed that a third of the positions in the bicameral legislative Congress of Mexico are occupied by women, thanks to the legal obligation that was the subject of a two-decade struggle requiring political parties to aim for 40% of its members to be women. However she stated that quotas are not enough; the presence of women in leadership positions, in addition to being a fundamental part of gender-related justice, increases the probability that women's priorities will be present in decision making at the national level, will inspire other women to strive for these positions, and will motivate men and women to bring forward the agenda for gender equality as a central axis of democracy.

Martha González Dávila (Nicaragua) explained that 40.2% of the National Assembly of Nicaragua is composed of women. In 2012, the Municipal Law was reformed at the initiative of the Executive branch so that 50% of electoral lists are represented by women. Despite all these advances, women continue to face many challenges, such as lack of consciousness about defending and promoting women's rights; discrimination from certain groups or sectors that block the emergence of female leaders, such as political parties, religious groups, and even certain feminist groups; and insufficient technical, professional, and political training for women.

Ms. González Dávila acknowledged that the government and the National Assembly have approved laws to promote programs with economic impacts such as production, food, and credit packages, and zero usury programs. These have improved women's productive and purchasing capacities and have also contributed to a reduction in poverty levels.

Clarissa Marín de Lopez (Paraguay) explained that the political participation of women in Paraguay is very recent. In the history of Paraguay, women have only attained the position of Vice-President of the Chamber. She emphasized that change has to occur not only at the legal level, but also at the cultural level. She described existing challenges such as the need for greater women's empowerment, political party openness, financing for women's candidates, shared family responsibilities, and women's own commitment. Key elements to ensure the consistency of changes and to avoid moving backward are training, negotiation, activism within political parties, and a service vocation.

The assembly was then invited to ask questions, comment on the information presented and to share experiences and practices from their countries.

Session 2—Leadership and Political Participation of Women of African Descent

The objective of this session was to reflect on areas in which legislation recognizes the double discrimination against women of African descent and to support their struggle for

space within women's movements. The session also sought to bring a discussion on the implications of positive discrimination for the Afro-descendant community. In general, significant progress has been made in Latin America in incorporating women into formal politics. However, there are strong indications that the situation of Afro-descendant women has not improved to the same extent as for other women in the region. The expert for this session was asked to reflect on how the leadership roles, styles, and traditions among women of African descent are constructed, and what strategies can be used to develop a political vision that can place their specific and strategic demands on the national and international agenda.

Beatriz Ramírez Abella, Director of the National Women's at the Institute of Uruguay (INMUJERES) since 2010 made a presentation and her analysis focused more specifically on the contribution made by Afro-descendant men and women in the fight for integration, inclusion and equality. She gave a history from slavery to the new conception of the multiple forms of discrimination (racism, religious, gender, generation, cultural, social and political). It was noted that the Afro-descendants and indigenous populations have been the largest minority and one of the poorest population groups. Various statistical charts were presented showing the labour market activity; employment and unemployment rate by gender and ethno-racial group; Afro-descendant and non-Afro-descendant employed population distribution by occupation and gender; attendance at educational institutions by age group and average income with the Afro-descendant and Non-Afro-descendant population.

Ms Ramirez Abella informed the participants that the National Women's Institute (*Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres*) created a department to address Afro-descendant women's issues, to promote gender and racial equality and to encourage actions to make gender and racial/ethnic equality a cross-cutting issue in government agencies. Additionally, affirmative actions such as providing training or designing diploma courses on race and gender with universities are being encouraged. Others include quotas for Afro-descendant youngsters through the law on youth employment, and a bill on affirmative actions for the Afro-descendant population to be submitted to the Senate. This constitutes an historical milestone in the recognition of their rights in the fields of labour and education. Finally she informed that work is currently under way to set up an African Affairs Embassy in Uruguay.

The regional rapporteurs were: Angélica de la Peña Gómez (Mexico), Valdez San Pedro; (Dominic Republic – Guadalupe); Vernella Alleyne-Toppin (Trinidad and Tobago) and Marcela Revollo Quiroga (Bolivia). They reflected on the session topic in light of the situation in their respective countries.

