Report of the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas

7th Gathering of ParlAmericas Parliamentary Network on Climate Change and 15th Gathering of ParlAmericas Parliamentary Network for Gender Equality

Mexico City, Mexico

From September 27 to 29, 2023

Report

DELEGATION MEMBERS AND STAFF

From 27 to 29 September 2023, **Senator Rosa Galvez** – Vice-Chair of the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas, 2nd Vice-President of ParlAmericas and President of ParlAmericas' Parliamentary Network on Climate Change and Sustainability (PNCCS) – led a delegation to the jointly held 7th Gathering of the ParlAmericas Parliamentary Network on Climate Change and 15th Gathering of the ParlAmericas Parliamentary Network for Gender Equality (PNGE), held in Mexico City, Mexico. The theme of the joint gathering was "A food secure future: Building people and planet-centered strategies." The other delegates were **Senator Sharon Burey, Member of Parliament (MP) Alistair MacGregor** and **MP Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné**. The delegation was accompanied by Ms. Alison Clegg, Advisor to the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas.

ACTIVITIES DURING THE 7TH GATHERING OF THE PARLAMERICAS PARLIAMENTARY NETWORK ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND 15TH GATHERING OF THE PARLAMERICAS PARLIAMENTARY NETWORK FOR GENDER EQUALITY

A. Meeting of the ParlAmericas Board of Directors

On 27 September 2023, the ParlAmericas Board of Directors held an in camera meeting at which **Senator Galvez** and other board members, agreed, among other decisions, to broaden the name of the climate change network to include the concept of sustainability, given that the network considers a wide range of sustainability issues that interest member countries. The network was officially renamed the ParlAmericas' Parliamentary Network on Climate Change and Sustainability (PNCCS) and is referred to as such throughout this report.

B. Opening and remarks and welcome

Senator Sergio (Checo) Pérez – Vice-President of the General Committee of the Senate of Mexico – opened the event and welcomed delegates. He reflected on the threat that climate change represents to humanity, in Latin America and the Caribbean in particular, and highlighted the Mexican Senate's recent passage of a law regarding adequate and sustainable nutrition, to achieve food security.

Senator Blanca Ovelar – President of ParlAmericas and Paraguayan Senator – welcomed participants and provided opening remarks. She thanked the Senate of Mexico for welcoming the gathering, as well as the Government of Canada for its support to ParlAmericas. Senator Ovelar spoke about the worrying situation revealed by data from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO): hunger levels that have doubled after the COVID-19 pandemic, despite the world having capacity to produce food as never before. She also stated that the number of people who have experienced serious food insecurity has doubled in recent years, going from 135 million before the COVID-19 pandemic to 276 million in 2022. Senator Ovelar highlighted that four out of ten people in Latin America and the Caribbean experience moderate to serious food insecurity, noting that vulnerable

populations may eat more highly processed foods due to their lower cost, leading to a variety of health problems. Senator Ovelar concluded her remarks by calling on participants to fight to reverse the trend described by the FAO data and to centre their political work on human beings.

Verónica Noemí Camino Farjat – President of the PNGE, Mexican Senator and Host of the Gathering – also welcomed participants. Senator Camino Farjat explained that food security is not only a matter of producing more food, but a matter of ensuring that the food is accessible to all. She mentioned gender considerations related to food affordability and nutrition security, noting, for example, that rural women are responsible for half of agricultural production in some areas. As well, she noted that in many cases women are responsible for feeding their households, although many women have less access than men to such resources as land, water, and money, and experience worse working conditions. Senator Camino Farjat emphasized that empowering women and closing the gender gaps in agri-food systems could improve individual and collective wellbeing, by increasing resilience and reducing hunger through economic independence. Senator Camino Farjat concluded her remarks by underscoring the importance of collaboration and the exchange of best practices for building a food secure future.

Lastly, **Senator Rosa Galvez** thanked her Mexican counterparts for organizing the meeting and, among other topics, emphasized the importance of international cooperation in implementing lasting solutions in the complex world of food security. Senator Galvez also reflected on the difficulty of explaining such issues as poverty, hunger, and inequality in a world with such a high degree of globalization and production. She emphasized the likelihood that political decisions are the reason, rather than a lack of knowledge or resources. Senator Galvez concluded her remarks by saying that countries require legislation, policies and the reallocation of budgets to achieve goals such as reducing inequality, and aligning with climate-related objectives such as holding global average temperature to below a 1.5-degree Celsius increase above the pre-industrial average.

C. Keynote address: Women's leadership and the current state of food security and sovereignty in the Americas and the Caribbean

Guadalupe Valdez – FAO Special Ambassador for Zero Hunger in Latin America and the Caribbean –spoke to delegates about food security, which she said is a fundamental pillar for the wellbeing of people across the world. She highlighted some challenges that the Americas and the Caribbean region face, including food shortages and malnutrition.

Ms. Valdez noted that malnutrition and hunger disproportionately affect vulnerable groups such as children, older adults, Indigenous people, and afro-descendent people, as well as people living in rural communities and people with disabilities. Moreover, Ms. Valdez discussed the impacts of climate change on food security and stated that it is imperative to promote resilient agricultural practices and cooperation among nations to mitigate the effects that climate change has on food production.

Ms. Valdez also explained that the active participation of women in decision-making in the agri-food sector is essential to promote policies and practices that address their specific needs and concerns. As well, she emphasized that ensuring women’s access to

land and investing in education and training related to agriculture and food management could improve their abilities and knowledge while contributing to the growth and sustainability of the agri-food systems.

Ms. Valdez emphasized the importance of gathering and using high-quality data that allow to monitor progress on achieving gender equality. In concluding her remarks, Ms. Valdez stated that food security is an attainable goal if its intricate relationship with the health of the planet is recognized.

D. Parliamentary exchange on sustainable and gender-sensitive national efforts to end food insecurity and poverty

Kayra Harding Bart – Vice-President for Central America of the PNGE and Member of the National Assembly of Panama – moderated a parliamentary exchange on sustainable and gender-sensitive national efforts to end food insecurity and poverty which included four panelists:

- **Senator Rosa Galvez** from Canada;
- Óscar Izquierdo Sandí, Member of the Legislative of the Assembly of Costa Rica and Vice-President of the PNCC;
- Senator Lisa Jawahir from Saint Lucia; and
- Juan Federico Ruiz, Uruguayan Representative.

During the panel, **Senator Galvez** spoke about the actions Canada is taking regarding the food crisis. For example, she shared information about the poverty reduction strategy that was launched in 2018. She also mentioned how the Senate of Canada was applying different lenses to its consideration of bills, such as a gender lens, to uncover potential unintended consequences on diverse groups of people. Senator Galvez explained that the Senate of Canada is systematically adding a revision clause to the legislation it adopts, allowing it to evaluate a law after some years to determine whether it achieved its purpose. She concluded her remarks by stating that while eliminating poverty and hunger are specifically highlighted in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1 and 2, and addressing climate change is specifically addressed in SDG 13, it is important for all parliamentarians to understand that such issues underly all 17 of the SDGs, and to find ways to advance the SDGs in their work.

Óscar Izquierdo Sandí highlighted some of the actions that Costa Rica has taken regarding food security and poverty, including the creation of the Institute for Rural Development and the development bank system. Mr. Izquierdo Sandí articulated that there are still challenges that need to be addressed in the country, such as reducing inequality by eradicating poverty.

Senator Lisa Jawahir from Saint Lucia explained how her country is a net importer of food, a situation which caused shortages of essential products during the COVID-19 pandemic. Among other initiatives, Ms. Jawahir highlighted Saint Lucia's plan to reduce its food import bill by 25% by 2025, as well as the recent adoption of a law aimed at increasing

young people's access to mentorship and financing, including for youth involved in the agricultural sector.

Representative Juan Federico Ruiz from Uruguay presented the example of Law 19.717, which was passed by the Uruguayan parliament in 2018. The law aims to support the promotion and development of systems that promote production, distribution and consumption of agro-ecological products, with the aim of strengthening food sovereignty and security and contributing to environmental protection. Mr. Ruiz also mentioned that Uruguay, among other countries, has faced challenges in implementing policies related to climate change, food production and distribution, and food security.

During the question and answer period, **Alistair MacGregor** asked a question regarding the reduction of food quality and nutrient density when farmers face pressures to increase their production. **Mr. MacGregor** specifically asked if Uruguay's Law 19.717 addressed food quality and nutrient density. In his reply, Representative Ruiz from Uruguay explained that the law created an honorary commission to monitor compliance with and evaluate the law and that further work lay ahead.

E. Panel: Inclusive and innovative approaches to addressing hunger

Lilia Margarita Valdez Martinez – Mexican Senator and Representative of the Mexico Chapter of the Parliamentary Front Against Hunger – moderated a panel on inclusive and innovative approaches to addressing hunger that included three panelists:

- Eduardo Benítez, Assistant Representative for Programs at the FAO Office in Mexico;
- Chenille Humes, Agricultural Youth Ambassador for Jamaica; and
- Benjamín López Velásquez, Co-Founder of Flor de Tierra Guatemala and Representative of the Network of Rural Youth of Guatemala.

Eduardo Benítez presented data on food systems. In particular, he highlighted some of the challenges faced in Latin America and the Caribbean related to efforts to eradicate hunger and malnutrition. He noted, for example, that more than 80% of the environmental footprint of food in the region comes from supply chains. He noted also that by 2030, demand for water will exceed the available supply by 40%; and unmanaged climate risks could lead to annual losses of up to US$1.2 trillion.

Mr. Benítez highlighted that even though the Latin American and Caribbean region is one of the top food producers in the world, access to healthy foods is challenges, as such foods are the most expensive of any region in the world, with a daily average cost for a healthy diet of US$3.89 while the world average is US$3.54. Mr. Benítez stated that the challenges facing the region's sustainable food systems are mainly related to three issues: maintaining food and nutrition security, improving livelihoods, and ensuring environmental sustainability. He concluded his remarks by reminding participants that governments and parliamentary organizations like ParlAmericas can play an innovative role in the fight against hunger and malnutrition as part of the 2030 Agenda.

Chenille Humes discussed the links between agriculture and climate change, and gave an example of a hydroponic system that she helped to implement in Jamaica. She stated that hydroponic systems could allow households to reduce their food costs by providing nutritious food for families. Ms. Humes concluded her remarks by explaining how Jamaica supports innovative agricultural projects and is aiming to provide agricultural goods and services through e-commerce.

Benjamín López Velásquez spoke about some of the issues that Guatemala is facing, such as the excessive use of agrochemicals to increase food production. Mr. López Velásquez also discussed how his Guatemala-based company, Flor de Tierra, which produces and sells organic fertilizers, has been able to offer farmers in Brazil, Peru and Costa Rica workshops on how to make their own organic fertilizers.

During the question and answer period, **Senator Galvez** asked panelists to speak about the timeline for countries to update their agricultural practices to more sustainable ones, given the rapid rate at which impacts of climate change – such as changes in rainfall patterns and worse and more frequent flooding – are affecting people. Panelist Eduardo Benítez replied that, in his opinion, countries must act extremely quickly, as food systems are complex and it takes time for governments to put into place the necessary laws, incentives, and compensation systems, for example.

F. Working session on inclusive and innovative approaches to addressing hunger

After the panel, participants engaged in a roundtable working session to discuss inclusive and innovative approaches to addressing hunger. Working in small groups, they explored potential approaches that could end hunger that could be applied in their countries and communities. **Senator Sharon Burey** of Canada facilitated a discussion on good legislative practices for guaranteeing food and nutritional security and good health, from an intersectional perspective. She outlined some of the ways that economic constraints are linked to food insecurity and health. She also discussed *Bill C-35, An Act respecting early learning and child care in Canada*, speaking about the importance of women being able to enter the workforce and increase their incomes, as well as noting that in Canada these issues are interjurisdictional, given different provincial and federal responsibilities.

G. Panel: The impacts of climate change on food security in the hemisphere

Jatziri Pando Medina – Technical Secretary of the Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change Committee of the Senate of Mexico and Regional Coordinator for North America of the Parliamentary Staff Network on Climate Change – moderated a panel on the impacts of climate change on food security in the hemisphere which included three panelists:

- Isabel Bennett-Moody, Senator of Belize;
- Diego Montenegro Ernst, representative of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) in Mexico; and
- Matteo Perrone, World Food Programme Country Director in Ecuador.

Senator Isabel Bennett-Moody outlined some threats that are affecting the food system in Belize. She explained that the country has experienced more drought and flooding than usual in recent years, noting that climate change contributes to this situation through its effect on coastal erosion. She noted that in the face of rising temperatures and their impact on food security, Belize has established a parliamentary alliance to combat hunger and malnutrition, with an emphasis on the education of young people.

Diego Montenegro Ernst spoke about the transformation of the agri-food systems and the challenges for food security in the Americas. He explained that Latin America and the Caribbean is one of the regions of the world where health inequalities are greatest in both urban and rural areas. He noted that there are high levels of both malnutrition and overweight. He also explained that most data indicate that agricultural yields in the Americas and the Caribbean are decreasing compared to those in Asia or sub-Saharan Africa. Additionally, the majority of farms in the Americas are owned by small families who are not only responsible for a significant amount of food production, but are also highly vulnerable to climate change and international price fluctuations. In order to successfully transform the agri-food system, he identified three crucial steps. First, producers much participate directly. Second, transformation must be supported by science and technology that are not harmful to the environment or biodiversity. Third, he said, the agri-food system must become more efficient.

Matteo Perrone started his intervention by describing the worrying effects that climate change and El Nino could have on Central and Latin America in the near future, including drought and flooding. He explained that this is a concern for the World Food Program (WFP) and that while the WFP has a humanitarian focus, part of its role involves convincing governments to adopt adaptation measures and prepare for climate change. He also explained that beyond investing in agricultural systems that are more resistant to drought and floods, the WFP also invests in microinsurance programs that provide direct assistance to farmers to help them deal with the impacts of climate change. He also emphasized climate change resilience projects, particularly in Colombia, where reforestation projects have led to the replanting of thousands of hectares of mangroves.

Mr. MacGregor asked about other countries' national soil information systems or strategies to help promote and ensure soil health. Diego Montenegro Ernst provided several examples from Latin America; notably Argentina, which has a national strategy that prohibits almost all tillage and requires the reincorporation of organic matter into the soil in order to preserve its health. **Senator Rosa Galvez** asked panelists about the influence of lobbying by the food industry on the national healthy food strategies of other countries, giving an example from Canada. Mr. Perrone emphasized the importance of being aware of the influence of lobbyists.

H. Technical considerations on climate change and food security work in Mexico

Jatziri Pando Medina – Technical Secretary of the Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change Committee of the Senate of Mexico and Regional Coordinator for North America of the Parliamentary Staff Network on Climate Change – gave a presentation entitled "Technical considerations on climate change and food security work in Mexico." Ms. Pando Medina outlined new Mexican legislation that aims to achieve greater climate

resilience. However, she explained that other high priority issues in Mexico, such as employment and security, often sideline climate issues. She advocated for greater communication between academics, scientists, Indigenous communities, producers, the political class, and others who work in the areas of agriculture and climate change.

During the discussion, **Mr. MacGregor** spoke about the need to encourage youth participation in farming, and how to change attitudes toward it. He raised a number of points, including: the importance of collecting disaggregated data related to farming, so that policies can be based on this data; the necessity of including Indigenous peoples in the development of policies that affect them; and the benefits of supporting community resilience and policies that lead to healthier diets.

I. Conversation panel: Gender equality, women's leadership, and food security

Tamika Davis – Member of Parliament (Jamaica) – moderated a panel on gender equality, women's leadership, and food security which included three panelists:

- Nadia Manning-Thomas, Planning and Coordination Specialist, UN Women Multi-Country Office for the Caribbean;
- Medalith Rivera Maquera, Union of Indigenous Aymara Youth of Peru "Wayna Wila Ujia" and member of the Children and Youth Commission of the Continental Network of Indigenous Women of the Americas (ECMIA); and
- Isis Cuéllar, Member of Congress and Vice-President of the National Congress (Honduras).

Nadia Manning-Thomas presented information about how to ensure that work being done to fight climate change is not leaving anyone behind – especially not women. Ms. Manning-Thomas noted that women are proportionally more affected than men by climate change, and that United Nations organizations have predicted that there will still be 340 million women and girls living in extreme poverty in 2030. In the Caribbean specifically, it is expected that 20 million additional women will experience food insecurity by 2030. As a solution, Ms. Manning-Thomas suggested the adoption of new laws that support women; particularly women farmers and the elimination of laws that discriminate against women and girls. She also advocated better data collection in order to be able to measure the effects of such new laws.

Medalith Rivera Maquera addressed two topics: the empowerment of Indigenous women and food insecurity in rural communities. She began by emphasizing the importance of the role of Indigenous women in family farming. She advocated for a greater role for women, in particular Indigenous women, in the development of national agriculture and food security plans. She then highlighted the impact that climate change has on the price of food, particularly by citing the example of Peru. She also defended the importance of supporting family, peasant, and Indigenous agriculture in order to ensure food security. She stated that the key to food security also involves better education for women and girls.

Isis Cuéllar discussed the “CREDIMUJER” women’s credit program in Honduras. Ms. Cuéllar explained that the program is a national-level program that provides credit for rural women entrepreneurs, with the aim of promoting productive activities and services that can contribute to improved personal, family and community quality of life. The goals of the program include helping women achieve economic independence, promoting greater participation of women in the labor market and reducing the gender pay gap in the labor market. She explained that although the law establishing CREDIMUJER was adopted in 2015, no budget was allocated to implement it until 2023. However, since 2023, a women-led advisory council has helped establish the first budget related to the program and begin funding activities related to food security.

During the question and answer period, Senator Galvez spoke about Indigenous women's rights in Canada and the ways that the country’s *Indian Act* has not respected them. She highlighted a dynamic during the colonization in which white men, primarily, came to exploit Indigenous peoples' lands for their resources while committing abuses against Indigenous women. She advocated for Indigenous women across the Americas to unite to better inform people about Indigenous women’s rights, raising the question of what organization might be most appropriate to carry out such work in a multinational way. Medalith Rivera Maquera expressed the view that governments are typically not the best entities to address Indigenous women’s issues; she felt that organizations like the International Forum of Indigenous Women or other civil society organizations are much better suited to defending Indigenous women’s rights.

J. Closing remarks

In providing closing remarks, Senator Camino Farjat (Mexico) thanked the delegates and recalled the importance of ParlAmericas for supporting relationships between parliamentarians and their various member countries. She reminded participants of the importance of institutionalized dialogues such as the one within ParlAmericas to the discussions of shared issues across the region – such as food security, poverty, and climate change. Finally, she reiterated the importance of national efforts to improve women’s quality of life.

K. Election results

On the final day of the Gatherings, the new Executive Committees of both the PNCCS and the PNGE were announced.

The PNCCS executive committee will be formed by:

- President: Senator Rosa Galvez (Canada)
- Vice-President: Senator Raúl Bolaños-Cacho Cué (Mexico)
- Vice-President for Central America: Member of the Legislative Assembly Óscar Izquierdo Sandí (Costa Rica)
- First Vice-President for the Caribbean: Senator Anthony Vieira (Trinidad and Tobago)

- Second Vice-President for the Caribbean: Member of the Chamber of Deputies Nelsa Shoraya Suárez Ariza (Dominican Republic)

- First Vice-President for South America: Member of the Chamber of Deputies Margarita Stolbizer (Argentina)

- Second Vice-President for South America: Member of the National Assembly Radjendrekoemar Debie (Suriname)

The PNGE executive committee will be formed by:

- President: Senator Verónica Noemí Camino Farjat (Mexico)

- Vice-President for North America: Member of Parliament Stephanie Kusie (Canada)

- First Vice-President for Central America: Member of the National Assembly Kayra Harding Bart (Panama)

- Second Vice-President for Central America: Member of Congress Andrea Villagrán (Guatemala)

- Vice-President for the Caribbean: Senator Lisa Jawahir (Saint Lucia)

- First Vice-President for South America: Senator Carmen Gloria Aravena (Chile)

- Second Vice-President for South America: Senator Daniella Velloso Borges Ribeiro (Brazil)

L. Meeting with delegates from the Dominican Republic

The Canadian delegation met with parliamentarians from the Dominican Republic. Meeting participants from the Canadian delegation were: **Senator Rosa Galvez**, Vice-Chair of the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas and President of the PNCCS; **Senator Sharon Burey**, member of the Canadian Section's executive committee; **Alistair MacGregor, MP**; and **Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné, MP** and member of the Canadian Section's executive committee. During the meeting, the parties expressed interest in building stronger bilateral relationships. They also noted their common interests in cultural diversity and their commitment to women's rights and gender equality.

Travel Expenses

Travel expenses associated with this activity can be found in the delegation's financial report. This report is available in the Financial Disclosure section of the Parliamentary Diplomacy website.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia Lattanzio, MP
Chair, Canadian Section of ParlAmericas