

Canadian Group
Inter-Parliamentary Union



Groupe canadien
Union interparlementaire

**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
respecting its participation at the meeting of the
Steering Committee of the Twelve Plus Group
Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
Paris, France
17 September 2012**

Report

1. Introduction

Article 25 of the Statutes and Rules of the Inter-Parliamentary Union permits members of the IPU to form geopolitical groups. These groups play an important role in the functioning and activities of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

There are six geopolitical groups formally recognized by the IPU: the African Group (44 members), the Asia-Pacific Group (27 members), the Arab Group (19 members), the Eurasia Group (7 members), the Latin American Group (19 members) and the Twelve Plus Group (46 members). Each group decides on working methods that best suit its participation in the activities of the Union and informs the Secretariat of its composition, the names of its officers, and its rules of procedure.

Canada belongs to the Twelve Plus Group and the Asia Pacific Group. Because Canada belongs to more than one geopolitical group, it submits candidatures for vacant positions within the Union through the Twelve Plus Group.

2. Background on the Twelve Plus Group

The Twelve Plus Group was formed in 1974 (as the Nine Plus Group) by IPU members from the European Community. Its purpose is to coordinate the action and policy of its member Groups and, where possible, to arrive at common positions on IPU matters. The word “Plus” was intended to indicate the openness of the Group to new members of the EC as well as other like-minded nations, such as Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand. Today, the Group has 45 members, including Central and Eastern European countries.¹

The Twelve Plus Group holds meetings on a regular basis during the IPU’s spring and fall Assemblies. These meetings provide a venue for the Group’s members to discuss the functioning of the Assembly and related meetings. Members also use these meetings to discuss administrative and substantive matters of consequence to the future activities of the Union.

The Chair of the Twelve Plus Group is elected for a term of office of two years. The Chair is advised by a Steering Committee of representatives from approximately seven to nine member countries and normally meets in the weeks prior to an IPU Assembly. The Steering Committee appoints a Vice-Chair among its members by consensus.

According to the Guidelines of the Twelve Plus Group, the Steering Committee shall include: the two most recent predecessors of the current Twelve Plus Chairperson (as long as they are members of their national IPU delegation); members of the Twelve Plus Group serving on the Executive Committee; further members, invited by the Chairperson on account of their particular abilities or merits, who could benefit the activities of the Twelve Plus Group as a whole.

¹ See <http://www.ipu.org/strct-e/geopol.htm> for a breakdown of geopolitical group membership in the IPU.

3. The Meeting of the Twelve Plus Steering Committee

Ten parliamentarians participated in the meeting of the Twelve Plus Steering Committee in Paris, France on 17 September 2012. The countries represented were: France, Belgium, Canada, Italy, Poland, United Kingdom, Sweden, Switzerland and Germany.

The Canadian parliamentarian in attendance was Senator Donald H. Oliver, Q.C., from the Senate of Canada.

The agenda for the meeting included issues and questions for consideration by the Twelve Plus Group at the 127rd IPU Assembly (Quebec City, 21-26 October 2012). The purpose of the meeting was to debate and make recommendations concerning these matters. The attached appendix summarizes the decisions taken by the Committee on the occasion of its meeting in Paris.

Respectfully submitted,

The Honourable Salma Ataullahjan, Senator
President, Canadian Group of the IPU

Appendix

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF THE TWELVE PLUS GROUP STEERING COMMITTEE
SÉNAT, PARIS, MONDAY 17TH SEPTEMBER 2012**

Participants:

Mr Robert del Picchia (France), *Chair*, Mr François-Xavier de Donnea (Belgium), Mr Donald Oliver (Canada), Ms Barbara Contini (Italy), Mr Marek Ziołkowski (Poland), Mr Robert Walter (United Kingdom), Mr Patrice Martin-Lalande (France), Mr Krister Örnfjäder (Sweden), Mr Pierre-François Veillon (Switzerland), Mr Josef Winkler (Germany).

Excused: Mr Norbert Lammert (Germany), Ms Barbara Prammer (Austria).

The meeting started at nine o'clock, chaired by President of the Twelve Plus Steering Committee Mr Robert del Picchia (France).

1. Opening of the meeting

The Chair, Mr Robert del Picchia (France), welcomed everyone.

2. Adoption of the Agenda

Mr Donald Oliver (Canada) wished to add the following items to the Agenda: the Gender Partnership Group, the Twelve Plus' position on the emergency item and the appointment procedure of the Secretary General of the IPU.

The Chair approved and stated that the draft Agenda did not call for any other remarks.

The Agenda was adopted.

3. Approval of the Minutes of the meeting of the Twelve Plus Group Steering Committee, held in Paris on 5th March 2012.

The Minutes were approved without comment.

MATTERS RELATED TO THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

4. Matters debated by the Sub-Committee on Finance and the Executive Committee

The Chair praised the Sub-Committee on Finance for its serious and steady work, by which it had proved its critical relevance. He invited members of the Executive Committee to report on their work and that of the Sub-Committee.

