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**Report of the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas**

**6th Gathering of ParlAmericas Open Parliament Network**

**Virtual Sessions**

**March 9, 15 and 22, 2022**

# Report

## Delegation members and staff

ParlAmericas held the 6<sup>th</sup> Gathering of the Open Parliament Network (OPN) on March 9, 15 and 22, 2022. The virtual meeting, which was hosted by Paraguay's Chamber of Senators, was focused on the theme of "Integrity Matters: Building Stronger Democracies." The meeting was attended by more than 180 parliamentarians, parliamentary staff, subject-matter experts, and representatives of both civil society and youth organizations from 19 countries of the Americas and the Caribbean.

Mr. Marc G. Serré, MP, Chair of the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas, led the Canadian delegation, which comprised Senator Rene Cormier, Vice-President (North America) of the OPN, Senator Mobina Jaffer, Vice-President (North America) of ParlAmericas' Parliamentary Network for Gender Equality and Randy Hoback, MP.

Ms. Julie Pelletier, Association Secretary, as well as Ms. Erin Virgint and Ms. Clare Annett, Advisors to the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas, supported the Canadian delegation.

## Activities during the 6th gathering of the open parliament network

Discussions were centred on public integrity, which is important not only in preventing and fighting corruption but also as one of the fundamental pillars of democratic governance.

### A. Dialogue with representatives of civil society and youth organizations: March 9, 2022

#### 1. OPENING REMARKS

In giving opening remarks, Paraguayan Senator Blanca Ovelar – President of ParlAmericas' Board of Directors – spoke about the importance of restoring the public's trust in political representatives and of promoting society's participation in democratic institutions. Senator Ovelar stressed the need to ensure that legislatures are practising democratic governance in a manner that aligns with the public interest, reduces corruption and is based on integrity. Senator Ovelar concluded by noting that collaboration between the public and private sectors must be part of democracy's "culture of integrity."

Costa Rican Deputy Ana Lucía Delgado provided opening remarks on behalf of the OPN. The focus of Deputy Delgado's remarks was recent OPN initiatives, such as the creation of a network of officers from legislatures in countries that are members of ParlAmericas; the network's objective is to share best practices regarding open parliament initiatives.

#### 2. KEYNOTE SPEAKER

As moderator, Senator Cormier stated that governments must work to build pillars of integrity across their political institutions and cultures, and commented that this integrity must include accountability and address corruption. As well, Senator Cormier introduced Dr. Daniel Ortega Nieto, Senior Governance Specialist with the World Bank.

Dr. Ortega Nieto spoke about cultivating a culture of integrity in democratic spaces through three pillars – system, culture and accountability – and asserted that, to strengthen these pillars, governments require data and evidence. According to Dr. Ortega Nieto, governments must foster integrity because corruption affects a country's most vulnerable groups and leads to inequality. Dr. Ortega Nieto drew attention to the Worldwide Governance Indicator on Violence and Accountability and Rule of Law, noting that – unlike most other regions – evaluations for countries in the Americas have declined in the last decade; for example, in many of the countries in the Americas, approximately 25% of people believe that public officials are corrupt. Dr. Ortega Nieto explained that, beyond enhancing data and evidence as a tool for improving integrity, public policies that both encourage society to be involved in democracy and ensure that the public feels a responsibility to improve the integrity of governments and elected officials are important.

### **3. YOUTH AND CIVIL SOCIETY REPRESENTATIVES**

Representatives of youth and civil society organizations underscored the need to improve integrity and fight corruption. They argued that democracy and integrity in public institutions have been affected by the current economic and social contexts, including technology and media. In addition, they spoke about the need to engage with youth to increase their participation in democracy.

Senator Jaffer highlighted the importance of transparency in government decision making and provided the example of the implementation of gender-based analysis plus (GBA Plus) in Canada. In explaining that certain documents that are protected by “Cabinet Confidence” undergo GBA Plus but without these analyses being released publicly, Senator Jaffer advocated greater transparency and public access to these analyses.

### **4. CLOSING REMARKS**

Belizean Senate President, Ms. Carolyn Trench-Sandiford, delivered closing remarks. In concluding that public integrity is not solely a concern for the public sector, Senator Trench-Sandiford emphasized that fostering greater integrity requires the participation of society as a whole, including both the public and the private sectors. Senator Trench-Sandiford suggested that civic education campaigns on public integrity could help to raise awareness about the importance of improving public integrity.

