

Canada – Africa
Parliamentary Association



Association parlementaire
Canada – Afrique

Report of the Canada–Africa Parliamentary Association

Bilateral Visit to Senegal

Dakar, Senegal

From November 5 to 10, 2022

Report

A delegation from the Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association visited Senegal from November 5 to 10, 2022. The Honourable Amina Gerba, Senator, Co-Chair of the Association, and Brenda Shanahan, M.P., Co-Chair of the Association, led the delegation composed of the Honourable René Cormier, Senator, and Mr. Jamie Schmale, M.P. Accompanying the delegation was Rémi Bourgault, Association Secretary.

Objectives of the mission to Senegal

The objectives of the Association's visit to Senegal were the following:

- to strengthen bilateral relations and parliamentary cooperation;
- to engage with parliamentarians on issues related to multi-party democracy, governance, human rights, and the rule of law;
- to learn about the role played by women in Senegal's National Assembly;
- to meet with community groups to discuss the status of women and their empowerment;
- to discuss the situation of the LGBTIQ+ community with community groups;
- to meet with government officials to further the Association's understanding of the current political situation in Senegal;
- to discuss the conflict affecting the Casamance region;
- to engage with civil society organizations on issues related to human rights, freedom of the press, and the rule of law;
- to learn how Senegal is addressing development challenges, including public health issues such as HIV/AIDS and maternal, newborn and child health;
- to understand the impact of the deployment of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) for Senegal and West Africa, the opportunities it offers for the region, and the local challenges it faces in its implementation;
- to meet with business associations to gain new perspectives on the economic situation in Senegal and to discuss how the global economic outlook is affecting the country; and
- to engage with United Nations organizations working in the area of economic and social development in the region; and learn more about

Canada's support to Senegal in the areas of development, peace and security.

VISIT TO SENEGAL

Senegal is a country situated in west Africa. It is bordered by Mauritania to the north, Mali to the east, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau to the South, and the Atlantic Ocean to the west. The Gambia is almost an enclave that extends from the coast eastward into Senegal along the Gambia River. The capital of Senegal is Dakar. According to 2022 estimates, the country has a population of 17.9 million people. 97.2% of the population are Muslims while 2.7% are Christians¹. Muslim religious leaders are socially and economically influential. Senegal's official language is French, but some 38 Indigenous languages are also spoken in the country.

Historical Overview²

Most of the region that is now Senegal has been inhabited for at least several thousand years. Starting in the 15th century, Portugal, the Netherlands, France, and Great Britain traded along the Senegalese coast. Senegal's location on the western tip of Africa made it a favourable base for the Atlantic slave trade. European merchants used the Senegalese island of Gorée as a base to buy slaves from the continent's kingdoms. At the height of the slave trade in Senegal, more than a third of the Senegalese population was enslaved.

During the second half of the 19th century, French colonists progressively invaded the kingdoms on the Senegalese mainland. In the 1940s, Senegalese political life was increasingly influenced by nationalist movements elsewhere in Africa, as well as by high internal tensions. Senegal achieved independence in 1960, first as part of the short-lived Mali Federation and then as a wholly sovereign state. Léopold Senghor was elected Senegal's first president in August 1960.

As president, Senghor maintained collaboration internally with the powerful Muslim religious leadership and externally with France. Senghor presided over a relatively stable country through his Socialist Party (PS) who remained in power until 1981, when he stepped down. He was succeeded by the then Prime Minister Abdou Diouf. Diouf continued Senghor's pro-Western policies and oversaw Senegal's gradual political liberalization.

In March 2000, opposition leader Abdoulaye Wade won presidential elections widely seen as free and fair. Wade's victory and Diouf's peaceful transfer of power to Wade's Senegalese Democratic Party (PDS) were hailed as a landmark for democracy in Senegal and the region, which had seen few democratic transitions between civilian leaders³. Wade was re-elected in 2007.

¹ Central Intelligence Agency, "[Senegal](#)," The World Factbook.

² Unless otherwise noted, the source of information for this section is: Britannica Digital Learning, "[Senegal](#)," Britannica Academic.

³ Ibid.

In the February 2012 presidential election, Wade failed in his effort to win a third term in office, losing to one-time ally Macky Sall. Wade's third-term candidacy had been controversial within Senegal, provoking protests in Dakar and sparking concerns over potential political instability.