Mr Krister Örnfjäder (Sweden) confirmed that the Sub-Committee on Finance had gathered the various Geopolitical Groups' strategic priorities and had convened several times in the

past few months. The IPU draft budget for 2013 predicted savings of nearly 400,000 Swiss Francs – compared to the original objective of 409,000 Swiss Francs. The amount of contributions had stabilised at its 2007 level and gross operational expenses amounted to 13.6 million Swiss Francs. The suggested working plan matched the IPU Strategy for 2012-2017 and consisted of three priorities: setting up democratic Parliaments, strengthening their international role and making the IPU a major player in inter-parliamentary cooperation. Their implementation, however, would be slower than planned. The reserve funds for future repairs on IPU buildings and the working capital were frozen. In 2012, the operational surplus should increase slightly, which would help build up the working capital. There was a restriction of loans available for WTO-related activities, and those in relation with global economic governance were suspended. The layout of the budget documents had been changed for better readability. Finally, as its first anniversary was nearing, the Sub-Committee would have to assess its work and operations over the past year, to which end it would seek everyone's advice.

New voluntary contributions had already been announced for 2013. Due to the limitation of its own funds, the IPU would have to increasingly rely on its external partners by encouraging them to contribute to its overall Strategy rather than to specific projects. To this day, only the Sweden International Development Agency agreed to do this. There was still a largely untapped source of potential donors, be they foundations, businesses or rich individuals. Before the end of the year, the Secretariat would circulate relevant information documents to IPU Members. Moreover, several States, including the Republic of Korea and Egypt, had seconded staff to the Secretariat of the IPU. This was another way of saving money that should be encouraged.

Thanks to the Sub-Committee on Finance's preparatory work, the Executive Committee had had more time to deal with non-budget-related matters. It had carefully reviewed the IPU's communication policy. Investments in this field could not at all be postponed, since the IPU had to increase its visibility. For this reason, the development of the website was crucial.

The Executive Committee had published a press release on behalf of the IPU, commanding the Syrian Parliament to assume its responsibility to protect its people and to put an end to the current conflict. The delicate matter of its suspension would be discussed at the Assembly in Quebec City, as initiated by the Kuwaiti delegation. However, only the absence of a Parliament or non-payment of contributions could currently justify suspension.

The Executive Committee had also noted that the working methods of the Standing Committees needed to be improved. Finally, it had been sent an external assessment report of the Secretariat's technical support activities: between January 2008 and June 2012., the IPU had organised around a hundred support actions for thirty Parliaments, including seventeen in the least developed countries.

Mr Donald Oliver (Canada) stated that the Committee had hesitated to decide upon several important matters at its last meeting, since six of its seventeen members had not been attending. Regarding financial matters, several members had deemed it unacceptable that the working capital be used to balance the budget; however the Committee voted seven to two

against a motion rejecting this measure. The Secretary General had told the Committee that the total of voluntary contributions would be well over 1.5 million Swiss Francs, especially thanks to contributions from SIDA and USAID. One member had suggested suppressing the funding of WTO-related activities, but the Committee had rejected this. It had then been suggested that the draft budget be submitted to the Governing Council with two minor changes, one about the title "Implementing the IPU Strategy in a restricted budget context" and the other about the breakdown of expenses over the two yearly Assemblies. Eight had voted for the amended text and one had abstained.

Furthermore, since several members wanted each of the two yearly Assemblies to last four days, the Chair had asked the Secretary General to report in Quebec City about the format of the Assemblies and the Committees' work.

The Committee had then examined the relationship between the IPU and the UN. The UN General Assembly had adopted a resolution that strongly encouraged the IPU to get more involved in the UN activities. The Secretary General was reluctant to put the IPU under the UN umbrella, but agreed that both organisations should work closer together. He had encouraged members to judge for themselves the efficiency and usefulness of the work of the IPU Committee on UN Affairs, so that it could be assessed in Quebec City.

Finally, he had informed the Committee that two Parliamentarians' groups wanted to establish themselves as recognised bodies within the IPU: a group of young Parliamentarians, which had already informally convened on the fringe of previous Assemblies, wished to have a similar structure as that of the Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians and, as such, to have a meeting room and interpreting services. Also, as initiated by the majority whip at the Australian Parliament, the whips would like to set up a self-funded group whose activities would have no financial impact on the IPU. The Executive Committee and its President had agreed in principle to both requests.

The IPU's Communication Strategy relied on the following priorities: getting a new logo, improving the layout of the website and the prioritisation of information, producing newsletters in English, French and Spanish, and using the social networks more.

The Executive Committee had extensively discussed the importance that should be given to Technical Support and Capacity Building done by the IPU in some national Parliaments. The IPU might have some expertise and a large network in this field, but other organisations played a major role as well, such as UNDP, the World Bank, or others, and had much better resources. In such a context, the IPU had to assert the relevance of its work.

