

Section canadienne de
l'Assemblée parlementaire
de la Francophonie



Canadian Branch of the
Assemblée parlementaire
de la Francophonie

Report of the Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie

Bureau Meeting of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie

Brussels (Belgium)

January 25–28, 2024

Report

The parliamentary delegation of the Canadian Branch that participated in the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF) Bureau meeting in Brussels, Belgium, from January 25 to 28, 2024, has the honour to present its report.

The Canadian delegation was composed of Mr. **Francis Drouin**, MP, President of the APF and Chair of the Canadian Branch, Mr. **Joël Godin**, MP and Chair of the APF's Parliamentary Affairs Committee, and Mr. **Darrell Samson**, MP, Acting Chair and Vice-Chair of the Canadian Branch. Ms. Julie Pelletier accompanied the delegation as the Executive Secretary.

The Bureau brought together about 20 francophone parliamentarians from five continents. In addition to the Canadian Branch, parliamentarians from the Belgium/French Community/Wallonia-Brussels, Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, France, Luxembourg, Jura, Morocco, New Brunswick, Ontario, Quebec, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Switzerland, Vietnam and New Caledonia branches, as well as representatives of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) and the Association des secrétaires généraux des parlements francophones (ASGPF), took part in the proceedings.

Commencement of proceedings

The proceedings began with speeches by the President of the Parliament of the Wallonia Brussels Federation, Mr. Rudy Demotte, and Mr. **Francis Drouin**, President of the APF and Chair of the Canadian Branch. The parliamentarians also learned about the Parliament of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, whose mission is to represent Belgium's French-speaking community.

Bureau and APF membership

After adopting the agenda and the minutes of the Bureau meeting held in Tbilisi on July 4, 2023, the participants acknowledged certain changes in the Bureau's composition: (a) the replacement of Mr. Charles Juillard with Mr. Nicolas Walder for the Swiss Branch; (b) the appointment of Mr. Daniel Allain, Member of the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick, as Chair of his Branch; and (c) the departure of Mr. Faustin Boukoubi, former First Vice-President; Mrs. Angélique Ngoma, former Chair of the Economic, Social and Environmental Affairs Committee; and Mr. Seyni Oumarou, former Member, following the dissolution of the parliaments of Gabon and Niger.

The Bureau decided to refer to the Political Committee the request to change the status of the Andorra General Council from associate member to that of Branch member, as well as the requests from the Assemblies of Angola (member), Cyprus (associate) and Pondicherry (observer).

Hearing of the OIF Administrator

The delegates heard from the OIF Administrator, Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire. She noted the dynamic relationship between the OIF and the APF, which was highlighted through the APF's participation in the Ministerial Conference of La Francophonie in November 2023. She also acknowledged the APF's vital contribution to OIF projects, notably citing

interparliamentary cooperation programs and the legislative corpus project, and confirmed that the OIF will maintain its grant to the APF in 2024 at a level equivalent to that of 2023.

Her presentation was followed by questions from parliamentarians that touched on (a) funding provided by the OIF for initiatives aimed at young people; (b) how to improve cooperation between the two organizations for electoral missions; (c) the harassment policy adopted by the OIF; and (d) how to promote the APF's work within the OIF, particularly the work involving citizen mobility in La Francophonie.

General Delegate's 2023 activity report

The General Delegate (GD), Mr. Bruno Fuchs, noted that in 2023, the organization had begun to explore new avenues to better meet the contemporary challenges faced by La Francophonie, notably through the creation of the OIF-APF Policy Committee; President **Drouin's** campaign to obtain status with the United Nations; discussions undertaken on improving citizen mobility in La Francophonie, which will be presented to heads of state and government at the Summit of La Francophonie in 2024; and the investment in relationships with other interparliamentary organizations such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the Parliament of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Pan-African Parliament.

In terms of activities, the GD spoke about parliamentarians' participation during the OIF good offices mission in Armenia and electoral missions in Guinea-Bissau, Cambodia, Comoros and Madagascar. He also highlighted the fact that the APF focused its diplomatic efforts in Africa in 2023, with missions in Niger, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, Cameroon, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Senegal and Gabon.

