



Canada - China Legislative Association
Association législative Canada - Chine



Canada - Japan Inter - Parliamentary Group
Groupe Interparlementaire Canada - Japon

Report of the Canada-China Legislative Association and the Canada-Japan Inter-Parliamentary Group

40th General Assembly of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA)

Bangkok, Thailand

August 25-30, 2019

Report

The Hon. Joseph A. Day, the Hon. Jim Munson, the Hon. Victor Oh and Irene Mathyssen, MP, participated in the 40th General Assembly of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Inter-Parliamentary Assembly from August 25 to 30, 2019, in Bangkok, Thailand. They were joined by David Chandonnet, Executive Secretary of the Canada–China Legislative Association and the Canada–Japan Interparliamentary Group. ASEAN member countries take turns chairing the organization, which includes organizing and hosting various meetings, such as the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA)¹. Canada has participated in these annual meetings on many occasions over the past 40 years, most recently at the 39th Assembly in Singapore in September 2018. The objectives of Canada’s involvement are to:

- maintain regular contact with member countries and discuss issues specific to the Asia-Pacific region;
- network with parliamentarians in the region;
- present the views of Canadian parliamentarians on various topics; and
- strengthen Canada’s international presence, particularly in Southeast Asia.

The 10 ASEAN member countries sent a delegation to the General Assembly: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. Other countries or regional governments that have observer status in the General Assembly, like Canada, were also present: Australia, Belarus, the European Parliament, the People’s Republic of China, the Republic of Korea and Russia. Also present this year were a few groups of researchers, and members of the AIPA and ASEAN secretariats. Lastly, Morocco and Norway were also invited to attend. These two countries have been considering applying for observer status for some years now.

Briefing by the Canadian Embassy in Bangkok

Before the General Assembly began, the delegation met with Donica Pottie, the Canadian Ambassador to Thailand, along with Embassy staff member Jeff Senior, Political Counsellor. This briefing gave the delegates greater insight into the political and social situation in the region, the local and regional challenges facing Thailand, and future prospects. Ambassador Pottie described the consular and regional mandate of the Embassy to also include in Cambodia, Laos and ASEAN.

Prior to the session, the delegates discussed the themes of the 40th General Assembly and Canada’s planned interventions. The parliamentarians learned more about the situation of the Rohingya and its geopolitical subtleties and discussed a variety of other topics such as trade and commerce, investment, the nature of consular issues and matters related to the presence of Canadians in Thailand. Ambassador Pottie had also

¹ The report of the 40th General Assembly is available at <https://aipasecretariat.org/report-aipa-general-assembly/>.

planned to attend the opening ceremony of the Assembly on August 26 and offered the support of Embassy staff as needed throughout the Annual General Assembly. A subsequent meeting was held with other Embassy officials at the end of the day on Wednesday to cover other topics and to explore in greater depth some of the issues that could not be addressed due to time constraints.

1. The General Assembly and the official program

Meeting between the President of the National Assembly of Thailand and the Heads of Delegations

On the morning of August 26, prior to the official opening of the General Assembly, the heads of delegations, together with a member of their staff, were invited to a meeting with His Excellency Mr. Chuan Leekpai, President of the National Assembly of Thailand. This meeting allowed Senator Day to thank the hosts for their hospitality, briefly discuss Canada's participation in the General Assembly with Mr. Leekpai, and reiterate the commitment of Canadian parliamentarians to Southeast Asia and the broader Asia-Pacific region. It was also an opportunity to meet the heads of delegations from the other countries participating in the event and build relationships with those parliamentarians from other countries. Several of these conversations continued during the three days of the General Assembly.

First plenary session

Following the General Assembly's opening ceremony hosted by the Prime Minister of Thailand, Prayut Chan-o-cha, the first plenary session began the morning of August 26. ASEAN member countries delivered statements on behalf of their delegations, as did the observer countries. On behalf of the delegation, Senator Day, the head of delegation for Canada, addressed the roughly 100 participants in the General Assembly on matters of importance to Canada, such as trade with Asian countries and more specifically Southeast Asia, investment in the region, student exchanges that enrich Canada and the participants' home countries, Canada's commitment to human rights, and cooperation with Asian countries in maintaining peace and security in the Pacific region. The speech was well received by all the other countries' delegates, who congratulated Canada on its contribution.

Meeting of Women Parliamentarians of ASEAN

Although their observer status did not allow them to officially participate in the proceedings, the delegation was still able to attend the women parliamentarians' discussions. Canada was able to affirm its desire, to make a contribution where possible, with respect to the role of women parliamentarians, such as we have done at the Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum.