Mr Pierre-François Veillon (Switzerland) noted that the budget cuts planned for 2013 meant that the process had been started, even though it only amounted to a modest 70,000 Swiss Francs within a total budget of over 13 million. At the meeting of the Executive Committee, he had backed up two proposals: first, not to use the working capital in order to sustain income and second, to focus the IPU's work on its core activities, especially by suppressing its taking part in the work of the WTO. He had been the only one to support the latter. The Executive Committee might not yet be used to adopting amendments.

The state of voluntary contributions was encouraging. However, the IPU Standing Committees were not operating adequately, and efforts should be made, especially towards the professionalization of their secretariats. The Secretary General had announced that he would report on this in Quebec City, as well as on the format of yearly Assemblies.

Finally, the Secretariat of the IPU sometimes got offended that UNDP or the World Bank offered technical support to national Parliaments, in which the IPU was competent by nature. However, the external assessment report submitted to the Executive Committee had revealed that the IPU was wasting its energy, did not have an adequate project management structure and was struggling to follow up set objectives for each of its activities. In Quebec City, the IPU could discuss the twelve recommendations of the report in order to really improve its performances for the appreciation of the major lenders.

Mr Josef Winkler (Germany) thought it was not yet time to put an end to the IPU's WTO-related activities, but wished that their relevance and efficiency were accurately assessed in order to help the discussion.

Mr Krister Örnfjäder (Sweden) thought that the IPU's Strategy as it had been set up needed to take more into account what kind of budgetary cuts the Twelve Plus and other Geopolitical Groups were thinking of adopting. In this perspective, WTO-related activities did not seem like a priority. The IPU's Strategy had been discussed for too long to go back on it, but ways of implementing it should be examined. The IPU was capable of doing it, especially thanks to voluntary contributions amounting to more than originally planned. However, there was no point in building up the working capital unless the IPU used it to achieve its main missions. It would be counterproductive to increase the working capital on the one hand whilst suppressing important activities on the other.

Mr François-Xavier de Donnea (Belgium) welcomed the fact that the methods of the working group he presided over had improved since its establishment, which had helped towards a better layout of the budget according to clear objectives. In this perspective, the work of the Twelve Plus was extremely helpful to the Sub-Committee on Finance when it was time to suggest budget cuts. Overall, the 2013 budget was satisfactory. Any further cut should trigger an accurate assessment of its potential consequences on the IPU's Objectives and Strategy.

The various Support Services to Parliaments cost around 2.5 million Swiss Francs, or 20% of the overall IPU budget. In this field as in any other, a breakdown per objective would make discussions easier, even without going into extensive detail. Regarding Technical Support, UNDP, the World Bank, the European Union and other organisations such as AWEPA were indeed playing a very active role. There were huge needs in this field, and the IPU could not answer to them all. It was therefore necessary to aim for coordination in order to better distribute activities between these various partners, geographically or thematically for instance, and to encourage lenders to subcontract certain tasks that the IPU would deem a priority. These organisations did indeed devote significant financial means to the strengthening of Parliaments, which was the corner stone of good governance. Furthermore, UNDP, the European Union or the World Bank already relied on direct bilateral cooperation

programmes between Parliaments, such as those already in place between the Belgian Parliament and Central African Parliaments. In short, a meeting of the main role-players in Assistance to Parliaments urgently needed to be organised.

The Chair thought that this fascinating perspective should be discussed with other Members of the Twelve Plus at their next meeting.

Mr Robert Walter (United Kingdom) praised the work of the Twelve Plus Members on the Executive Committee and the Sub-Committee on Finance.

He wondered about the exact definition of "young Parliamentarians." Would a quota be applied to each national delegation? Was it about achieving a similar balance between ages as the one sought between genders?

Regarding the whips, the operating mode differed between Parliaments, but in the United Kingdom as in Canada, one had to distinguish between government whips and opposition whips. The former belonged to the Government, while the latter worked for their own party or for the Parliament. The former were decision makers and managers, while the latter sought to undermine the efforts of the Government. So how could a meeting of whips be considered in practice, even though the idea was good in theory?

Regarding the financial aspect, already widely discussed by the Twelve Plus – who represented more than half of the IPU budget –, it was fortunate that Members' contributions remained the same for 2013, since it would be difficult to find other funding resources. However, the situation for industrialised countries would probably not change much until 2016, since their Governments were freezing or reducing expenses. This would have to be taken into account.

Why not turn to the European Parliament, which had not endured the same budgetary constraints as other European Parliaments and whose Associated Member's contribution to the IPU budget amounts only to 8,700 Swiss Francs? Furthermore, it had set itself objectives for its external activities that were similar to those of the IPU and regularly sent an official representative to the IPU Assemblies. It could be encouraged through constructive dialogue to contribute more to the IPU budget via its compulsory contribution or a voluntary one, and to collaborate more with the IPU in overlapping fields. The Secretariat, or individual members attending today, apart from Swiss and Canadian colleagues, could pressure their fellow citizens who were Members of the European Parliament into doing this.