Lastly, the GD noted that the APF's institutions were strengthened at the 48th Annual Session through the adoption of the revised Constitution, the 2023–2030 Strategic framework and a new Code of the Ordre de la Pléiade. Furthermore, the APF continued to expand in 2023 with the arrival of a new branch: the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. The APF is currently comprised of 92 branches, or 56 members, 18 associate members and 18 observers.

Review of the political situation in the francophone community

The GD submitted to Bureau members a list of parliamentary diplomacy missions for 2024 that would promote the APF and its work in various international organizations; engage with parliamentary assemblies to encourage them to join the APF or to return to the APF; and, in the event of a crisis in certain countries, seek to understand the issues and help restore democratic order. Lastly, he mentioned a possible collaboration with an NGO specializing in international mediation that could respond to mediation requests during political crises.

Several parliamentarians also spoke: Ms. Amélia Lakrafi (France) noted that the objectives of the various missions proposed should be more precise. Ms. Nathalie Roy (Quebec) said that it would be desirable to have a breakdown by activity and clarification of the processes leading to the selection of various missions. Mr. **Darrell Samson**

(Canada) said that he shared the concerns of his colleagues and added that it would be necessary to identify how the missions are in line with the APF's strategic framework. Mr. Mars Di Bartolomeo (Luxembourg) reiterated the need to be informed of the findings and results obtained following these missions.

The Secretariat General was asked to set up an indicative program of parliamentary diplomacy missions and good offices missions in 2024, including a provisional budget for each mission. In the meantime, it was decided that each established mission will be the subject of an exchange between the GD and the Bureau's delegation to outline the intended objective, address questions and confirm that the composition of the delegation is diverse and gender balanced. It was also agreed that a report be published after each mission and that these transitional provisions be debated at the Bureau meeting in Montreal, Canada, in July 2024.

The members of the Bureau then examined some of the political situations in the francophone community presented by the Chair of the Political Committee, Mr. Christophe André Frassa. He further stated that the Working Group on the Revision of the Constitution was currently updating the democratic oversight mechanisms (DOMs) with a view to incorporating a support principle for the branches concerned and that he anticipated that the DOMs would be adopted at the 49th Annual Session in Montreal, Canada. He suggested waiting for these new parameters before taking a position on branches in countries that are currently facing political crises.

Members also briefly discussed the good offices mission in Gabon in November and December 2023, in which President **Drouin** took part.

The Bureau members unanimously adopted the report on political situations in the francophone community.

Climate change legislative corpus

Ms. Stéphanie Reiche de Vigan, an instructor-researcher in comparative international law and a sustainable development specialist, presented a summary of her work to the parliamentarians via videoconference. Her work was divided in three parts: a report on good practices in French-speaking countries; country fact sheets covering 43 members of the APF; and a toolbox serving as a basis for seminars on climate change.

Mr. **Darrell Samson** (Canada) commended the APF for making climate change a priority. He asked how the corpus would be promoted and noted that the reality of federated states had unfortunately not yet been included, even though Canada had made a request to the Bureau in January 2023.

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin (Ontario) suggested that the APF be provided with an Americas Region fund designed to take stock of the organization's sustainable development practices.

Lastly, the GD stated that two new corpora were being developed: one on whistleblowers and the other on gender budgeting, supported respectively by the Parliamentary Affairs Committee (PAC) and the Network of Women Parliamentarians. The first project is supported financially by the OIF while the second is supported through a grant from Global Affairs Canada. He then asked the members to think about future corpus themes,

specifying that these themes may include the following topics: setting up natural resource processing streams; combatting counterfeit and falsified drugs; limiting the use of plastics and processing plastic waste; pay equity; self-entrepreneurship; the status of non-profit organizations; the forest code; access to water; food waste; and sustainable mining.

Mr. Jean-Christophe Frassa (France) suggested that the tangible impact of the first corpus be analyzed before embarking on new ones. It was agreed that an assessment would be made at the 2024 Montreal Bureau meeting.

The climate change legislative corpus was approved, as well as the application of this method on other topics.

Parliamentary cooperation programs

As Chair of the PAC, Mr. Joël Godin (Canada) presented approximately 30 proposed parliamentary cooperation initiatives for 2024, after receiving 50 applications from 20 different branches. He stated that this list could be expanded to include other initiatives taking place at the same time as APF meetings.

The Bureau adopted the APF's Parliamentary Cooperation Program for 2024.