This meeting was an opportunity for Ms. Mathysen and other delegates to observe the proceedings. This year, one of the debated resolutions focused on gender equality as a means of empowering women and giving them greater importance in society, not only in

terms of education and employment, but also economic prosperity. A second resolution focused on promoting the contribution and equality of women in technological fields of study so they can fully participate in the new digital economy and in current and future development that require a high degree of digital literacy. These are themes that we addressed at the meeting of women parliamentarians during the 39th General Assembly in 2018. This participation allows Canada to monitor developments with regard to the status of women in ASEAN countries and the other countries represented.

Work of the Committees on Economic Matters, Social Matters and Organizational Matters

The Canadian parliamentarians attended the various committee meetings held on August 26 and 27. Based on their specific areas of interest, Ms. Mathyssen and Senator Munson focused on the activities of the Committee on Social Matters, which debated resolutions on a variety of topics: drug control in ASEAN countries, the quality of life of older persons, road safety, violence and exploitation of children, regional climate change initiatives, and justice for migrant and temporary workers. They were able to meet directly with some of the participants at these meetings and learn of progress.

Senator Oh focused on economic matters. The committee's agenda was to focus on inclusive economic development in the region, ASEAN cooperation to prepare for the fourth industrial revolution, new media and technological infrastructure development, and standardization and liberalization of air services under the ASEAN single aviation market. Senator Oh was able to observe the discussions and negotiations within this committee.

Senator Day focused on the Committee on Organizational Matters. Previous experience at AIPA and at the Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum, whose annual meeting Canada hosted in January 2016, was useful for monitoring internal management issues pertaining to the organization's operations. These included finance and the annual report to be adopted during the Assembly, the budget for the 2020 Assembly, and other important matters such as the guidelines for engagement with guest and observer countries, standardization of the format in drafting the resolutions of the various committees, efficiency of AIPA dialogue and its functioning mechanisms, and the venue of the next Annual Assembly. These useful discussions provided insights into some of AIPA's future directions.

Second plenary session

The second plenary session took place on the morning of August 29, followed by the closing ceremonies. During this session, the rapporteurs of the various committees presented the plenary assembly with the reports of their respective proceedings, debates and resolutions. This was followed by the representatives of the various member countries signing the joint communiqué that not only details the decisions taken, but also highlights the Annual Assembly's achievements with regard to regional cooperation and solidarity.

Participation in the AIPA Annual Assembly helped Canadian delegates maintain contact with representatives from various countries, some, but not all, of which will be participating in the Annual General Assembly of the Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum to be held in Canberra, Australia, in January 2020. It is also an opportunity for the Canada–Japan

Inter-Parliamentary Group and the Canada–China Legislative Association to maintain regular contact with parliamentarians from Asian countries at times other than during co-chair visits and bilateral meetings, in a different context and with aims that vary from those usually observed during strictly bilateral meetings.

Dialogues with observer countries

This activity was the cornerstone of Canada's participation in the General Assembly. On the afternoon of August 27, all observer countries had one and a half hours to formally meet with representatives of each of the 10 ASEAN member countries to discuss a specific topic: in Canada's case, the topic chosen was initiatives to promote good governance and regulatory best practices. This roundtable meeting allowed the delegation to lead the discussion.

It was agreed that Senator Day would initiate the conversation given his role as co-chair of the Standing Joint Committee for the Scrutiny of Regulations of the Senate and House of Commons. The conversation took a more general turn, also dealing with governance, regulatory mechanisms specific to certain industries and the challenges that some countries face in harmonizing their laws and regulations in the face of competition from other regions, including industrialized countries such as Canada. This engaging discussion allowed the Canada's four delegates to express their views and reflect the diversity of perspectives both in Canada and among ASEAN member countries.

2. Bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the official events

As is generally the case, the Canadian delegates tried to meet with an optimal number of delegates, both officially and informally, in order to maximize the impact of Canada's presence at AIPA.

Official meeting with the AIPA Secretariat

Again this year, the delegation had a formal meeting with Isra Sunthornvut, Secretary General of AIPA, at his request. He wished to meet with the delegations from the observer countries to discuss opportunities for strengthening ties with ASEAN member countries. Together with members of the AIPA Secretariat, Mr. Sunthornvut spoke with the delegates on a variety of topics, including transpacific cooperation and solidarity on issues such as single-use plastics, ocean debris and child protection. The delegates also reiterated Canada's commitment to the region and highlighted the importance of an ongoing and sustained relationship with ASEAN and, more specifically, its member countries.

Beyond this initial discussion, delegates used the meeting to raise other important topics such as education and the beneficial role that educational exchanges play in building relationships between Canada and several world regions, including Southeast Asia. The issue of human rights and the situation of the Rohingya were also brought up by Canada's delegates, who generally raise this issue whenever they have the opportunity to do so in these regional forums. It appears that regional consensus is difficult to achieve given the diversity of identities among ASEAN member countries. The delegates were able to have a frank and open conversation with the organization's secretariat. This is an issue that

Canada will continue to raise in the foreseeable future, at least until a viable solution is found to resolve this situation.

Meeting with the delegates from Australia

The delegation requested a meeting with the representatives of Australia. This is in keeping with the tradition of meeting the hosts of the upcoming Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum, if possible. These meetings allow delegates to make initial contact and also to offer Canada's assistance in organizing the event.

In addition, Canada and Australia are similar in terms of their socio-economic make-up. They are both former British colonies whose development and modern economy still rely on the development of natural resources. An issue familiar to both countries is that of Indigenous rights, and they are also dealing with certain geopolitical challenges, including their relations with China, which is increasingly emerging as a regional power, as well as the importance of diversifying their trade with the Asia-Pacific region. Both Canada and Australia are willing to play a greater role than that of a mere observer in ASEAN, if offered.

Both delegations committed to discussing all these topics and more at the Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum's Annual General Assembly in Canberra in January 2020.

Meeting with the delegates from China

On August 27, the Canadian delegation requested a meeting with the Chinese delegation. Given the current context of diplomatic relations between Canada and China, the association uses every possible opportunity to meet with its representatives. This meeting enabled Canada to reaffirm its position on Huawei, the arrest of Ms. Meng at the request of the American government, and the subsequent detention of Canadians Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig in China.

The purpose of this meeting was also to maintain an open dialogue between Canada and China despite the current turbulence in the relationship. According to the delegates, as well as the Chinese representatives, both countries have a long relationship that has been productive in many respects. Canada is home to a large Chinese diaspora, and both countries have extensive economic ties. Not only is this relationship important now, but it will become even more so in the future. There was recognition on both sides that China and Canada can learn from each other. To this end, China's delegates expressed an interest in Canada's environmental initiatives. The whole issue of single-use plastics and the problems they cause was raised, as well as measures to encourage a reduction in their use. Greenhouse gas management was also discussed. China believes that it can learn a lot from Canada on these environmental issues.

These discussions allowed the Canada–China Legislative Association to pursue some of the themes discussed at the 23rd bilateral meeting held in China in May 2019. Not only was this an opportunity to connect and build relationships with Chinese representatives, but the meeting also allowed Canada to reiterate some of its positions and express how the current situation is complicating public opinion. Both sides agreed that the 24th Bilateral Meeting to be held in Canada in 2020 would be a good opportunity to strengthen the ties between Canada and China and will help maintain diplomatic relations between the two countries.

In conclusion, Canada's participation in the 40th ASEAN General Assembly allowed parliamentarians to reaffirm Canada's commitment to the member countries. It also allowed the delegates to meet parliamentarians from the Asia-Pacific region, and other parts of the world, as well as engage in productive discussions that were beneficial to Canada and its diplomatic outreach internationally. The 41st General Assembly will be held in Halong City, Vietnam, and will be important for Canada to participate in order to build on what was accomplished at the 40th General Assembly in Bangkok in 2019.

Respectfully submitted,

The Honourable Joseph A. Day, Senator
Co-Chair

Canada-China Legislative Association

Terry Sheehan, M.P.
Co-Chair

Canada-Japan Inter-Parliamentary Group

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canada-China Legislative Association and Canada-Japan Inter-Parliamentary Group
ACTIVITY	40 th General Assembly of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA)
DESTINATION	Bangkok, Thailand
DATES	August 25-30, 2019
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Joseph A. Day, Senator Hon. Jim Munson, Senator Hon. Victor Oh, Senator
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Mrs. Irene Mathyssen, M.P.
STAFF	Mr. David Chandonnet, Association Secretary
TRANSPORTATION	\$42,022.37
ACCOMMODATION	\$6,669.58
HOSPITALITY	\$345.46
PER DIEMS	\$2,579.46
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$349.73
MISCELLANEOUS	\$99.68
TOTAL	\$52,066.28