Ms. Angélica de la Peña Gómez (Mexico) expressed her belief that a nation's legal framework is the backbone of its democracy, which is why a country's legislation must be concordant with its adoption of international treaties on human rights. In Mexico, there is legislation that prevents and sanctions discrimination, and which recognizes that people of African descent, similarly to indigenous peoples, suffer multiple forms of discrimination, including discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, gender, age, religion, and economic status.

Ms. de la Peña Gómez insisted that those in charge of guaranteeing the implementation of the law be held accountable. She called on fellow parliamentarians to reflect on the

actions they have taken as women in positions of power to help improve the situation of other women in their societies. Finally, Ms. de la Peña Gómez called for legislation that promotes the representation of indigenous groups and Afro-descendant groups in parliament.

Ms. Guadalupe Valdez San Pedro (Dominican Republic) noted that in Latin America, censuses show that only 1% of all legislators are of African descent and only 0.03% are women of African descent. The reality is completely different from the discourse on equality in constitutions and equality of opportunity in laws. She called for integrated public policy with a focus on equality of opportunity that will render these women visible. Public policy has to take into account these populations in the areas of health, education and agriculture. Mrs. Valdez San Pedro states that the struggle of women of African descent be linked with the struggle for education, climate change, and food security so that a legislative agenda can be created that includes legal frameworks to guarantee equality of opportunity through concrete actions.

Ms. Vernella Alleyne-Toppin (Trinidad and Tobago) informed participants that in the Caribbean, independence has sharpened the contradictions in gender relationships. While blacks now enjoy political power, few black women enjoy this same power. She further noted that once elected or appointed to Parliament, female Members of Parliament face additional barriers and limitations to their equal participation in political decision making. The political barriers include the historical domination of politics and the political environment by the male gender, and the traditional political power structure and its bias against women. Also she noted the cultural and economic barriers which include the perception of women's subordination to male control and the necessity of male "permission" to participate in public life; the lack of support from the family (emotional and sharing of domestic responsibilities); the burden of having to successfully manage domestic responsibilities and professional obligations and the lack of adequate financial support.

Ms. Marcela Revollo Quiroga (Bolivia) asserted that the American identity is strongly marked by the presence of people of African descent, which count for a population of 150 million. She noted, however, that this massive presence has not translated into their effective inclusion in political, economic, and social decision making processes in most countries. This reality is exacerbated when it comes to women of African descent, whose experience of exclusion, subordination and access to public services is even worse.

Ms. Revollo Quiroga stated that countries such as Bolivia have approved and incorporated into their constitutions the "*Law Against Racism and All Forms of Discrimination*". She noted, however, that the large percentage of indigenous populations has been the centre of almost all the interest of the government and of social institutions. Therefore, incorporating women of the Americas into the political agenda implies shifting our focus to the poorest women who are almost absent from public policy and who do not receive social and cultural recognition. In order to recognize women of African descent in countries where they are a minority, it is necessary to analyze the hierarchized conception with which female politicians look at the women's agenda without identifying those women who suffer multiple forms of discrimination.

The discussion continued with the comments and reflections from the assembly.

Session 3 — The Effects of Women’s Participation in Politics

The objective of this session was to discuss progress in the drafting of laws made possible by the participation of women in politics and the specific characteristics of their participation, and to analyze the contribution of women’s participation in raising awareness on issues related to gender and women’s rights. The growing presence of women legislators in the Americas has not only produced visible progress in the kind of laws being enacted but also in the will to include a gender approach in existing laws.

The invited expert, Ms. Cynthia Barrow Giles (Saint Lucia), a Senior Lecturer in Politics from the University of the West Indies, started this last session with her presentation; “*Women’s Political Representation in the Commonwealth Caribbean and Latin America – A Preliminary Analysis*”.

The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) regards 33% as the critical mass of women required for meaningful decision making. By 2008, 24 countries surpassed the 30% target. In the Caribbean, only Guyana, under its proportional representation system, comes close to this goal. Ms. Barrow Giles stated that given the present configuration and composition of parliaments in the Commonwealth Caribbean, women acting in their own spaces have been unable to exercise or exert much leverage with regards to the myriad of issues that require action. At a political level, it is anticipated that the greater inclusion of women in political parties and government would bring to the political agenda their specific interests which it is claimed cannot always be represented by men. Consequently, it is expected that the larger the share of parliamentary seats that women occupy, the greater the representation of specific women’s concerns which will translate into policy action.