Treasurer's report

Mr. Mars Di Bartolomeo (Luxembourg), Treasurer, reported on the APF's sound financial situation for the year ending December 31, 2023, and proposed the draft budget for 2024. He also thanked the Parliament of Canada for making one of its employees available to the APF.

Mr. **Darrell Samson** (Canada) questioned the value of increasing GD's budget for unforeseen expenses given that he already has an unlimited budget.

Mr. **Joël Godin** (Canada) asked whether the draft budget should not include the anticipated legal costs for 2024 and whether the payments recently received for contribution arrears had been included in the draft budget revenue.

In particular, the Bureau approved:

- the closing of the accounts for the financial year ending December 31, 2023;
- the adoption of the Treasurer's report and, consequently, the adoption of the budget for 2024;
- the use of the carryover from the previous year, in the amount of €174,162, of up to €88,407 in order to present a balanced fiscal year for 2024, and of up to €85,755 to sustain the Parliamentary Cooperation Support Fund and strengthen the French language;
- the funding of several initiatives through the Parliamentary Francophonie Support Fund, in the amount of €173,100;
- increasing to €25,000 per year the amounts allocated, on one hand, to the APF President, and on the other, to cover the GD's unforeseen expenses;
- setting the increase in contribution rates at 2.6%; and

– contributing to the Support Fund so that Congo-Brazzaville could settle part of the country's Branch arrears.

Working group on the revision of the APF Constitution

Mr. Christophe-André Frassa (France), Chair of the Political Committee, reviewed the different stages of the institutional reform project launched at the Dakar Bureau meeting in 2020, which materialized as a Working Group under the Political Committee. He said that the mandate of the Working Group was to revise existing texts: the Constitution, the democratic oversight mechanisms (DOMs), and two Regulations—one financial and one internal. Mr. Frassa then proposed the adoption of the internal Regulation as adopted by the Working Group in November 2023. The Regulation will eventually be enhanced by a personnel Code, an idea that was put forward by the Canadian Branch. He concluded by expressing the hope that the documents the Working Group will examine in April 2024, namely an update of the DOMs and the financial Regulation, will be presented at the 49th Annual Session of the APF in Montreal, Canada, in July 2024.

The Bureau approved the draft internal regulation.

Adoption of the APF's response to crisis situations in the francophone community

President **Drouin** (Canada) noted that, at the Bureau meeting in Papeete (January 2023), at the end of the political debate on the theme "APF doctrine and methodology for responding to crisis situations in the francophone community," he had instructed the Secretary General to develop methods to guide the APF's response to crises.

The GD then presented the draft response procedures drawn up in part based on the APF's usual practices, but also in light of the crisis situations or concrete incidents that occurred in the final months of 2023, for which it was difficult to formulate a response given the absence of a doctrine.

The Bureau approved the APF's procedures to respond to crisis situations in the francophone community, which may be re-examined by the Working Group on the revision of statutory texts.

Political debate

The President of the APF, Mr. **Francis Drouin** (Canada), introduced the political debate on the theme "Resisting hostile interference in francophone democracies." He said that the aim was to reflect on the various forms of interference and to define strategies and mechanisms to strengthen the resilience of francophone democracies against external interference, while preserving national sovereignty and protecting the integrity of democratic processes. The debate was introduced by Mr. Pascal Petry, Belgium's Deputy General Administrator of State Security and Chair of Belgium's Intelligence and Security Services Coordination Committee. This was followed by a debate where the branches shared the various actions taken by their parliaments against anti-democratic interference. Mr. Alexandre Vautravers, Swiss historian and professor of international relations, concluded the debate via videoconference from Geneva.

Mr. **Samson** (Canada) stated that the issue of foreign interference was central to the work of the Parliament of Canada in 2023. He also spoke of the various entities in Canada responsible for ensuring national security and monitoring foreign interference, including the Canadian Security Intelligence Service and the Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force.

Adoption of the various reports of the work of APF committees, networks and regional delegates

Each group presented an overview of its activities in 2024.

The Parliamentary Affairs Committee, through its Chair, Mr. **Joël Godin** (Canada), reported on the year's highlights, summarized the Committee's work and stressed the importance of the APF's various cooperation programs.

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin (Ontario), General Delegate for the Americas Region, confirmed that the Ontario Branch will be hosting the Regional Assembly from August 6 to 10, 2024, on the theme of francophone immigration issues.