Recent Political Developments

President Macky Sall has taken steps to reverse some actions undertaken by his predecessor. In September 2012, backed by the National Assembly, he abolished the upper legislative chamber, the Senate, in which 65 of 100 members had been appointed by the president. The Senate, which Abdoulaye Wade had reinstated in 2007 after earlier doing away with a similar body, was widely viewed as a tool of political patronage⁴. A 2016 constitutional referendum reduced the presidential term from seven years to five years and limited the president to two terms in office.

In February 2019, voters re-elected Macky Sall to a second term. Two of Sall's most prominent challengers, Khalifa Sall and Karim Wade, were barred from standing in the election because of their criminal records.

President Macky Sall faces challenges in responding to public expectations of better employment opportunities and a lower cost of living. A worsening regional security outlook also preoccupies the Senegalese government, particularly given terrorist activity in neighbouring Mali. Terrorist networks active in West Africa, including Al Qaeda in the Islam Maghreb, have not successfully carried out attacks within Senegal to date, but Senegal is potentially vulnerable to violent extremist infiltration and recruitment⁵.

The System of Government

Under Senegal's current constitution, promulgated in 2001 and amended in 2016, the country is a presidential republic with a president directly elected by absolute majority vote for a five-year term renewable only once⁶. The president is the head of state and the head of the armed forces. The prime minister and members of the cabinet, called the Council of Ministers, are appointed by the president.

Senegal's unicameral parliament is the 165-seat National Assembly. Parliamentary elections are held every five years with the most recent held on 31 July 2022. The electoral system is mixed; 112 members are directly elected from constituencies by majority vote, and 53 members are elected by proportional representation. In the most recent elections, the presidential coalition, Benno Bokk Yaakaar (United in Hope), won 82 seats, losing its majority in the National Assembly. Yewwi Askan Wi (Liberate the People), a coalition led by Ousmane Sonko, won 56 seats while the Wallu Sénégal (Save Senegal) coalition, led by former President Abdoulaye Wade, took 24 seats. Three minority parties each hold one seat. In the 2022 elections, 73 of the 165 members that were elected to Parliament were women, accounting for 44.2% of the total membership⁷.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Senegal, National Assembly, "[Organisation internationale du travail, Constitution du Sénégal](#)".

⁷ Inter-Parliamentary Union, "[Senegal](#)," IPU Parline.

The President of the National Assembly is elected by the members for the five-year duration of the legislature. The current President of the National Assembly is Amadou Mame Diop, member of the Benno Bokk Yaakaar coalition⁸.

In addition to introducing and passing legislation, Senegal's parliament exercises an oversight function regarding government action. This oversight function consists of asking written or oral questions to members of government as well as establishing parliamentary committees of inquiry with specific terms of reference.

The judiciary is independent of the other two branches of government. Judicial power in Senegal is exercised by the Constitutional Council, the Council of State, the Court of Cassation, the Court of Accounts, and other courts and tribunals.

Governance and Human Rights

Senegal is one of the most politically stable countries in West Africa. It ranks above the regional average for Africa on several global indices that measure governance, democracy and corruption. For example, Senegal ranks 88th out of 167 countries assessed by the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index 2021. Similarly, Senegal ranks 73th out of 180 countries assessed by Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Notwithstanding its relatively strong rankings on these and other indices, several organizations have raised concerns about certain aspects of the political and human rights situation in Senegal.

Casamance Conflict

While the majority of Senegalese are Muslims, a Christian minority, the Jola, inhabits the southern region of Casamance. Economic factors, particularly high levels of youth unemployment⁹, as well as religious differences have contributed to conflict between this region and the capital. In 1982, independence leaders in Casamance founded a separatist movement, the Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC). Tensions between the Senegalese government and the MFDC have led to intrastate conflict that has killed approximately 3,000 to 5,000 people and displaced close to 50,000 people¹⁰.

Several ceasefires and peace agreements between the government and the MFDC have been negotiated throughout the years. Additionally, the separatist movement has long been internally fragmented with the emergence of various factions of the MFDC. President Macky Sall prioritizes peace talks and violence has decreased since a spike in 2009.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Gabriella Jozwiak, "[Senegal's secret civil conflict: what's the future for its young people?](#)" The Guardian, 26 May 2014.

¹⁰ Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights in Geneva, "[Senegal: A Non-International Armed Conflict in Casamance.](#)"

Economic Situation

Senegal's economy mostly revolves around mining, construction, tourism, fisheries and agriculture, which are the primary sources of employment. The economy grew by more than 6% annually between 2014 and 2018. However, GDP growth is expected to slow from 6.1% in 2021 to 5% in 2022¹¹.