Finally, if there was a surplus, which proved expenses had been sensible, why not use it as extra income rather than add it to the reserve funds?

Mr Marek Ziolkowski (Poland) thought that amidst budgetary cuts, the IPU had to focus on its main Objective – the functioning of parliamentary democracy, especially that of specific parliamentary groups, such as women and youngsters. However interesting they might be, other matters – poverty, world peace, world trade, etc. – were better left to other organisations. The IPU should obviously not restrict its focus on Parliamentarians alone, but

had to focus on what it had to do – and potentially what it could do more thanks to extra funds. It would be interesting to know the position of other Twelve Plus Members, especially about discussions between the IPU and the WTO.

Mr François-Xavier de Donnea (Belgium) said the Twelve Plus should propose to the Executive Committee that the IPU organise a meeting of officials from international and national organisations working to build Parliaments' capacities. On top of the already mentioned UNDP, World Bank, European Union – Commission and Parliament – and AWEPA, there were two major and very active American NGOs: the *National Democratic Institute*, close to the Democratic party, and its Republican counterpart, the *International Republican Institute*. The IPU, whose action was restricted by its budget, and which could not be everywhere, could therefore play a major role without having to fund everything, and by possibly freeing up extra funds. The meeting could be held in Brussels or New York at the UN headquarters, since the relevant role-players were based in the United States rather than in Europe. It would be chaired by the President of the IPU or by its Secretary General, while the invited organisations' officials would be free to resort to representatives.

Mr Donald Oliver (Canada) approved. However, a new conference could not be proposed, for lack of funds. Why not then ask the Secretariat of the IPU in Geneva to dedicate a specific session of the spring Assembly in Quito to Assistance to Parliaments in Conflict Situations? It would help implement this project at no extra cost.

The Chair was in favour of a coordination meeting at the time of an IPU conference, and thought it could be held in New York, where the relevant people could be invited. The time seemed right to submit the project to the Twelve Plus in Quebec City, so that their representatives could submit it at the next Executive Committee meeting.

Ms Barbara Contini (Italy) thought that Assistance to Parliaments was up to UNDP and the World Bank. A coordination meeting sounded like a good idea, but having it in Quito seemed too far in the future. The matter could be raised in Quebec City in order to send representatives to the yearly UN parliamentary audition in early December in New York, where all relevant role-players would be present. A Parliamentarian representing their country could also take part on behalf of the IPU.

Mr Pierre-François Veillon (Switzerland) said that if the aforementioned organisations did not automatically collaborate with the IPU, one should wonder why. The IPU's working methods had been criticised as amateurish in one very harsh external report. From that perspective, one should be very careful, especially within the Executive Committee.

The Chair asked the Steering Committee about the opportunity to suggest such a meeting to the Executive Committee, since it had to be held within an existing conference.

This was agreed.

Regarding young Parliamentarians, **Mr Donald Oliver (Canada)** replied to Mr Walter that the issue of their definition had been raised at the Executive Committee meeting. No age limit had been set. They were youngsters elected in their own countries, who wished to formalise

their meetings on the fringe of those of the IPU. The Secretary General had not been opposed to it, reminding that the Group of Women Parliamentarians had been created that way, and that it could boost youth participation. Some had wondered about the relevance of a separate group acting within the organisation, but none had really rejected the initiative, since it did not cost any money.

The same went for the whips' group, which would gather whips from the opposition and from the majority. For countries with whips, it would be good if the latter knew more about the IPU, since they had a say in Parliamentarians taking part in its meetings.

Mr Oliver stressed the importance of the relationship between the IPU and the WTO. Parliamentarians, who had been taking part in WTO public forums for a long time, could and should play an essential role in trade organisations and the establishing of trade agreements. This was Pascal Lamy's theory: integrating representatives of the legislative power and civil society into the G20 meetings was the next step towards a new world order, after going from G8 to G20, then having the WTO take part in G20 summits. Preparing trade agreements could indeed not happen without those who would vote for their implementation in their respective countries. The IPU, therefore, should not pull out now. The 2012 WTO Public Forum would gather Parliamentarians from all over the world in Geneva.

As for the European Parliament, it supplied the main bulk of the WTO-related budget. It was likely that it would give more, but Parliamentarians had already contributed a lot to the funding of WTO Public Forums.

The Chair reminded how difficult it had been when the European Parliament had requested full membership – which was not allowed by the IPU Statutes. This had now been solved. The European Parliament organised the Parliamentary Seminar on the WTO jointly with the IPU. Furthermore, Associate Members should contribute more, since they cost the IPU money when they took part in one of its conferences.

The Chair asked the Steering Committee about using the working capital to stabilise the IPU budget.

Mr Pierre-François Veillon (Switzerland) did not like using the working capital. He wouldn't be opposed to the IPU keeping profits from an aborted planned action in order to build up some small capital it could resort to in case of emergency. One reason he had suggested amending the 2013 budget was that it did not include the necessary supply of certain fields, aimed for example at buildings' maintenance. One wondered whether such a practice would long be tolerated in terms of external reviewing standards. Furthermore, it was only 100,000 Swiss Francs.

5. Preparation of the 127th IPU Assembly in Quebec City and first draft of the Declaration of Quebec City: discussions on subjects selected at the 126th Assembly in April 2012

The Chair briefly presented the programme of the 127th Assembly to be held in Quebec City from 21st to 26th October 2012. On top of panel discussions on the subjects related to the three

Committees, a special discussion was to take place in Assembly about "Linguistic and cultural citizenship, identity and diversity amidst globalisation." Panel discussions were also announced about: "Youth perspectives in a globalised economy," "Peace-building after a conflict," "Parliamentary immunity: blessing or curse?," "Parliamentary and political law," and "Peak oil: what perspectives in terms of energy security?" The IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs would discuss the following matter: "Multilateralism and the role of parliamentary diplomacy."

Mr Donald Oliver (Canada) said that, as President of the Canadian Group and on behalf of the Canadian Parliament, he felt very much honoured that his country had been chosen to host this major event for the fourth time in the history of the IPU and for the first time since 1985. It was particularly timely, since Canada would celebrate in 2012 the hundredth anniversary of its formal affiliation with the IPU. To commemorate the event, a leaflet was being written about a whole century of collaboration between Canada and the IPU.

Mr Oliver stated that to this day, the budget of the Assembly was over 3 million Canadian dollars. IPU Assemblies drew over 1,300 delegates and observers from around the world. The Assembly in October would be no exception: it would be the most important parliamentary conference ever hosted in Canada. To this day, more than 1,000 hotel rooms had been booked, 116 countries and 7 observer organisations had registered. 868 delegates had used the online registration form, for which technical support was available.

The main theme of the Assembly would be "Linguistic and cultural citizenship, identity and diversity amidst globalisation." A draft declaration on this matter had been sent to all IPU Members in June. It had been penned by the Canadian Group in collaboration with Ms Assegaf (Indonesia), who would report jointly on the text with Mr Oliver. So far, reception of the draft had been very positive. An amended version would soon be circulated. Furthermore, experts on the various themes would open each session. A final draft of the declaration would then be written and submitted to the Assembly so it could be adopted during the closing session.

As usual, this second yearly Assembly would include meetings of the Governing Council, the IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs and panels on themes to be reviewed next year by the Standing Committees in Quito. On top of this, several special sessions would be prepared jointly with the Secretariat of the organisation. As a preparation, around twenty high-level researchers had been working for five months at the Parliament's library, independently from the already set budget. Furthermore, thanks to the Canadian team's relentless work, experts and facilitators from around the world would attend, including representatives from international organisations, Parliaments and the Private Sector. Former President Clinton had been approached but unfortunately had to stay in the United States due to the elections there. Finally, a dynamic format had been established to encourage discussions and avoid the reading of pre-written speeches.

The joint conference of the IPU and the Association of Secretaries Generals of Parliaments would be about: "Parliamentary representation, communication and the role of social media." It would take place on the last day of the Assembly and would target Parliamentarians,

Secretaries Generals and parliamentary staff who used social media. Delegations were strongly encouraged to take part. This dynamic programme would benefit from the latest technologies of the Quebec City Convention Centre, internationally renowned for its expertise in terms of organising eco- friendly events.

Beside the work programme, there would also be cultural activities, including a one-off performance by Cirque du Soleil, which would stress the diversity of the Canadian cultural heritage, especially on the French-speaking side.

Finally, not one of around one thousand registered delegates' visa requests had been rejected. The lengthy visa procedure was simply due to the strict separation of powers in the Canadian Constitution, which forbade even a high-ranking Parliamentarian to interfere with a judge in order to back up an application. The Canadian administration, therefore, was not at issue.

The Chair welcomed the good news and the significant funds Canada would dedicate to the event.

Mr Josef Winkler (Germany) asked whether Canada having suspended its diplomatic relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran would affect the participation of the Iranian delegation in Quebec City. **Mr Donald Oliver (Canada)** informed him that the Iranian delegates had only applied for their visas the day before.

The Chair mentioned that the Twelve Plus Group would have a rapporteur in each of the three Standing Committees.

Choice of the Emergency Item

Mr Donald Oliver (Canada) said that some delegations would like the Syrian situation to be made into an emergency item, as it had been in Kampala. He reminded that a Resolution on the matter had been adopted by the 126th Assembly and that, following the latest meeting of the Executive Committee, the President of the IPU had issued a statement that strongly denounced the attitude of the Syrian Government towards its own population. To avoid any kind of repetition, it would be best to choose another theme.

The Chair noted that in the meantime, the situation in Syria had worsened and that the rules of the IPU did not prohibit the submission of several emergency items on the same subject. However, other suggestions were also possible.