The reports were unanimously adopted.

Relations with the Association des secrétaires généraux des parlements francophones

Mr. Siegfried Peters, Secretary General of the National Assembly of Quebec and President of the ASGPF, reported on the Association's activities and called on the APF to raise topics that it would like to see the ASGPF focus on.

Honours awarded by the APF

Mr. **Joël Godin** (Canada) told the story behind the creation of the Prix Geoffrey-Dieudonné and announced that the winner for 2024 is Mrs. Nino Bujiashvili, lead specialist of the international relations department of the Parliament of Georgia. Ms. Bujiashvili will complete her internship with the Parliament of Cambodia.

Mr. Wherli (Switzerland), Chair of the Education, Culture and Communications Committee, launched the 2024 edition of the Prix Senghor-Césaire. Ms. Chantal Soucy (Quebec), President of the Network of Women Parliamentarians, launched the 2024 edition of the award for her network. Both awards will be handed out at the 49th Annual Session of the APF in Montreal, Canada.

The nominations of seven APF Branches for the Ordre de la Pléiade were accepted as presented.

Mr. **Drouin** suggested that the Ordre de la Pléiade be modified to broaden the delegation of authority to the chairs of APF branches and to account for cases where the Ordre is awarded posthumously. Mr. **Joël Godin** (Canada) stressed the importance of highlighting the value of the distinction, protecting it and giving it the credibility it deserves.

Institutional activities

Mr. **Drouin** (Canada) gave a brief presentation on the programming planned for 2024. Mr. **Drouin** called on the branches to find a host branch for the APF institutions that still did not have one. President of the National Assembly of Benin and Chair of the Beninese Branch, Mr. Louis Vlavonou, proposed that the Africa Regional meeting be held in Porto-Novo.

The following programming was adopted as presented.

Other business

Mr. **Darrell Samson** (Canada) reminded everyone that the 49th Session of the APF, the Francophone Youth Parliament and the annual general meeting of the ASGPF would be held in Montreal, Canada, in July 2024.

At the initiative of the French Branch, a vote of thanks was extended to the Belgian Branch.

The Bureau's record of decisions was adopted.

Bilateral meetings

Mr. **Joël Godin** met with the GD and Mr. Damien Cesselin, Secretary General (SG) of the APF, to discuss the Parliamentary Affairs Committee's future projects, notably the development of a legislative corpus on whistleblowers to disseminate good governance models in La Francophonie. The SG said that the climate change legislative corpus had made it possible to develop three seminars in 2024 aimed at encouraging the branches to legislate on the topic. The GD also mentioned that the APF had strengthened its parliamentary diplomacy actions and that it would remain an objective for 2024, in accordance with the APF's Strategic framework. He also discussed the opportunity for the APF to collaborate with an organization specializing in mediation.

Award ceremony of the Ordre de la Pléiade

Mr. **Drouin** presided over the award ceremony for the Ordre de la Pléiade recognizing the contribution of nine Belgian individuals to the Francophonie.

Site visits

Bureau participants had the opportunity to visit the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren. Opened in 1897, it is one of Belgium's most-visited museums. Delegates learned about Central Africa's cultural and natural diversity through mostly historical collections on the themes of language, music, biodiversity, education, leadership and ceremonies. Lastly, delegates were also made aware of the fact that the Museum is a place of remembrance of Belgium's colonial past in Central Africa, more specifically in the former Belgian Congo.

ASGPF

The ASGPF held its Bureau meeting on January 25. The Deputy Clerk of the House of Commons, Mr. Jeffrey Leblanc, intervened to present the next ASGPF meeting that will be held in Montreal in July 2024, on invitation of the Canadian Parliament.

Respectfully submitted

Francis Drouin, MP

President, Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie
Chair, Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF)
ACTIVITY	APF Bureau Meeting
DESTINATION	Brussels, Belgium
DATES	January 25 to 28, 2024
DELEGATION	
SENATE	
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Francis Drouin Joël Godin Darrell Samson
STAFF	Julie Pelletier
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 35,150.37
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 7,627.35
HOSPITALITY	\$ 0.00
PER DIEMS	\$ 2,922.78
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 0.00

MISCELLANEOUS	\$ 164.06
TOTAL	\$ 45,864.56