## **B. INTER-PARLIAMENTARY DIALOGUE: MARCH 15, 2022**

### **1. OPENING REMARKS**

Paraguayan Senator Ms. Hermelinda Alvarenga de Ortega and Ecuadorean Deputy Ms. Wilma Andrade provided opening remarks. Senator Alvarenga de Ortega noted that there is a lack of transparency in public affairs in Latin America and mentioned that corruption significantly affects democratic affairs. In agreeing, Deputy Andrade asked fellow

ParlAmericas members to maintain an open dialogue about the fight against political corruption. As well, Deputy Andrade stressed the importance of establishing robust and strong strategies that promote public integrity to build or regain the public's trust in parliamentary institutions.

## **2. KEYNOTE PANEL**

Trinidadian Speaker Ms. Bridgid Annisette-George, Vice-President of ParlAmericas, moderated a panel discussion on the topic of "New Challenges and Trends in Advancing Public Integrity." The presenters were:

- Mr. René Fernández Bobadilla, Minister Executive Secretary of Paraguay's National Anticorruption Secretariat;
- Mr. Julio Bacio Terracino, Head of Division, Public Sector Integrity with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; and
- Mr. Radivoje Grujic, Democratic Governance Officer, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

Mr. Fernández Bobadilla's presentation focused on Paraguay's experience in developing a national public integrity strategy. According to Mr. René Fernández Bobadilla, the strategy aims to promote transparency, improve access to public information, enhance citizen participation, develop a culture of public integrity, establish a framework for public procurement, and provide strong investigative and sanctioning capacities for acts of corruption.

Mr. Bacio Terracino noted that public integrity strategies are increasingly necessary as confidence and trust in democratic systems is declining, particularly among youth. In the view of Mr. Bacio Terracino, the key features of an integrity-centred approach to governance include rules that are consistently applied and enforced, the promotion of a culture of integrity in all public bodies and the existence of effective accountability mechanisms. Mr. Bacio Terracino concluded by stating that parliaments play an integral role in establishing, promoting and maintaining public integrity.

Mr. Grujic spoke about instruments that can be implemented by parliaments to reduce the risks associated with corrupt practices and to strengthen integrity in the legislative branch. In particular, Mr. Grujic suggested that codes of conduct, ethics committees, conflict-of-interest regulations and legislation, and training for legislators and staff may strengthen integrity in the legislative branch.

## **3. WORKING GROUPS**

Working Group 1, which was focused on regulating conflicts of interest and was moderated by Jamaican Member of Parliament Mr. Robert Nesta Morgan, provided participants with an opportunity to discuss current legislative practices relating to public integrity and conflict-of-interest management. Participants agreed that a major challenge in establishing a conflict-of-interest regime is obtaining support from all political parties. They also noted that the adoption of codes of ethics and/or conduct for parliamentarians

is critical for encouraging ethical behaviour. In their opinion, parliaments should also regularly provide parliamentarians and their staff with training about conflicts of interest.

Senator Jaffer mentioned improvements in the Parliament of Canada's conflict-of-interest and ethics regimes over the last 20 years. In Senator Jaffer's view, the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner and the Senate Ethics Officer in the Senate of Canada play a vital role in informing parliamentarians on matters relating to ethics and in monitoring compliance.

Working Group II, which was focused on "Public Integrity Systems," had no Canadian participants.

## **C. PLENARY SESSION: MARCH 22, 2022**

### **1. OPENING REMARKS**

Senator Alvarenga de Ortega welcomed participants before speaking about the importance of sharing legislative practices in order to advance public integrity and combat corruption.

### **2. KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

Ms. Delia Ferreira, Chair of Transparency International, gave a keynote address on the topic of "Strengthening Public Integrity for Democratic Governance." Dominican Speaker Joseph Isaac moderated the session.

Ms. Ferreira's presentation highlighted the value of promoting integrity systems within parliamentary bodies, noting that such systems are essential for combatting political corruption and regaining both the public's trust and its confidence in democratic institutions.

According to Delia Ferreira, laws that define the actions that qualify as ethical or unethical are essential to integrity systems, and laws also reduce confusion and promote predictability for parliamentarians. As well, Ms. Ferreira suggested that laws are not effective without enforcement, and asserted that legislatures have an important role to play in protecting the independence of the judiciary as public integrity laws are enforced.

Ms. Ferreira concluded by explaining that, over the last 20 years, political corruption has evolved into a highly complex, cross-border phenomena and the traditional methods of fighting corruption are no longer efficient. In Ms. Ferreira's opinion, independent, expert bodies with the mandate to monitor public corruption should be established, and they should have both the legal authority needed to enforce anti-corruption measures and adequate resources to carry out their work effectively.

Following the presentation, Mr. Serré asked Ms. Ferreira to provide thoughts about the ways in which parliamentarians can collaborate effectively with civil society organizations. In responding, Ms. Ferreira contended that public education is the best way to include representatives of civil society organizations, particularly youth, on matters related to public integrity.

### **3. LAUNCH OF THE ROAD MAP TOWARDS LEGISLATIVE OPENNESS 2.0**

Senator Ovelar presented ParlAmericas' [Road Map towards Legislative Openness 2.0](#), which builds on the road map that was adopted in 2016 at the 1<sup>st</sup> Gathering of ParlAmericas' OPN: the [Road Map towards Legislative Openness](#).

The 2016 road map, which was the OPN's guiding document in ParlAmericas' initial efforts to advance open parliament initiatives, identified four pillars for democratic governance: transparency, accountability, citizen participation, and ethics and probity. To update the roadmap, ParlAmericas consulted with legislators and parliamentary officials, as well as with representatives of civil society organizations, in 29 countries. The 2022 road map, which will be the OPN's guiding framework, provides examples of possible actions that could strengthen legislative openness, discusses the four pillars in relatively greater detail, and explains why open parliament action plans are important mechanisms for advancing parliamentary openness.

#### **4. OPEN GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP PRESENTATION**

Due to its relevance to the OPN's work, Mme Lotte Geunis – Open Parliament Consultant with the [Open Government Partnership](#) (OGP) – presented the OGP's [Memorandum on Parliamentary Engagement](#). Mme Geunis explained that the OGP is a multilateral, voluntary initiative in which member countries work to secure concrete commitments that are designed to fight corruption, promote governmental transparency, empower citizens, and use new technologies both to strengthen governance and to provide improved public services.

As noted by Mme Geunis, the OGP focuses predominantly on assisting member states to develop open government action plans and to monitor progress, and it has developed a framework for parliamentary engagement.

#### **5. COMMITMENTS**

Participants reported on the progress made in their countries' legislatures concerning implementation of the commitments presented at the March 2021 OPN meeting. Delegations from the following countries highlighted some of the initiatives that they have been undertaking in relation to legislative openness: Bolivia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Panama and Saint Lucia.

Senator Cormier provided an update on the Canadian Section's most recent activities concerning an open parliament action plan. In particular, Senator Cormier identified the work done in 2021 by the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas' Subcommittee on Open Parliament concerning the development of a draft "road map" for the creation of an open parliament action plan for the Parliament of Canada. In noting that the Subcommittee adopted the roadmap in August 2021, Senator Cormier also commented that – despite not having such a subcommittee in the 44th Parliament – the Canadian Section is committed to continuing its work on the road map, and intends to present it to the Canadian Section's executive committee for approval.

Finally, participants adopted a [final declaration](#) recognizing that developing public integrity strategies is essential in combatting corruption, strengthening governance, safeguarding democratic values in ParlAmericas' member countries. As well, the election of Barbadian

Senate President Mr. Reginald Farley to fill the vacant seat for the Caribbean on the OPN's executive committee was announced.

Respectfully submitted,

Marc G. Serré, MP  
Chair, Canadian Section of ParlAmericas

**Travel Costs**

<b>ASSOCIATION</b>	Canadian Section of ParlAmericas
<b>ACTIVITY</b>	6th Gathering of ParlAmericas Open Parliament Network
<b>DESTINATION</b>	Videoconference
<b>DATES</b>	March 9, 15 and 22, 2022
<b>DELEGATION</b>	
SENATE	Hon. René Cormier Hon. Mobina Jaffer
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Mr. Marc G. Serré Mr. Randy Hoback
STAFF	Ms. Julie Pelletier Ms. Erin Virgint Ms. Clare Annett
<b>TRANSPORTATION</b>	\$ 0.00
<b>ACCOMMODATION</b>	\$ 0.00
<b>HOSPITALITY</b>	\$ 0.00
<b>PER DIEMS</b>	\$ 0.00
<b>OFFICIAL GIFTS</b>	\$ 0.00
<b>MISCELLANEOUS</b>	\$ 0.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>