Ms. Barrow-Giles stated that an evaluation of the bills that women parliamentarians pilot through national legislators is one of the major tools that can be used to make a determination of the impact that woman legislators make in advancing the cause of women nationally. However, this in itself is a difficult task as it is not easy to make a direct connection between legislation and the outcome of such legislation to women’s participation in the legislative process.

Research shows that in legislatures where women constituted at least 20%, there was a greater tendency for women to introduce/sponsor legislation concerning women, families, and children than their male counterparts (Sue Thomas, *How Women Legislate*. New York: Oxford University Press). This was further corroborated by other work which found that women legislators were pivotal to the introduction of specific legislation designed to address women’s rights, but they were also instrumental in advancing bills that diversified the scope of solutions to women’s rights problems. However she mentioned that the political assumption that women in politics always represent specific women’s interests is not always the case as some women enter the legislative process with ideas that are shaped and often limited by the party under which they sought election (requirement of party line).

As per the presenter, the Caribbean parliamentarians have not been able to advance in terms of concrete proposals and legislation in areas such as human trafficking (both drug and prostitution), domestic violence legislation, sexual harassment legislation. Thus, at this

time, it's nearly impossible to conclude that women parliamentarians sponsor more bills dealing with the substantive areas in which it is assumed that women ought to be invested.

Ms. Barrow-Giles highlighted that in Latin America, there is a growing tendency to be proactive and to increasingly place women's issues at the forefront of the policy agenda which is set by some powerful women and women's movements. For example, Chile's election campaign in 2005 included a focus on reform of the pension system in Chile, promoting the rights of women and indigenous people and reducing inequality in the country.

She informed the assembly that according to the United Nations report on Drugs and Crime in Latin America and the Caribbean Region of the World Bank, gender-based violence in the region is pervasive, therefore domestic violence legislation is an absolute necessity. In that regard, nearly 30 countries have enacted legislation against domestic violence. In 1991, Trinidad and Tobago became the first English speaking Caribbean country to pass a Domestic Violence Act. Among other things, the Act grants victims the right to petition courts for orders of protection against their abusers. An amended Act of 1999 broadened the categories of persons to whom the domestic violence law applied. In Jamaica, the enactment of such legislation has also led to the establishment of *The Centre for Investigation of Sexual Offences and Child Abuse*. This is a special investigative unit within the police force, whose major role is to help foster an enabling environment that seeks to encourage victims of domestic violence to report sexual victimization, undertake efficient and effective investigation of allegations of sexual abuse, provide rehabilitation of victims and increase public education on the issue of sexual victimization.

Ms. Barrow-Giles further informed the participants that Ecuador has been one of the main countries leading the charge to end domestic violence and has not only succeeded in passing effective legislation but has also established a number of public awareness programmes and female-run police stations. Police stations known as *Comisarías de la Mujer y la Familia* (Police Stations for Women and Families) were established in 1981.

She also mentioned that the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) developed model legislation for the member states which aimed at addressing the growing problem. The model legislation addresses sexual harassment as a labour relations problem and provides civil remedies for those harassed at work. The legislation extends to educational institutions, as well as to sexual harassment in relation to accommodation. It remained, however, for the individual Caribbean countries to carry forward legislative action. It was noted the partnership with male counterparts in the legislation is necessary to advance women's issues. In the last decade, several countries in Latin America have sought to both strengthen existing legislation and enact specific legislation on sexual harassment, most notably Chile in 2005.

Ms Barrow-Giles continued her presentation by talking on the legislation on Human Trafficking. She mentioned that several Latin American and English speaking Caribbean countries serve as sources, transit, and destination countries for people (including children) trafficked primarily for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labour. Only two jurisdictions have enacted laws which address the issue. Human trafficking is prohibited under Belize domestic law by the Trafficking in Persons Prohibition Act of 2003 and was followed in 2007 by Jamaica when the government passed its Trafficking in

Persons (Prevention, Suppression and Punishment Act). As vexing as the trafficking of women, girls and boys is, both for the purpose of sexual and labour exploitation, equally important is the use of girls and women as drug mules by narcotraffickers. This, unfortunately, is an area which has not been dealt with in any serious way and the criminal justice system appears to deal with such persons in a much more severe fashion than they do males.