Mr François-Xavier de Donnea (Belgium) pointed out the situation in Northern Mali, which directly affected neighbouring countries, such as Algeria, Niger, Mauritania, and even Burkina Faso and Nigeria. Moreover, drug smuggling between South America and Europe went through the Sahel and contributed to the funding of terrorist groups. Finally, armed elements had been seen in the area, coming from Afghanistan and Pakistan. In total, no less than four continents were involved.

The Chair said that the African Group should be approached about the matter first.

Ms Barbara Contini (Italy) said she was in favour of carrying on discussions on Syria or more localised matters, such as nomadic Arabs or the territorial dispute between China and Japan.

Mr Robert Walter (United Kingdom) said that the Twelve Plus Group had worked with other Groups on the Syrian case in Kampala, and that some delegations had expressed reservations, but that an eventually successful momentum had been created. In Quebec City, the Arab Group intended to request suspension for Syria. Should the Syrian tragedy be chosen as the emergency item, there would be two discussions on the same subject, and the Syrian delegates might not be able to take part in discussions within the Assembly, which would certainly be a problem. Mr Robert Walter was not in favour of suspension, which would restrict the IPU's leverage of action, but it seemed obvious to him that the situation in Syria was a global priority. One would be hard pushed to choose another subject, unless a more general theme was selected, such as the legacy of the Arab Spring or the state of democracy in the Arab world, which might not be backed up by all. In any case, work must be done in collaboration with the Arab Group.

Mr Donald Oliver (Canada) noted that the IPU Statutes called for suspending Parliament Membership in two cases only: if it hadn't paid its contribution or if it didn't function anymore. The Executive Committee had asked the Secretary General to submit a new provision including other situations in Quebec City, but as matters currently stood, the Arab Group's initiative could not come to any fruition.

The Chair reminded that a similar discussion had taken place the year before about Egypt and Tunisia. The rules called for suspending a Parliament if it did not function "normally". One could say that civil war prevented "normal" functioning of the Syrian Parliament, but it would not be logical to discuss its possible suspension before reviewing the country's situation as part of the emergency item. The opposite should be done.

Mr Krister Örnfjäder (Sweden) said that at the Executive Committee in Geneva, Kuwait had justified its suspension request in this way: when, out of 10 million potential voters, only half were registered as voters, and that only half of this half actually voted, this was not enough to ensure government legitimacy. Obviously, the same reasoning could apply to many other countries! New rules should be adopted, which could be used in such situations and would be valid for all.

Mr François-Xavier de Donnea (Belgium) agreed with Mr Robert Walter: to exclude delegates from a functioning Parliament would be a bad strategy, since the IPU would then lose all means of exerting any influence. Furthermore, it would not be possible to vote in Quebec City on a proposal to amend IPU statutes in order to adopt new grounds for the suspension of the affiliation of a member of the Union, since the rules specified a three-month delay after the submission of the amendment, which would postpone the vote until the Assembly in Quito. It would be better to focus on the situation in the Sahel and ask the African Group whether it would accept that an emergency item be submitted about it.

Mr Josef Winkler (Germany) agreed: at the previous Assembly, the situation in Northern Mali had not been as serious, and it would be sensible to make it the emergency item in Quebec City. However, even if the Syrian Parliament had been properly elected, one could wonder if it was actually functioning – it was currently impossible to access its website, which was allegedly "under construction". It seemed difficult to avoid the question of a possible suspension of Syria, especially since the Arab Group had requested it. This should be discussed before the Assembly in Quebec City.

Mr Pierre-François Veillon (Switzerland) said that, since the request had been made by the Kuwaiti delegates at the previous Executive Committee meeting, the discussion was *de facto* open. On the other hand, he did not deem it appropriate to link the discussion with the emergency item, since this might lead to conflicting positions. Mr Veillon said that the one case of IPU affiliation for other grounds than those mentioned in the Statutes dated back to the 1930s, when the Italian Parliament had been suspended following the invasion of Ethiopia.

The Chair said that some Arab countries might raise the matter of demonstrations triggered by the online circulation of an American movie.

As proposed by **Mr Krister Örnfjäder** (Sweden), it was agreed that the discussion should first take place within each delegation and would then resume at Group level in Quebec City.

6. Vacancies

The Chair said that a substitute position at the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, and a permanent position at the Committee on Middle East Questions, were available.

A permanent position and a substitute position were also vacant at the Bureau of the Third Standing Committee, although they would only be filled at the 128th Assembly in Quito.

Two internal auditors for the financial year 2013 would also have to be appointed.

The Chair stated that applications for the various positions should be submitted via the Group's website (<http://12plus.net>).

7. Inter-Parliamentary Union Membership

The Chair said that he had not received any information regarding potential IPU Membership requests.

8. Special IPU meetings since the 126th Assembly in Kampala.

The Chair said that a meeting on the Role of Parliaments in the Emancipation of Rural Women had been held on 29th February 2012 in New York and that the Steering Committee on the Parliamentary Conference on WTO, the result of collaboration between the WTO, the

IPU and the European Parliament, had convened on 8th May in Brussels. Furthermore, the IPU had sent an "information memo" to Parliamentarians on the UN Conference on Sustainable Development, held in Rio on 20th and 22nd June. Also, it had organised a parliamentary meeting during the 19th International Conference on AIDS, held in Washington from 22nd to 27th July. The IPU had sponsored the 10th Workshop of Parliamentary Scholars and Parliamentarians, hosted by the University of Hull in Great Britain on 28th and 29th July. Finally, the World e-Parliament Conference had taken place in Rome on 13th and 14th September.

9. Other matters related to the IPU

Mr Donald Oliver (Canada) said there had been a meeting of the Gender Partnership Group on 30th August in Geneva. They had then planned to organise a special session in Quebec City about Parliaments that were sensitive to gender issues.

These past few decades, women's participation in public life, either as voters or as Parliamentarians, had significantly progressed. In Canada, for instance, women might represent just 25% of the House of Commons, but had much higher visibility in Provinces. After Pauline Marois became Prime Minister of Quebec, nearly half of the Canadian population was currently governed by women. The question of gender equality had now taken centre stage, and women had become important role-players in politics, economy and culture. To what extent Parliaments could mirror the movement and transform themselves remained to be known.

The special session in Quebec City would provide a discussion platform which aimed to define the nature of a Parliament that was sensitive to gender issues and to establish a relevant strategy. The session would take place over three half-days, with plenary session and working group debates. Participants would be encouraged to share their experiences, assess their own Parliament's sensitivity to such issues and work towards establishing common strategies. The objective was to have an action plan adopted by the 127th IPU Assembly.

Mr Robert Walter (United Kingdom) praised Mr Donald Oliver for his work and informed his colleagues that the British Parliament would host a Conference on Women in Politics from 6th to 8th October 2012. Invitations had been sent to Parliaments around the world.

The Chair then asked Mr Donald Oliver, a Member of the Executive Committee, to talk about the Secretary General's appointment procedure.

Mr Donald Oliver (Canada) recommended establishing a sub-committee within the Steering Committee to carefully review the question and to ensure that the Twelve Plus Group played an important role in the appointment of the next Secretary General.

The Chair reminded that there was now an appointment procedure which would be difficult to alter in time.

Mr François-Xavier de Donnea (Belgium) thought that a profile should be defined beyond matters of procedure. The applicant especially needed to have a good knowledge of the UN and to have enough diversified contacts within international relations so that the IPU could carry on with its role of political advisor for the UN.

The Chair added that they would also have to have perfect knowledge of the functioning of parliaments. In any case, it was essential to avoid having to choose the new Secretary General from a list of just two or three names.

Mr Pierre-François Veillon (Switzerland) welcomed the setting up of a strict appointment procedure. The IPU and the Twelve Plus Group had done well. There was just one delicate matter: the President of the IPU and the Vice-President of the Executive Committee had to make a list of the best applicants, which should not allow them to influence the ultimate choice.

The setting up of an ad hoc working group was decided, comprised of the Chair, and Messrs Pierre-François Veillon and François-Xavier de Donnea. **Mr Donald Oliver (Canada)** said that this group would have to work carefully on the "minimum requirements" for the first stage of the appointment procedure.

MATTERS RELATED TO THE TWELVE PLUS GROUP

10. Programme of activities and meetings at the 127th IPU Assembly in Quebec City

The Chair presented the programme of meetings for the Twelve Plus Group at the 127th IPU Assembly in Quebec City. The Group would have lunch together after the first meeting.

Mr Robert Walter (United Kingdom) asked whether the date and location of the reception hosted by the European Union were known. Neither the Union nor Great Britain had diplomatic representation in Quebec City, although France had a Consulate General there.

The Chair reminded his colleagues that few European countries had consular representation in Quebec City. It was likely, then, that there would be no reception hosted jointly by several Embassies as it had happened in the past. Each delegation would therefore do as it pleased.

11. Twelve Plus Group Membership of Ukraine and Azerbaijan

The Chair reminded that the Twelve Plus had decided in Kampala to wait until the meeting in Quebec City before deciding whether to welcome these two Parliaments. One Ukrainian representative had already been heard, and one from Azerbaijan would be in Quebec City. There would be elections in Ukraine on 28th October, after the end of the meeting in Quebec City. Azerbaijan would hold presidential and legislative elections in the autumn of 2013.

Last March, the Steering Committee had adopted a recommendation that was "rather favourable, but with reservations." It was now no longer possible to postpone the decision.

After stressing that this was a sensitive issue, and there had been a heated discussion at the previous meeting, **Mr Marek Ziolkowski (Poland)** said that he remained very much in favour of a Ukrainian membership. It would indeed be most unfortunate to postpone the decision again. However, a two-third majority was needed within the Twelve Plus Group for the membership to be accepted. Perhaps detailed information on the voting campaign in Ukraine would help convince other participants and therefore reach this large majority.

The Chair answered that he would give delegates all the information he had managed to gather.

Mr Robert Walter (United Kingdom) stressed that the Geopolitical Group of the Twelve Plus was to welcome two Parliaments that already were IPU Members – two Parliaments with a majority and an opposition. The idea was in no way to approve the actions of their Governments or their judicial systems. As active members of the Council of Europe and of its parliamentary Assembly, Ukraine and Azerbaijan were eligible to belong to the Twelve Plus Group. They might well be monitored right now, but other Group Members were as well, so why set these two countries apart from others? The IPU had just organised a Day of Democracy, so it seemed appropriate to put willingness for dialogue and inclusion first.

Mr François-Xavier de Donnea (Belgium) deemed it extremely delicate to refuse Ukraine's membership request. This European country, which was very close to Poland, hesitated to go further into the European Union or the Commonwealth of Independent States. However, he deemed the case of Azerbaijan much more complex, since there was much to criticise in its democratic processes. However, perhaps joining the Twelve Plus Group would help influence it towards an improved model. He asked whether these countries would leave the Eurasian Group, should they join the Twelve Plus Group.

The Chair informed colleagues that, although Armenia did belong to the Eurasian Group, neither Ukraine nor Azerbaijan belonged to any Geopolitical Group of the IPU.

Mr Krister Örnfjäder (Sweden) agreed with Mr Robert Walter.

The Chair noted that all membership conditions seemed to be fulfilled and that the Committee seemed to be progressing towards accepting these countries as Members, which might help influence them. It was agreed that the Steering Committee would suggest a vote, preceded by explanations of vote, at the meeting in Quebec City, according to the usual procedure.

Mr Josef Winkler (Germany) said that the German delegation still wondered whether a country should be accepted within the Twelve Plus when its political system was not truly democratic. Opinions within the Group seemed to differ as much as they did in Kampala.

12. Financial matters

The Chair informed the Steering Committee that the total amount of contributions requested from Group Members was 41,394 euros for 2012, of which 36,807 had already been received. Seven National Groups and one Observer had not yet paid their contributions.

As for expenses, the meeting of the Twelve Plus Steering Committee held in Paris on Monday 14th March 2011 had cost 4,561.87 euros. The 126th Assembly, held in Kampala from 14th to 20th April 2011 had cost 9,446.50, except for interpreting costs – since the IPU had not yet circulated the relevant amount – and for bank charges – 33.46 euros. The new website, whose URL was <http://12plus.net>, cost 84.76 euros per year, being hosted by the company OVH.com. Finally, the Group had spent 38 euros for French into English translations.

The decrease in contributions requested from Group Members therefore meant a decrease in expenses, first thanks to the joint effort applied to Steering Committee meetings, whose expenses had decreased by 18% between March 2011 and March 2012.

The Secretariat of the Twelve Plus had opened three savings accounts, which ensured greater banking security and the best rates, since the life span of these accounts was limited in time. 10,000 euros – 6,000 of which had had to be withdrawn due to exceptional expenses – had been put on a mobile savings account with a 1.60% annual rate, which allowed both deposits and withdrawals. Two blocked term deposit accounts had been opened over thirty-six months with a three-year listing, and rates between 1.9% in the first semester and 5% in the sixth semester. 20,000 and 30,000 euros had respectively been put into these two accounts.

13. Twelve Plus Group activities

Mr Patrice Martin-Lalande (France) asked whether the absence of any President of the various Geopolitical Groups within the Executive Committee of the IPU – its main steering body – might not constitute a weakness.

The Chair said that this matter had already been raised in Kampala.

14. Twelve Plus Group Presidency

The Chair reminded colleagues that his term would end as the 127th Assembly in Quebec City came to a close. There would have to be a new election. Applications could be submitted until 18th October. Information on how to apply was on the website 12plus.net.

The Chair repeated that he was available for a second term. He wished for formal elections to take place, even if there was only one candidate.

Mr Donald Oliver (Canada) highly praised the Chair for his strong actions, especially regarding gender equity, transparency, and financial issues. He had allowed the Twelve Plus Group to make its voice heard. He said that he would fully support his renewed candidacy.

15. Date of the next meeting

The Chair informed colleagues that the 128th Assembly would be held in Quito from 22nd to 27th March. The Twelve Plus Steering Committee might therefore convene on Monday 25th February or Monday 4th March.

The meeting ended at 12:15 p.m.

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
ACTIVITY	Meeting of the Steering Committee of the Twelve Plus Group
DESTINATION	Paris, France
DATES	September 17, 2012
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Donald H. Oliver, Q.C.
HOUSE OF COMMONS	
STAFF	
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 2,384.80
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 650.69
HOSPITALITY	
PER DIEMS	\$ 308.49
OFFICIAL GIFTS	
MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES	
TOTAL	\$ 3,343.98