Consumer price inflation averaged 5.5% in the second quarter of 2022, driven mainly by shortages and increases in the price of food and energy. These shortages and price increases can be explained by the disruption of the global value chain due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian war on Ukraine¹².

The Economist Intelligence Unit has forecasted that the GDP will expand by an average of 8.1% in 2023–2024. Ongoing exploration and development work in Senegal's oil and gas sector will contribute toward economic growth during that period¹³.

Canada-Senegal Relations

Canada and Senegal established diplomatic relations in 1962. Relations between the two countries touch on a range of areas including commercial activities, promoting peace and security, and providing development and humanitarian assistance.

In 2021, bilateral merchandise trade between Canada and Senegal totalled \$184.1 million, including \$179.2 million in exports and \$4.9 million in imports. Canada's commercial involvement in Senegal features growth potential in the mining, agriculture, oil, gas, clean energy, and digital sectors¹⁴.

Canada and Senegal also collaborate to promote peace and security in the region. In particular, the Armed Forces of Senegal are involved in Canada's Military Training and Cooperation Program. Canada is also supporting Senegal in implementing its Armed Forces' Gender Integration Strategy in order to increase the number of women in its ranks¹⁵.

Finally, Canada is a long-standing partner in Senegal's development, having provided nearly \$1.3 billion in official development assistance since 1962¹⁶. More recently, Canada provided over \$78 million in development assistance to Senegal in 2020–2021. Canada is also supporting Senegal in its efforts to reduce gender inequalities, strengthen the rights of girls and women, and promote their full participation in society.

Monday, November 7 (Parliament, Politics and Civil Society)

Information Session with Civil Society Organizations

¹¹ The World Bank, "[Senegal: Overview](#)."

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Economist Intelligence Unit, "[Senegal Country Report](#)"

¹⁴ Government of Canada, "[Canada-Senegal relations](#)."

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

The meeting focused on the political situation, women's rights, and the security situation in Senegal and the region. While the civil society leaders we met were pleased that the July 2022 parliamentary elections were peaceful, they raised concerns about the political climate in the country ahead of the 2024 presidential election.

While the ruling coalition has only a short majority of one member in the assembly (compared to +43 previously), tensions are high in the chamber. Street protests are also becoming more frequent. The session participants reported a climate of political unease and growing dissent among young opposition supporters in relation to President Macky Sall's intention to seek a third term.

Meeting with Cultural Sector Representatives

The delegation met with representatives from Senegal's cultural sector. They spoke about the vitality of Dakar's cultural sector. The relationship that exists with educational institutions in Canada for vocational training, as for technicians, was discussed. The delegates also learned about the history and future plans of Dakar's Biennial of Contemporary African Art.

Meeting with His Excellency Mamadou Mame Diop, President of the National Assembly of Senega

For this meeting, the President of the National Assembly of Senegal, His Excellency Mamadou Mame Diop, was accompanied by the Honourable Aissatou Sow Diawara, Member and Vice-President of the National Assembly of Senegal; the Honourable Gnima Goudiaby, Member and Vice-President of the National Assembly of Senegal; the Honourable Babacar Mbengue, Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Senegalese of the Exterior and African Integration; and the Honourable Abou Mbow, Chair of the Committee on Laws, Decentralization, Labour and Human Rights.

President Diop welcomed the delegation and the ambassador. He believes that it is important to revitalize relations between Senegal and Canada, a country he has visited several times. At the head of the first joint government-opposition assembly in Senegal's history, Mr. Diop acknowledged the challenges ahead of him. However, the Senegalese parliamentarians present affirmed their confidence in the new president to carry out this legislative assembly with an unprecedented composition and the important two-year presidential term.

Speaking of the National Assembly of Senegal, he recalled the abolition of the Senegal Senate in 2012. Together with the President, the National Assembly has eight vice-presidents and several committee chairs. The parliamentary session begins in October and ends in June of the following year, about nine months later. It can also meet for extraordinary sessions. Senegalese parliamentarians have a wide range of powers, including passing laws and assessing public authorities. The Senegalese parliamentarians in attendance expressed pride in having President Diop—a president for parity—and rely heavily on him.

With regard to the presence of women in the National Assembly, the participants noted that things have changed. Women parliamentarians now come from all walks of life,

including educated women and women who have received less education. The presence of women in politics has been a long journey in Senegal. However, the country has seen important female figures who have paved the way since the colonial era, long before the gender parity law. Women parliamentarians with experience coach and encourage their young colleagues. Parliamentarians say they are confident about the future of women in politics in Senegal despite the persistence of certain barriers.

