

Canada - Africa
Parliamentary Association



Association parlementaire
Canada - Afrique

Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation on the Bilateral visits to Algeria and Tunisia

**Prepared for the
Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association**

**Algers, (Algeria) and Tunis (Tunisia)
15–20 February 2009**

Report

The Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association was represented by the Honourable Mauril Bélanger, P.C., M.P., Co-Chair of the Association; the Honourable Mobina S.B. Jaffer, Senator, Association vice-president; Ms. Johanne Deschamps, M.P., Association vice-president; Mr. Larry Miller, M.P., Director of the Association; the Honourable Terrance Stratton, Senator, member of the Association; and Mrs. Candice Hoepfner, M.P., member of the Association. The delegation was assisted by Ms. Julie Lalonde-Prud'homme, Executive Secretary of the Association, and Mr. Michael Dewing, Analyst for the Association.

OBJECTIVES

The Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association undertook bilateral visits to Algeria and Tunisia from 15–20 February 2009. The visits had the following objectives:

- to engage parliamentarians on topics of mutual interest;
- to strengthen bilateral relations;
- to foster mutual understanding of bilateral issues;
- to learn about continental issues and their impact on regional bodies; and
- to study Canadian activity in the region, along with the role of civil society groups and businesses.

To meet these objectives, the delegation met with Algerian and Tunisian parliamentarians and government officials, representatives of political parties, Canadian officials, United Nations officials, and representatives of non-governmental organizations. In Algeria, it also visited a development project sponsored by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

ALGERIA

A. Key Issues

Algeria is the second-largest nation in Africa and the second-most populous francophone country in the world. Its population of nearly 34 million is a mix of Arab and Berber and is 99% Sunni Muslim. A multiparty democracy, Algeria is recovering from the political turmoil of the 1990s that resulted in more than 150,000 deaths. Although the security situation has improved, rebel groups remain active and a number of underlying conditions continue to pose challenges. These include unemployment, rapid urban migration, inadequate industrial productivity, and decaying infrastructure. The economy is based largely on hydrocarbons. Attempts at diversification have had limited success and economic development is also hampered by corruption.

The last elections were held in 2004. The lower house of the Algerian Parliament, the National People's Assembly (*Assemblée populaire nationale* or APN),

has 389 members who are directly elected using a proportional list system. There are 30 women members, or 8% of the total.

In the APN, the ruling National Liberation Front (*Front de Libération Nationale* or FLN), the National Rally for Democracy (*Rassemblement National Démocratique* or RND) – which is composed of former FLN members – and the Movement of Society for Peace (*Mouvement de la Société pour la Paix* or MSP) – a moderate Islamist party – make up a coalition known as the Presidential Alliance. The Workers' Party (*Parti des Travailleurs* or PT) is the main opposition party, followed by the Rally for Culture and Democracy (*Rassemblement pour la Culture et la Démocratie*, or RCD).

The Council of the Nation (*Conseil de la Nation*) is the upper house of the Algerian Parliament. It was created in 1996. Two-thirds of its 144 members are indirectly elected by regional assemblies and one-third is appointed by the President of Algeria. The latter are noted personalities from the fields of arts, science, economics, and the professions. Four of the members of the Council of the Nation are women, or 3% of the total.

In November 2008, the Algerian Parliament approved the abolition of the two-term limit for the president and President Abdelaziz Bouteflika announced subsequently he would run for a third term in office.

Relations between Canada and Algeria are good. This is due in part to the 50,000 people of Algerian descent who live in Canada, mostly in the Montreal region. With bilateral trade totalling \$5.5 billion annually, Algeria is Canada's leading trading partner in Africa and the Middle East. In addition, Canadian companies have made significant investments in Algeria's energy sectors. CIDA's bilateral aid program focuses on private sector development and vocational training reform. In 2006–2007, CIDA disbursed \$2.3 million in aid.

B. Meetings

1. Meeting with Mr. Mamadou Mbaye, United Nations Resident Coordinator and Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Programme

The United Nations Resident Coordinator represents all the UN development organizations operating in Algeria. These include the United Nations Development Programme, UNICEF, the World Food Programme, and the World Health Organization. As the title suggests, the Resident Coordinator works to improve the coherence and efficiency of the UN's efforts in the country.

Mr. Mbaye began by giving an overview of the situation of UN organizations in Algeria. In December 2007, a bomb destroyed the UN headquarters, killing 19 people. Since then, UN personnel has re-evaluated the UN's role in the country. Mr. Mbaye said that withdrawing from Algeria was not an option, but the UN needed to find ways to bring added value.

Algeria, he noted, is a medium-income country with little debt and some US\$147 billion in reserves. Although it does not need financial assistance, the economy is very fragile and the security situation remains tense. Because the economy

is based almost entirely on petroleum production, fluctuations in the price of oil have a large impact. Consequently, Algeria is looking for other sources of income, such as tourism.

Mr. Mbaye identified a number of challenges for Algeria – such as the risk of natural disasters, rising food prices, and migration – and said the government must tell the UN what its priorities are. Existing UN programs in the area of governance, the environment, poverty, and risk management are being reviewed, and new projects might focus on the banking system.

Mr. Mbaye also discussed the situation of women in Algeria, as well as the situation of refugees and Canada's contribution to their wellbeing.

2. Meeting with Mr. Saïd Sadi, Secretary General of the Rally for Culture and Democracy

The Rally for Culture and Democracy (*Rassemblement pour la Culture et la Démocratie*, or RCD) is a secular Berber party that was formed when the multi-party system was introduced in 1989. Mr. Sadi is a former presidential candidate.

After giving an overview of the RCD, Mr. Sadi said the root of Algeria's problems is electoral fraud, from which in his view stems the abuse of authority, the lack of legitimacy, and corruption. He said that although Algeria is no longer a one-party state, it suffers from group-think. Regarding restrictions placed on opposition parties, Mr. Sadi said for the past ten years the RCD has been limited to 19 members in the APN, whereas 20 members are needed to propose parliamentary initiatives. In addition, he said the RCD is unable to appear on television. He expressed particular concern about the abolition of the two-term limit for the president and the mobilization of state resources in favour of the incumbent.

In response to questions from the delegation, Mr. Sadi discussed the role of women in society, noting the constraints on their political participation. He also talked about political repression, the difficulty opposition parties have in communicating with citizens, and the lack of outlets for disaffected youth to express themselves. He went on to elaborate on the conditions being imposed on international observers at the upcoming elections and the situation regarding party financing.

3. Meeting with Mr. Abdellaziz Belkadem and M. Salah Goudjil of the National Liberation Front

Until 1989, the National Liberation Front (*Front de Libération Nationale* or FLN) was the sole political party in Algeria. It is the party of President Bouteflika, and holds the greatest number of seats in the APN. Mr. Belkadem is the secretary-general of the party and was prime minister from 2006 to 2008. Mr. Goudjil is a member of the APN. The opening of the meeting was covered by the media.

Mr. Belkadem began by noting the good relations between Algeria and Canada and expressed his hope that these relations might expand. In discussion with the delegation, he talked about the challenges of creating jobs for graduating students. He said that national reconciliation and the rise in the price of oil had enabled Algeria to reduce unemployment from 33% to roughly 12%.

On the subject of efforts to increase the representation of women in Parliament, Mr. Belkadem said there had been a constitutional amendment to this effect and an organic statute to implement the amendment was being prepared. He noted the progress women had made since independence, but said that, given the prevalence of conservative attitudes, the biggest problem was convincing people to vote for women. He said women should work within political parties and remarked they are well represented in other areas, such as medicine and the judiciary.

The discussion then moved on the subject of the economy. Mr. Belkadem said Algeria was not going to be in the position to export agricultural products in the medium term. Although it is self-sufficient in fruit and meat, it imports cereals, milk, and oilseeds. Because the price of milk is subsidized, producers are not interested in increasing production, so Algeria imports powdered milk. Regarding the world financial downturn, he said that, given Algeria's lack of investments abroad and its strong reserves, the financial crisis had not had much financial impact, but that it was having an economic impact as a result of the lower demand for petroleum products.

4. Meeting with Mr. Abderrezak Mokri, Vice-President of the Movement of Society for Peace

The Movement of Society for Peace (*Mouvement de la Société pour la Paix* or MSP) is a moderate Islamist party that condemns terrorism and works to be part of the political process. It became a legal party in 1991 and has been in the governing coalition since 1999. It has 51 members in the APN and 10 in the Council of the Nation, as well as a number of elected officials at the local level.

Mr. Mokri explained the MSP espouses Islamic values along with patriotism. He said that as a result of electoral fraud, the political balance in Algeria did not reflect the balance in society. Nevertheless, the MSP takes a pragmatic approach and sees its participation as a way of improving democracy.

Mr. Mokri was accompanied by two women who work for the MSP at the national level – Mme Fatima Saidi and Mme Ratiba Ben Belkacem. They discussed their role and influence in the party and said the reason they had not been elected to Parliament was because of on-going resistance within society and because of the nature of the list-based electoral system. They also discussed the role Islamic values play in their policy thinking and the support they get from their husbands – one of whom is a Member of Parliament.

The members of the MSP then elaborated on their position as an Islamist party. It paid a heavy price for condemning terrorism – 400 of its members were assassinated. Saying they would like to end the identification of Islam with terrorism, they said that despite the fact that only a tiny minority of Muslims kill in the name of Islam, the Western media tend to associate Islam with terrorism.

5. Meeting with Mr. Farouk Ksentini, President of the Consultative National Commission for the Promotion and the Protection of Human Rights

The Consultative National Commission for the Promotion and the Protection of Human Rights (*Commission Nationale Consultative de Promotion et de Protection des*

Droits de l'Homme or CNCPPDH) was created by the Algerian government in 2001. It was established to monitor the implementation of the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to study complaints made by citizens, and to undertake action when abuses of human rights are reported.

Mr. Ksentini began by describing the evolution of human rights in Algeria. He said Algeria has the political will and the tools to become a constitutional state (*état de droit*). He discussed the structure of the CNCPPDH, the way it handles the 20,000 to 30,000 complaints it receives annually, and the way it reports its findings. The CNCPPDH examines complaints against government organizations and ensures that the organizations in question follow up. He also discussed the CNCPPDH's relationship with Amnesty International and with the media, both of which he described as normal. He discussed prisoners' rights and said the CNCPPDH had campaigned against preventive incarceration and the use of the death penalty, which it would like to see limited to cases of assassination. On the subject of religion, he said that although the Algerian constitution guarantees religious freedom, there had been a few minor incidents involving non-Muslims.

6. Meeting with Mr. Mostefa Bouchachi, President of the Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights

The Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights (*Ligue Algérienne pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme* or LADDH) is an independent, non-partisan non-governmental organization that was formed in 1985 and legally recognized in 1989. It works to defend human rights through training and raising awareness. It cooperates with civil society groups in Algeria and internationally.

Mr. Bouchachi described the LADDH's work in holding seminars and training sessions for activists and journalists. He said the human rights situation in Algeria was regressing because of the on-going state of emergency. Specifically, he said civil and political rights have been frozen for 20 years – demonstrations and public meetings are prohibited, torture occurs in detention facilities, the judiciary is not independent of the executive, and although the security forces have restored peace, they operate under total impunity.

In discussion with the delegation, Mr. Bouchachi noted the LADDH has no access to the government and no contact with the CNCPPDH. He said the LADDH deals with cases of torture and freedom of religion by reminding the government of its responsibility to investigate. It also calls for the abolition of the death penalty. Finally, Mr. Bouchachi called on Canada to urge the Algerian government to improve human rights and the rule of law, saying that without democracy, the Islamists will take over.

7. Meeting with Mme Zohra Bitat, Vice-President of the Council of the Nation

Mme Bitat, the Vice-President of the Council of the Nation, was accompanied by members of the Council of the Nation: Mme Leila Tayeb, Mme Dalila Halilou, Professor Ali Berchiche, and Professor Rachid Bougherbal. All of them were presidential appointees. The opening of the meeting was attended by the media.

Mme Bitat began by giving an overview of the Council of the Nation, the reasons for its creation, and its role. The Algerian senators also elaborated on Algeria's development since independence, Algeria-Canada relations, regional issues, and terrorism.

The ensuing discussion dealt with the representation of women in parliament and society, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the situation of Algerian immigrants to Canada, and the roles parliaments play in each country.

8. Meeting with Professor Abdennour Laraba, Honorary President of the Amine Association and Visit to the Maillot Hospital

The Amine Association provides schooling for children who are in the Maillot Hospital, with the mission of making it a home for hospitalized children. Founded in 1997, it operates classrooms and organizes educational and cultural activities. The Association has received some \$25,000 from CIDA through the Civil Society Fund. This funding is used to train health professionals providing critical care for children with chronic and/or serious illness. This initiative supports efforts made for over four years to improve the paramedical and human capacities of medical and paramedical staff of the Maillot Hospital's pediatric unit. The initiative is aimed at strengthening respect for human rights in cases of illness, stress and anxiety, which are psychologically challenging for staff and negatively affect the performance of their duties. The pediatric unit in partnership with the Amine Association want to continue their efforts by establishing a range of training programs for health care providers and supervisors to give them the crisis management and intervention tools they need for the welfare of the sick children

The Maillot Hospital is a training hospital located in a former palace. Professor Laraba said the hospital's approach is a holistic one and that it seeks to address both health problems and social problems. He sees the hospital as a city, complete with schools and leisure facilities.

The delegation toured the hospital, seeing the wards – where mothers often stay with their children – and visiting the school and the playground established by the Amine Association. In response to questions about Algeria's needs in the area of healthcare, Professor Laraba noted that Algeria is building 100 hospitals and said that it needed more trained professionals.

9. Meeting with Mr. Abdelkader Messahel, Minister of State in charge of Maghreb and African Affairs

Minister Messahel joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1971. He served in a number of diplomatic posts before being named Minister of State in charge of Maghreb and African Affairs in 2001.

Minister Messahel began by giving an overview of the history of Algeria's relations with the rest of Africa. He reviewed African development, noting that Algeria was instrumental in launching the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) in 1999. At the regional level, he noted that the trans-Saharan highway, which will run from Algeria to Lagos in Nigeria via Mali, Niger, and Chad, will open up the interior of

the continent and link these countries together. At the international level, he stressed the importance of donor countries and recipient countries working together as partners. He talked about the success of NEPAD, noting that governance in Africa had improved and that there were fewer coups and fewer conflicts than previously. Indeed, he said Africa's current challenges were climate change, internal migration, and terrorism.

In discussion with the delegation, Minister Messahel discussed the situation in Darfur, saying that the various players in the region were not yet ready to come to an agreement, but that Africans must be trusted to find a solution. This involved guarantying territorial integrity, as well as Sudanese sovereignty, because if frontiers were not respected, the whole country could crumble. On the subject of common markets, he said North Africa was lagging behind other African regional communities, such as the South African Development Community (SADC) and the East African Community (EAC). Finally, with respect to climate change, he noted that even though Africa does not pollute as much as the developed world, it is facing the consequences of climate change, while not having the resources to deal with them.

The beginning of the meeting was covered by the media and interviews took place afterwards.

10. Meeting with Mr. Bentebet Reguieg, M.P., Chair of the APN Committee on Foreign Affairs, Cooperation, and Emigration

The meeting with Mr. Reguieg was the first of four meetings at the APN. He was accompanied by Mr. Azzedine Abdelmadjid, M.P.; Mr. Aissa Khiri, M.P.; and Mr. Mohammed Yarfaa, M.P. The beginning of the meeting was covered by the media. Mr. Reguieg began by giving an overview of the APN. He said it had a number of mechanisms for overseeing the government, including giving opinions during the development of laws and participating in workshops. The Committee on Foreign Affairs, Cooperation, and Emigration works to promote parliamentary democracy and build political relationships. The APN has 30 friendship groups with other countries, and he said it was working to set up an Algeria-Canada friendship group. He also talked about Algeria's relations with the rest of Africa and the development of infrastructure to help development.

In discussion with the delegation, Mr. Reguieg talked about the ability of members to propose legislation – 20 members must support the proposed text. He also discussed the representation of women in the APN, which he said was not high enough.

11. Meeting with Mr. Nouari Tayeb, M.P., Chair of the APN Committee on Finance and the Budget

Mr. Tayeb was accompanied by Mr. Djemaa Rekkas, M.P., and Mr. Mouloud Hachemane, M.P. He began by describing the work of the Committee on Finance and the Budget. He then gave an overview of Algeria's economic situation and the prospects for development. He also talked about cooperation with Canada.

In response to questions from the delegation, Mr. Tayeb elaborated on development projects – such as the building of new houses and roads – and Algeria's transition to a market economy. Regarding the shortage of trained professionals, he

said he was aware of the challenges and Mr. Hachemane said Algeria needed more specialists. Mr. Tayeb also talked about the situation of Algerian emigrants to Canada, some of whom have not had their credentials recognized. The delegation said that all Canadian parties recognize the need to do better in this regard.

12. Meeting with Representatives of Regional Organizations

The meeting with deputies who are also representatives of regional organizations was chaired by Mr. Aissa Khiri, M.P., a member of the Maghreb Consultative Council. He was accompanied by 10 MPs, including Mr. Abdelkader Semmari, M.P., a member of the Interim Arab Parliament, and Mr. Laroussi Hammi, M.P., president of the North African Caucus at the Pan-African Parliament.

The Maghreb Consultative Council is part of the Union of the Arab Maghreb (*Union du Maghreb Arabe*, or UMA), which was founded in 1989 by Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia. The Interim Arab Parliament was created in 2005 by the League of Arab States, an association of 22 Arab-speaking countries. The Pan-African Parliament is the legislative body of the African Union (AU). Launched in 2004, it currently has oversight, advisory, and consultative powers. Its 265 representatives are elected by the legislatures of the 53 AU states.

In discussion with the delegation, the Algerian deputies gave overviews of their roles in these three regional organizations. They also discussed the role of women in them.

13. Meeting with Mr. Abdelaziz Ziari, President of the National People's Assembly

A physician, Mr. Ziari was first elected to the APN in 1982. He returned to practising medicine during the 1990s, and then served as an advisor to President Bouteflika. Re-elected in 2007, he was also elected president of the APN.

Mr. Ziari talked about bilateral commercial relations, Algeria's improved security situation, the political situation in the run-up to the election in April, and the role of parliamentary associations and friendship groups. He called for a strengthening of bilateral relations and asked the Canadian delegation to consider creating a Canada-Algeria friendship group. In dialogue with the delegation, he also talked about the changing role of women in society and ways that might be used to increase the representation of women in Parliament.

TUNISIA

A. Key Issues

Tunisia is a constitutional republic of some 10 million people. Its population is a mix of Arab and Berber and is 98% Muslim. The government is a presidential system dominated by the Democratic constitutional gathering (*Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique*, or RCD). The opposition is divided into eight small parties, including five represented in Parliament. Civil society is represented by business groups, unions and professional and charitable associations closely controlled by the government. Freedom of association and expression are severely restricted. On the other hand, Tunisia is a

leader in promoting the legal and social status of women. The government has loosened its control of the economy, which is diversified with strong agricultural, mining, tourism, and manufacturing sectors. Although progressive social and economic policies have raised living conditions, unemployment remains a serious problem.

The Chamber of Deputies (*Chambre des députés*) has 189 members, 152 of whom are elected by the party-list majority system. Electors in each constituency choose a list of candidates, and all the constituency seats go to the winning list. All these seats are held by the RCD. In order to ensure wider representation in Parliament, the remaining 37 seats (this number will rise to 50 in the 2009 elections) are allotted proportionately to other parties that didn't secure an absolute majority in the elections. There are 43 women MPs – 23% of the total. The last elections for the Chamber of Deputies were held in 2004.

There are 126 members of the Chamber of Councillors (*Chambre des conseillers*), the upper house of the Tunisian Parliament. It was created in 2003 and the first members were chosen in 2005. One-third of the members are elected indirectly by municipal councils. Another third are elected by trade unions and professional associations. The final third are appointed by the President from among well-known personalities. The members serve six-year terms, and half are renewed every three years. There are 17 women members, or 15% of the total.

The RCD is headed by President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and holds the majority of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies and in the Chamber of Councillors. It has ruled Tunisia since independence. The RCD is governed by a ten-member political bureau (Politburo).

Canada and Tunisia have good long-standing relations. At first centred on development, they now revolve around trade, private sector investments, education and academic relations, and immigration. Although CIDA has not had a bilateral program with Tunisia since September 2008, Tunisia receives Canadian aid through CIDA's regional and multilateral programs and IDRC's projects. Trade between Canada and Tunisia amounts to about \$160 million annually. There are some 15,000 people of Tunisian origin in Canada.

B. Meetings

The delegation's official meeting program was prepared by the Chamber of Deputies' international services. The Canadian Embassy in Tunisia prepared the program for the bilateral visit, scheduling meetings that allowed the delegation to meet with each of the political parties and members of civil society. In addition, a meeting was arranged with the African Development Bank.

1. Working Session with Members of the Chamber of Deputies

The Association delegation held a working session with twelve members of the Chamber of Deputies. The session was chaired by Mr. Charfeddine Guellouz, President of the Tunisia-Canada Parliamentary Friendship Group.

Mr. Guellouz began with an overview of the Tunisian Parliament, the basic goals of the Tunisian government, and the economic and social situation. He expressed the

hope that relations between Tunisian and Canadian parliamentarians and economic exchanges will grow.

In dialogue with the delegation, the Tunisian deputies discussed agriculture, Middle East issues, the ways in which Tunisia might help the rest of Africa, and the problem of water shortages. They asked for Canadian support on these matters, and in response, the Canadian delegation pointed out that relations between Canada and Tunisia had evolved from one of development assistance to one of commercial and economic partnership. In order to encourage this partnership, the delegation said it hoped that barriers to trade might be reduced and economic exchanges increased.

The delegation and the Tunisian deputies also discussed the Tunisian political process and the challenges Tunisia has faced since the introduction of a multi-party system in 1989. Making reference to Algeria's political turmoil, they said that Tunisia could not afford to sacrifice five decades of hard-earned progress. The deputies talked about Tunisia's education and healthcare systems, as well as the country's good standard of living. They also talked about the advances women had made in Tunisian society – particularly in the areas of medicine, the judiciary, and attendance at university – and the role of women in Parliament. It was pointed out that Tunisia has a law that gives special status to female prisoners who are pregnant, and that once they give birth they are moved to a separate location in order to raise their child. The discussion then moved to the area of the environment and climate change.

In closing, the Canadian delegation asked for the Tunisian deputies' assistance in helping Canadians better understand Islam.

2. Meeting with Mr. Fouad Mebazaâ, President of the Chamber of Deputies

Mr. Mebazaâ was first elected in 1964 and his long career has included politics and diplomacy. He became President of the Chamber of Deputies in 2004. He is a member of the RCD Politburo.

Mr. Mebazaâ gave an overview of Tunisia's development, and said that much remains to be done. The dialogue with the delegation centred on the need to increase ties, the situation of Tunisian immigrants in Canada, the involvement of private enterprise in development, the need to lower tariff barriers and increase economic exchanges, and the importance of resisting protectionism during the financial crisis.

3. Meeting with Mohamed Nouri Jouini, Minister for Development & International Co-operation

Minister Jouini has been Minister of Development & International Co-operation since 2003. He was previously advisor to the President.

Minister Jouini gave an overview of his ministry and its role in economic planning, regional development, international economic and financial cooperation, investment promotion, and official statistics. He said because external trade is the motor of Tunisia's economic growth, he's worried about the impact of protectionism as countries respond to the financial crisis. Although Tunisia's trade is mostly with Europe, it wishes to diversify. To this point, he said Canadian companies were not participating enough in the Tunisian economy and he expressed the hope of increasing trade and tourism.

In response to questions from the delegation, Minister Jouini talked about Tunisia's agriculture sector, the performance of which he said could be improved. He discussed the financial crisis and said the challenge was to ensure that it did not last too long. He said if it lasted one or two years, the crisis wouldn't be too deep, but that if it lasted more than two years, everybody would have difficulties. He discussed the measures Tunisia was taking in response to the crisis, including reducing the fiscal burden on local and foreign firms, spending on investment, and focusing its efforts on core areas.

On the subject of women's role in the economy, Minister Jouini pointed to provisions for mothers of young children in the public sector to work half-time while receiving two-thirds of salary. In addition, their jobs are guaranteed if they stay home with their young children.

He also pointed out that much of the Tunisian population is middle class, with few very poor or very rich people. He emphasised the importance of education and talked about measures for helping people own their homes.

4. Meeting with Mr. Abdelwahab Abdallah, Minister of Foreign Affairs

A former university teacher and newspaper editor, Mr. Abdallah first became a cabinet minister in 1984. He held the posts of minister, deputy, ambassador, and senior advisor before being named Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2005. He is a member of the RCD Politburo.

Minister Abdallah began with an overview of Tunisia-Canada relations. He said that although they have been excellent historically, he would like to see them intensified. The delegation agreed that both countries would benefit from more bilateral exchanges. Minister Abdallah said that Tunisia's strategic geographic location made it an excellent point of access to sub-Saharan Africa. He also expressed hope that a direct air link would soon be established between Tunisia and Canada, saying it would encourage and deepen exchanges. In response to questions, Minister Abdallah discussed his views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

5. Meeting with Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi

Prime Minister Ghannouchi is an economist by training. From 1992 until he became prime minister in 1999, he was the Minister of International Co-operation and Foreign Investment. He is Vice-President of the RCD and a member of the RCD Politburo.

Prime Minister Ghannouchi noted the increased international interest in Africa and hoped this interest would help the continent develop. In North Africa, he said the situation was improving because of policies favouring the private sector and policy convergence on the part of North African countries. He noted that exchanges between North African countries were growing and that Tunisia had good relations with the European Union and other African countries, such as Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Chad.

Prime Minister Ghannouchi said that it will take time before an African common market is a reality. Because the Sahara issue is an obstacle to greater regional integration for Maghreb, efforts are continuing at the bilateral level. In the meantime,

various regions of Africa also continue to work toward improved integration within their respective regions. He agreed that protectionism posed a major risk for the world economy, as there could be a chain reaction.

In terms of the ties between Canada and Tunisia, Prime Minister Ghannouchi said the level of the relationship should be raised. He said there were a number of opportunities that could be built upon, including the some 2,000 Tunisian students in Canada, the 17,000 Canadian tourists who visit Tunisia each year, and the shared use of the French language. However, he said that the trade relationship was imbalanced. He said that establishing a direct air link would help facilitate exchanges. The Canadian delegation pointed out the usefulness of parliamentary exchanges in learning about each other's country.

The discussion then moved to the role of the League of States. He went on to talk about the role of associations in Tunisian society and the need for social dialogue.

6. Meeting with Mr. Abhallah Kallel, President of the Chamber of Councillors

Mr. Kallel held a number of administrative and ministerial posts before becoming president of the Chamber of Councillors in 2005. He is a member of the RCD Politburo. He was accompanied by nine members of the Chamber of Councillors.

Mr. Kallel began by giving an overview of Tunisia's approach to development, which is based on developing its human resources. He said that its multi-party system is built in such a way as to avoid crises and to ensure stability. He then reviewed Tunisia's social conditions.

In discussion with the delegation, Mr. Kallel elaborated on Tunisia's internal investments and its economic management. He discussed the make-up of the Chamber of Councillors and talked about parliamentary immunity, which extends to activities outside the Chamber. He also described the three goals of the government's latest five-year plan: conserve and improve the capital that has already been developed, continue social progress, and build the country's infrastructure. He asked for help from countries like Canada, to which the delegation responded that Canada's relationship with Tunisia is now one of economic partnership, rather than aid.

Mr. Kallel also expanded on the role the Chamber of Councillors plays in reviewing bills and the method of appointing its members. The delegation and Mr. Kallel also discussed the status of women, the protection of minorities, and the way in which Islam is portrayed internationally.

7. Meeting with Mr. Mohamed Ghariani, Secretary-General of the RCD

Mr. Ghariani has been active in the RCD since 1983 and served as ambassador and as advisor to the President. He was named Secretary-General of the RCD in 2008. He is a member of the RCD Politburo.

Mr. Ghariani welcomed the delegation and gave an overview of the history of the RCD. He said that in the years following independence, Tunisia needed strong leadership to overcome illiteracy, establish the education system, and liberate women. For these reasons, only one political party was permitted. After Mr. Ben Ali became

president on 7 November 1987, he said the country began taking steps toward democracy. Mr. Ghariani noted that opposition parties are represented in both the Chamber of Deputies and in the Chamber of Counsellors. As well, there are some 10,000 associations nationwide. He said, however, that terrorism remains a major concern.

As far as the economy is concerned, Mr. Ghariani said Tunisia has enjoyed economic growth in the 6% range. There is a large middle class and education for all.

In response to questions, Mr. Ghariani explained the relationship between the RCD and the government. He said the RCD follows the rules governing political parties and that the state relies on the RCD to implement programs. He stressed that the party, which has some 2.3 million members, does not exploit the financial resources of the state. He gave an overview of the process by which the party holds central committee meetings once or twice a year and general conventions every five years.

Mr. Ghariani went on to discuss economic policy, the seats in the Chamber of Deputies that are set aside for opposition parties, the management of elections, and controls on the media. Regarding the latter, he said the media, for example, are prohibited from calling for terrorism or violence and that he is concerned about the misinformation and libel being spread in some media. For example, some newspapers have been censured for attacking the national interest. In response to a question on media air time, the Secretary General of the RCD explained that air time is generally scheduled. However, during an election campaign, it is decided by a draw. He said the media are evolving in a gradual way in Tunisia.

8. Meeting with Mrs. Sarra Kanoun Jarraya, Minister of Women, Family, Children and Senior Citizens' Affairs

Mrs. Sarra Kanoun Jarraya worked in the public health field before becoming a secretary of state in 2004 and Minister of Women, Family, Children and Senior Citizens' Affairs in 2007.

Mrs. Jarraya gave an overview of her ministry, which has horizontal ties with other ministries, as well as partnerships with civil society groups. She pointed out that her ministry has responsibility for many sectors of society. She went on to elaborate about measures for balancing work and family life, as well as the kinds of childcare available and the support for seniors. She also talked about the national strategy to fight violence, which is based on raising awareness of the issue. The dialogue also touched on areas in which Canada and Tunisia might work together to improve the situation of women.

9. Meeting with Mr. Moncer Rouissi, Higher Committee for Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms

The Higher Committee for Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (*Comité Supérieur des Droits de l'Homme et des Libertés Fondamentales*) is a consultative body that reports to the President. It was created in 1991.

Mr. Rouissi gave an overview of the Committee. The President appoints 15 of its 30 members. There is also one representative from each Chamber in Parliament and

members from various associations, such as trade unions. The Committee can set its own agenda and can make unannounced visits to prisons. It also has contact with human rights organizations in other countries.

In discussion with the delegation, Mr. Rouissi discussed the state of religious freedom in Tunisia, the status of women, the law of inheritance, abortion, the banning of polygamy, and investigations into allegations of torture. He said that the Committee cannot bring cases before the courts, nor does it have a relationship with Parliament. The Committee's recommendations are forwarded to the President.

10. Other meetings

The delegation had the opportunity to meet with representatives from all political parties at the dinner held at the Canadian residence and during separate meetings. It also met with association and journalistic representatives. During these meetings, the delegation was informed of operational difficulties in Tunisia encountered by some political parties and players in civil society whose approaches and opinions differ from those of regional authorities. Although the Tunisian government does not physically intimidate opponents, the authorities still use various pressure tactics, including withdrawing state advertising from some news media, freezing funding and not renting out rooms for meetings. Moreover, it seems that Tunisia has acquired democratic institutions even though it has not yet taken the necessary steps for democracy to develop fully at a practical level in Tunisian society and institutions.

11. Meeting with Officials from the African Development Bank

The African Development Bank (AfDB) is a regional multilateral development bank whose shareholders include 53 African countries and 24 non-African countries. It promotes economic and social development through loans, equity investments, and technical assistance. It is temporarily headquartered in Tunis.

Canada joined the African Development Fund (ADF) – the AfDB's concessional arm – in 1973 and the AfDB in 1982. For 2005–2015, Canada has provided the equivalent of US\$172 million through the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Trust Fund. In 2008, Canada also pledged CAD\$302 million to replenish the ADF.⁽¹⁾

The delegation was welcomed by Mr. Modibo Toure, Chief of Staff of the Bank's President. He said the delegation's visit came at an important time for the AfDB. A series of institutional reforms were implemented in 2006 with a view to increasing consultation with clients. In the context of the world financial crisis, the AfDB was reviewing its approaches and a series of consultations were underway.

Mr. Louis Kasekende, the AfDB's Chief Economist, then gave an overview of the AfDB's medium-term strategy and its response to the financial crisis. He said the challenges for African countries included poor infrastructure, weak government

⁽¹⁾ African Development Bank Group, News Release, "Canada and AfDB Group Launch New Technical Cooperation Fund to Finance Development Projects in Africa," 15 April 2008, <http://www.afdb.org/en/news-events/article/canada-and-afdb-group-launch-new-technical-cooperation-fund-to-finance-development-projects-in-africa-1557/>.

institutions, limited regional integration, the presence of fragile states, and increased competitiveness. The AfDB's strengths include its structure, the confidence of its partners, the growing private sector role, and its improved processes and outreach. It focuses on infrastructure, governance, the private sector, and higher education, while paying attention to the cross-cutting issues of gender, environment, climate change, and knowledge management. He then reviewed the impact of the financial crisis and the AfDB's response, under which it would increase lending.

In discussion with the delegation, Mr. Kasekende talked about a Canadian trust fund that supports the AfDB's capacity to do gender-based analysis. He gave details on the way in which the AfDB invests its money, the interest from which pays its administrative costs. He went on to discuss the threat of protectionism, trade integration, and risk assessment.

The delegation then heard a presentation by Mr. Timothy Turner, Director of the Private Sector Department. Mr. Turner, a Canadian, began by saying that thanks to Canadian governments that had resisted pressure to deregulate the financial services sector, the Canadian banking system was one of the world's strongest. He went on to describe the AfDB's private-sector strategy, which is based on the idea that the private sector can make money and have a development outcome at the same time. He also talked about the process for evaluating projects. Mr. Turner went on to discuss the financial crisis and AfDB's counter-cyclical role. This will require it to be recapitalized at some point. He called on Canada to support the Fund for African Private Sector Assistance. In response to questions, Mr. Turner discussed environmental assessments, the credit situation, and environmental sustainability.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The delegation attended briefing sessions presented by Canadian officials for the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and CIDA.

In Algeria, the Canadian Ambassador hosted a lunch with business people and a cocktail buffet with Algerian journalists. The delegation also attended two lunches hosted by the Council of the Nation and the APN.

In Tunisia, the Canadian Ambassador hosted a reception with representatives of various political parties, business people, and members of the diplomatic corps. The delegation also attended a lunch hosted by the Chamber of Deputies and a dinner hosted by the Canada-Tunisia Friendship Association, which is made up of business people.

CONCLUSION

By visiting Algeria and Tunisia, the delegation gained a better understanding of their political and economic development and the challenges they face. The level of meetings was high in both countries. In Algeria, the delegation met high-ranking members of the ruling party, the Speaker of the APN and the Deputy-Speaker of the Council of the Nation. In Tunisia, the delegation met with half of the 10-member Politburo of the ruling party, including the Prime Minister, the speakers of both chambers of Parliament, and senior ministers.

As far as meetings with other parties were concerned, the delegation was able to meet freely with two parties in Algeria – one party of the governing coalition and one opposition party. In Tunisia, it was able to meet with representatives from all the parties, including those represented in Parliament and those that are not.

On the subject of relations with Canada, the delegation's Algerian counterparts stressed the things Canada and Algeria have in common, including the size of the countries and the French language. They stressed the good relations and the fact that they were not based on a history of colonialism. They expressed hope that bilateral relations would expand. They also noted the presence of many Algerians in Canada.

The delegation's Tunisian counterparts also expressed hope of strengthening bilateral relations. They called for Canadian assistance in a number of areas and for increased participation in the Tunisian economy by Canadian companies. The delegation pointed out, however, that bilateral relations are now based on economic partnership, rather than aid. In this context, it encouraged Tunisia to reduce its tariffs and to offer Canada the same tariff benefits as Europe.

With regard to interparliamentary relations, