

Canadian Group
Inter-Parliamentary Union



Groupe canadien
Union interparlementaire

Report of the Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

Expert Consultation: Parliamentary Engagement in Digital Policy

Geneva, Switzerland

October 18, 2024

Report

The Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner, P.C., M.P. was in Geneva, Switzerland, on October 18, 2024 to participate in the “Expert consultation: Parliamentary engagement in digital policy” co-organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).¹

The Expert Consultation was attended by invited parliamentarians from different regions as well as representatives of various organizations that provide support to parliaments on digital policy issues.

The participants considered the following themes in plenary sessions or their more focused aspects in working groups over the course of the full day:

- How do parliaments work on digital policy? What support is available to parliaments?
- Challenges for parliaments in a digital age:
 - Innovation and regulation in the context of the pace of technology change
 - Sovereignty among parliaments, the private sector and civil society
 - Gaps in governance between national approaches and regional and international frameworks
 - Gaps in knowledge between generalists and technical experts
- Parliaments and Artificial Intelligence (AI):
 - Approaches to regulation, challenges, opportunities and needs
 - The use of AI in parliamentary work and processes
- Identifying needs, addressing gaps:
 - Parliaments: what needs for support in the future, what and how
 - Organizations: what can they offer, and how

The discussions were informed by several recent commitments on global technology governance. These include the IPU’s resolution adopted at the recently concluded 149th Assembly on the impact of artificial intelligence on democracy, human rights and the rule of law of which Ms. Rempel Garner was a co-rapporteur. They also include the IPU’s new Charter on the Ethics of Science and Technology, also adopted at the 149th Assembly, and the Global Digital Compact as part of the Pact for the Future, adopted in September 2024 by UN Member States.

Ms. Rempel Garner actively participated in the plenary sessions as well as in the working groups.

Highlights from the discussions include the following:

¹ Ms. Rempel Garner was in Geneva together with other delegates of the Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union to attend the 149th Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Assembly. The Assembly concluded on October 17, 2024.

- There continue to be significant geographic digital divides between the Global North and Global South. As a result, any efforts to universalize regulations only reflect the perspectives and contexts with more advanced experience, at the expense of others. Parliaments, particularly those in the Global South, should have greater autonomy regarding digital governance.
- Regulations related to digital policy need to be founded on universal human rights law to avoid inconsistencies.
- Parliaments are not as advanced as governments in digitalization and the use of AI. Ultimately, parliaments risk being unable to maintain their responsibility for representation and oversight.
- Many parliaments lack the capacity to understand, set or legislate digital policy, thereby putting parliamentarians at the behest of private companies and lobbyists to become “rule-takers” rather than “rule-makers.” Accordingly, parliaments abdicate their responsibility to hold others to account.
- Parliaments need support to improve capacities regarding digital policy in order to bridge many of the gaps identified, to strengthen their role in this area and to improve inter-regional dialogue.
- Parliaments in particular would benefit from support to set clear protocols on how to incorporate digital technologies, including AI, into their work.

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,

Hon. Rob Oliphant, P.C., M.P.

President, Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union