Senegalese parliamentarians mentioned the country's young people, which are an important "resource" to invest in. The government is working to facilitate university and vocational education, including reducing tuition costs and increasing scholarships. On the development of the country's oil resources, the delegates learned that the profits will be reinvested in the country and its people. As for the environmental issues raised by the development of these resources, Chairman Diop affirmed that the companies will have to comply with environmental standards.

In closing, despite countries moving away from La Francophonie, President Diop reiterated the importance for Senegal of belonging to the organization.

Tuesday, November 8 (Trade Relations, Human Rights, Diplomacy)

Interview with Representatives of the External Trade Policy Division of the Ministry of Trade and SMEs

The delegation met with officials of the External Trade Policy Division of the Ministry of Trade, Consumer Affairs and SMEs to discuss the economic situation in the country.

The exchanges provided an opportunity for Senegalese officials to explain the need for the establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) for Senegal and West Africa and to outline the highlights of the policies related to this undertaking. They also shared the significant efforts and challenges associated with finalizing the protocol on goods and rules of origin that should govern the issuance of products' certificates of origin recognition. Some signatory countries are campaigning for the adoption of flexible, dynamic rules of origin that will change over time, pointing to a need for regional expertise on these issues.

The issue of Canada's Least Developed Country Tariff for countries in this category (duty-free importation of goods originating from these countries) was also raised. Senegalese representatives mentioned the country's efforts to exit the category of least developed countries, but they recommend that a transitional tax regime be put in place to support Senegal so that its exit does not end up penalizing facilities that would no longer qualify.

Interview with Fatou Niang, President of WIC

The parliamentary delegation had the opportunity to visit the offices of the Women's Investment Club (WIC), an association of women entrepreneurs (private sector) that established and manages an impact fund dedicated to supporting women's entrepreneurship in West Africa, WIC Capital.

In Senegal, access to financing for women entrepreneurs is very limited and often only includes traditional financial mechanisms, such as banks and microfinance institutions.

The WIC Capital Fund aims to connect women entrepreneurs with modern financial instruments and promote women's leadership and skills (through the WIC Academy) and then identify and develop a portfolio of promising SMEs that will contribute to the development of economies in Senegal and West Africa.

The projects in which WIC Capital participates are selected based on profitability and the ability to create jobs and value for the local value chain. In the opinion of the members of the delegation, this meeting allowed us to better appreciate the tremendous vitality and creative strength of Senegalese women entrepreneurs and their desire to transform their society.

Meeting with Robert Kotchani, Regional Representative of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the human rights situation in Senegal and the region. The complicated issue of defending the basic human rights of LGBTIQ+ people in Senegal was discussed with the OHCHR, whose parliamentary delegation visited the headquarters in Dakar.

The new representative of the OHCHR in Senegal described the work of his office and how the organization addresses challenges in supporting communities at risk.

Wednesday, 9 November (Cooperation and Development)

The members of the delegation travelled to Thiès, a city an hour from Dakar. This visit provided an opportunity to meet with implementing partners for international assistance projects funded by Canada.

During a courtesy visit with the new Governor of the Thiès region, the parties discussed the objectives of the mission and presented the day's agenda. The Embassy of Canada took the opportunity to highlight the many projects funded by Canadian cooperation and the importance of this region for Canada, recalling in passing the visit of Minister Harjit Sajjan in March 2022. The Governor mentioned the visit in 2020 of former Governor General of Canada, Michaëlle Jean.

Visit to the SOCODEVI Project

The first project visited was that of the Canadian NGO SOCODEVI and its local partner, Union régionale de coopératives de construction et d'habitat de Thiès, which is helping to improve the living conditions of nearly 6,500 families that are members of housing cooperatives in the region.

Recipients spoke about the support received through the project and the delegation also heard from various stakeholders how Canada's support facilitates the acquisition of social housing by building the capacity and skills of co-operative housing members. The delegation then went to the construction site of a pilot villa built from compressed earth blocks, highlighting the energy-efficient advantages of this technique.

Working Lunch with Nutrition International

The delegation also participated in a working lunch with Nutrition International and two young women benefiting from the activities of the Thiès Centre Conseils pour Adolescents, which is supported by Canada. The Centre provides reproductive health and nutrition services to young people aged 10 to 24, including weekly iron and folic acid supplements, menstrual hygiene kits, and nutrition and sexual and reproductive health advice, including on HIV/AIDS.