She concluded by stating that while many have signed on to a number of international agreements, action at the national level lags behind those international agreements. Women parliamentarians have no doubt made a significant contribution towards the development of a more just society, however they must continue to devise strategies to not only consolidate those gains but also expand into areas that are still uncharted.

The regional rapporteurs included Djaouida Sellah (Canada), Maria Jeannette Ruiz Delgado (Costa Rica) and Volda Lawrence (Guyana). They were then invited to give their regional perspectives on this session.

Ms. Djaouida Sellah (Canada) shared with participants that women are represented at the highest levels of provincial politics in Canada but gender equality, although a principle of the Canadian Constitution since 1982, has still not been fully achieved. Contrary to other countries, Canada does not have any quotas for the participation of women in political parties. Ms. Sellah stated that the presence of women has had an important effect on public policy. She noted that each draft law in her party is analyzed through a gender lens. The prominence of women allows issues to be put forward that would be otherwise forgotten, for example, in the study of economic policies or in the budget. She acknowledged that these visions are undoubtedly accentuated by the proportion of women in the different caucuses and that the increasing number of women in Parliament has allowed advancing causes that help women. She also indicated that in order to be representative of the different perspectives of the population, parliaments must be diverse in terms of age, profession, ethnic origin, language, and of course, gender.

Ms. Maria Ruiz Delgado (Costa Rica) began by stating that the role of women in politics is not only a question of presence but of impact. Costa Rica has been at the forefront of the struggle for women to occupy decision making positions; however, there is still much to be done in the way of legislation. Costa Rica has a female president and recently, a woman was elected to be the President of the Judicial System, which further reflects the country's confidence in women leaders. Ms. Ruiz Delgado commented that 38.5% of the members of the Legislative Assembly are women, due to a reform of the Electoral Code in 1996, which established that political parties must assure that women represent 40% of party structures as well as district, cantonal and provincial assemblies. In 2009, another modification to the Electoral Code was approved in favour of gender parity in representation. This modification will be in effect in the upcoming electoral period. Ms. Ruiz Delgado explained that Costa Rica's Legislative Assembly has a gender unit which is the organ that coordinates the Women's Commission. Gender is also a cross-cutting theme in the country's Institutional Strategic Plan, whereby 80% of the annual operating plan of each department must have a minimum of one action related to gender. Political parties also have resources from the State for training, in which it is obligatory to discuss women's issues.

Ms. Volda Lawrence (Guyana) expressed her belief that the increase in women's participation in Guyanese legislation is critical and that it has increased political stability in her society as well as the stability and continuity of political parties. She stated that there is absolutely no doubt that greater representation of women in politics is synonymous with the passing of legislation which reflects and supports women's issues. The growing number of women legislators in Guyana has produced visible progress not only in the kind of laws being enacted but also in the will to include a gender approach in existing laws. In Guyana, women legislators have piloted many bills and motions which address issues such as child care, salaries for nurses and teachers, subsidies for secondary education, public health immunization, children born out of wedlock, equal rights, domestic violence, medical termination of pregnancy, age of consent, and disabilities. Ms. Lawrence asserted that women legislators have played a significant role not only in passing laws but in highlighting issues that are important to women.

The assembly were then invited to ask questions, comment on the information presented and to share experiences and practices from their countries.

Keynote Address: Women in Power: Recent Changes in the Political Arena – A Vision from the Latin American Experience

The last speaker to address the assembly was Ms. Maureen Clarke Clarke, who is the President of the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM), the Minister of the Status of Women of Costa Rica, and Executive Director of the National Women's Institute of Costa Rica. In her keynote address, Ms. Clarke Clarke stated that from a gender perspective, it is clear that women in patriarchal societies are kept from fully enjoying their rights due to the sociocultural system which discriminates against them. Similarly, she noted, the diverse groups of organized women have raised their voices to show that they are the victims of multiple forms of discrimination. Women of African descent, in some countries, suffer from a triple discrimination where they are not able to access economic resources, which place them in a situation of vulnerability and disadvantage compared to other women.

Ms. Clarke Clarke explained that in order to discuss the recognition of rights, we must start at the construction of new social, political, cultural, and economic articulations that recognize all citizens as equals starting from their diversity. She insisted that the State's inclusion of new subjects must take place through affirmative actions such as quotas, which have proven to be positive for the political participation of neutral majorities. Ms. Clarke Clarke explained, however, that the quota system has not facilitated parity of racial participation, which in her opinion is the result of the neutrality of these policies. The political participation of women in general is urgent, she commented, but so also is the participation of women of African descent. It is therefore necessary for the agenda of Afro-descendant women to be taken into consideration in decision making processes and for their voices to be heard.

Ms. Clarke Clarke shared some of the research compiled by the Inter-Parliamentary Union on the opinions and experiences of men and women parliamentarians at the international level:

- While the number of women in parliaments has increased in the last decade, in 2008, women occupied less than 18% of all parliamentary seats.
- Women parliamentarians are not a homogeneous group but they can share interests. There is a tendency to emphasize social problems, the elimination of gender-based violence, poverty reduction, development including human development, and the provision of services. However, many women parliamentarians are interested in areas that were previously considered to be in men's domain, such as fiscal and exterior policies.
- Cultural prejudices and perceptions of the role of women, as well as the lack of financial resources, continue to present themselves as obstacles to the political participation of women.
- It is necessary to advance on themes that have direct implications for the effective political participation of women at all decision making levels, such as the issue of caring as a social responsibility.
- Harassment and political violence discourage the political participation of women, yet there are no mechanisms that prohibit these situations.
- It is necessary to engage male parliamentarians and political parties to commit to equality in their principles as well as in practice.
- The link between women parliamentarians and women's groups and citizens must be encouraged.
- It is important to continue encouraging women parliamentarian networks and policies that transcend individual party interests and visions and promote instead the construction of a multi-party agenda.

Ms. Clarke Clarke stated that democracy is indebted to women, especially women of African descent. Sustainable human development cannot exist if women's contributions, interests and demands continue to be rendered invisible. In her final statement, Ms. Clarke Clarke issued the following demands:

"We demand greater participation at all levels. We demand that the prejudices and stereotypes that render us invisible and situate us in a private sphere and men in the political and public spheres be eliminated. We demand policies with a gender focus and we demand that we advance from a position that allows us to make the specificities of our societies visible so that they include us democratically in all the forms we exercise our rights."

Closing Session and Final Remarks

Ms. Jennifer Simmons Acting Chair of the Group of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas presented closing remarks and thanked the meeting organizers, guest speakers and the meeting participants. She encouraged parliaments to continue supporting forums for discussion and exchange.

Dr. Simons asked participants to keep in mind two fundamental issues that are important for communities at large, but more specifically for women. In her words, these are as follows:

1. We will have to create a more sustainable political, economic system with more room to achieve well-being for all. We can start by using new ways to evaluate our economies. Tools like the genuine progress indicator could be useful as a first step in that direction.
2. It is necessary to strengthen democracy through the participation of citizens in public decision making and by improving the transparency of political parties specifically with respect to the processes by which they put forward candidates for election to parliament or to the executive presidency.

Speaker Simons commented that it has become clear that it is necessary to have enough women in parliament in order to have a chance for change; it is also important, she noted, for other conditions to be in place, such as cooperation between men and women. “To be able to fly we need both wings,” she said. Dr. Simons explained that both female and male perspectives are necessary in order to have a complete picture of humanity, but cooperation is also very important on a practical level, just to get the votes necessary for change.

Dr. Simons closed the session by reminding all that discussion is important, but those ideas need to be translated into action plans and that the actions be implemented.

The participants were invited to approve a list of recommendations that were noted throughout the two-day Annual Gathering. A report of eleven recommendations (by sessions) was adopted and is presented in the appendix 1. The participants were invited to present the report in their respective parliaments. They were also encouraged to use this list as an action plan and follow-up strategy in their parliaments to measure the progress on the inclusion of gender-based initiatives.

CONCLUSION

This visit provided an excellent opportunity for the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas to actively participate in discussions on gender violence and gender-based public policy, topics of continued interest and focus for the ParlAmericas Group of Women Parliamentarians. The Canadian Section also felt that the activity allowed the participants to make contacts with counterparts in the parliaments of many countries. The delegation would like to thank the International Secretariat of ParlAmericas and the National Assembly of Suriname for their tremendous work in ensuring the success of the event.

Lastly, the delegation applauds the leadership of Dr. Jennifer Simons for organizing an unprecedented level of high participation in a ParlAmericas meeting of the Group of Women Parliamentarians.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Truppe, M.P.
Head of Delegation,
Canadian Section of ParlAmericas

APPENDIX

Recommendations

Annual Gathering of the Group of Women Parliamentarians (2013): *“Women in Power: Recent Changes in the Political Arena”*

Session 1: Women Presidents of National Legislatures

We recommend:

1. Encouraging ParlAmericas member States to support legislation that sets effective quotas for electing or appointing women to parliaments, and that establishes effective, transparent and gradual processes toward parity, ensuring women obtain competitive spaces on election lists. States should take measures to have a critical mass of women in parliaments so that they are in a position to impact the decision-making processes of their countries. States should not rely on quotas alone, which are necessary but insufficient to achieve the stated goal, but should do so to facilitate gender parity in parliamentary representation.
2. Encouraging female politicians to take assertive action to increase and maintain the representation of women in parliaments, in order to support one another within political parties. Further, that action be taken to ensure that women who are elected or appointed receive on-going support from their parties, and from other parliamentarians, and have access to training programs.
3. Holding a summit to consider the new challenges and current realities facing women and develop strategies to address these realities through a focused hemispheric agenda.

Session 2: Leadership and Political Participation of Women of African Descent

We recommend:

1. Ensuring the institutionalization of gender equality public policies, which includes proportionally women of African Descent, and where such institutionalization exists, it be adequately strengthened through laws, norms, and decrees in order to generate the necessary social, cultural, and economic changes. Sufficient budgetary resources must be allocated to the institutionalization process in order to bring forward the changes.
2. Seeking more open and transparent gender equality processes, and defining strategies to achieve the stated objectives, while demanding governmental accountability in order to combat the perpetuation of the patriarchal system.

3. Asserting that the contribution of this political vision guarantee that all women be the subjects of rights, particularly women of African Descent, who are to the target of multiple forms of discrimination.
4. Creating formal mechanisms of support to promote cooperation and collaboration between civil society organizations and elected representatives.

Session 3: The Effects of Women's Participation in Politics

We recommend:

1. Encouraging political parties to give women incentive to join their parties in order to promote women's political empowerment. Striving to attain 50% representation of women in parliament in order to move forward an important new agenda.
2. Engaging the cooperation of all women and men, including leaders, as strategic allies in order to achieve the cultural and social transformations, where women, who comprise more than 50% of the population of the Americas, see their rights taken into consideration by public policy and government programs. In order to advance, it is crucial that women occupy decision-making positions within parties and that a stable majority be created with men.
3. Educating and training men and women from all regions of ParIAmericas, and providing orientation in parliamentary processes, building capacity and training those who are not aware of the various dimensions of their position.

Further, influencing the educational systems of our countries so that they are based on a form of education free of sexist and patriarchal stereotypes which prevent the recognition of men and women as equals.

4. Fostering that our parliaments dedicate national resources to the economic empowerment of women, promoting credit programs for women who wish to undertake business actions, and allocating financial resources within the Budget to programs that support women's participation in the productive processes of their countries.

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Section of ParlAmericas
ACTIVITY	Annual Gathering of the Group of Women Parliamentarians
DESTINATION	Paramaribo, Suriname
DATES	May 16 and 17, 2013
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Suzanne Fortin-Duplessis, Senator
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Ms. Susan Truppe, M.P. Ms. Djaouida Sellah, M.P.
STAFF	Ms. Guyanne L. Desforges, Association Secretary
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 9,376.77
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 2,017.54
HOSPITALITY	\$ 0.00
PER DIEMS	\$ 1,125.33
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 59.00
MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES	\$ 0.00
TOTAL	\$12,578.64