The meeting provided an opportunity to openly discuss issues related to access to reproductive health services for adolescent girls, as well as barriers to gender equality and social empowerment for girls. Other topics discussed related to youth: access to quality education, combating forced marriage, and access to employment, all drivers of social and economic empowerment.

Tour of the Tostan Project

The tour of Thiès then led the delegation to the village of Sam Ndiaye where they met the staff of the Senegalese NGO Tostan and the beneficiaries of the project “When She Leads, Everyone Succeeds.”

The project proposes tailored approaches to strengthen the rights of women and girls and address harmful practices such as child marriage, early pregnancies and female genital mutilation. This training centre created by Tostan has trained more than 700 participants from 49 countries on their human rights-based approach.

After a warm welcome of singing and dancing by the women of the village and the opening words of the Imam, Tostan presented their activities and their approach, which centres the community in their interventions. The representatives of the community management committee shared the village’s mapped vision to provide a visual of their priorities and actions in promoting maternal and child health and child education, among other initiatives.

Thursday, 10 November (Duty of Remembrance)

The delegation visited the island of Gorée, a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1978, and the House of Slaves. This island was witness to part of the history of Senegal and Africa. The delegation then visited the African Renaissance Monument, accompanied by its architect, Pierre Goudiaby Atepa.

Other Business

At the beginning of its stay, the delegation visited the Museum of Black Civilizations and the National Gallery of Arts as well as the exhibition of the Collective des Femmes plasticiennes [Women Artists Collective].

During a working lunch, the delegation met with the heads of mission from The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau in Senegal to outline the objectives of the delegation’s visit to Senegal and its interest in these same topics in the countries of the region.

The conversations revolved around the peace and security context at the national and regional level, the cumulative impacts of the war in Ukraine and the pandemic on

populations, the situation of democracy, human rights and women's empowerment in our respective countries.

Both ambassadors showed great interest and vigorously advocated for Canada to be more engaged and active in supporting the search for African solutions to African problems. Despite the absence of a bilateral development program in The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau, Canada is able to carry out targeted interventions through its multilateral program and funds for local initiatives. However, both diplomats see opportunities for Canada to do more in their country in the form of support for electoral processes, training of security forces, post-secondary education scholarship programs, trade, and funding for job-creating initiatives for youth facing chronic unemployment.

At another event, the delegates met with three women parliamentarians to discuss the situation of women parliamentarians in Senegal and the challenges they face.

Comments

At the end of their visit, the Canadian parliamentarians expressed that they found the various exchanges enriching and stimulating and noted in particular how field visits helped deepen their knowledge and understanding of Senegal. The delegates were able to measure the impact of Canada's actions in improving the living conditions of the population, while gaining a better understanding of the political, economic, social and cultural issues of Senegal and the region. The delegates would like to acknowledge the passion of the civil society actors, the vitality and creative strength of women entrepreneurs, and the extraordinary potential for economic, cultural and social cooperation with Senegal and Africa as a whole, concluding that Canada has an essential role to play in this region.

Discussions with stakeholders in the community revealed the importance of the Government of Canada revising immigration processes and adapting them to new technological changes. For example, the government should consider creating an application that works with all operating systems for applicants.

Canada would benefit from strengthening ties with Senegal and not just as a partner of La Francophonie. The country is an important economic, cultural and democratic player in the West African region.

Acknowledgments

The delegation would like to thank the staff of the Parliament of Senegal for organizing the itinerary for the visit to Parliament.

Conclusion

The delegation would like to thank the Ambassador of Canada to Senegal, Marie-Geneviève Mounier, as well as the dedicated staff at the embassy, for organizing a very comprehensive itinerary and for contributing to the success of the visit. The delegates would also like to express their appreciation to the officials from Global Affairs Canada and the Library of Parliament who helped produce the necessary background material.

Respectfully submitted,

Hon. Amina Gerba, Senator
Co-Chair Canada-Africa Parliamentary
Association

Brenda Shanahan,MP
Co-Chair Canada-Africa Parliamentary
Association

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association
ACTIVITY	Bilateral Visit to Senegal
DESTINATION	Dakar, Senegal
DATES	November 5 to 10, 2022
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Amina Ger Hon. René Cormier
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Brenda Shanahan Jamie Schmale
STAFF	Rémi Bourgault
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 33,072.98
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 13,900.71
PER DIEMS	\$ 3,273.39
HOSPITALITY	\$ 2,448.64
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 562.22
MISCELLANEOUS	\$ 4,010.06
TOTAL	\$ 57,268.00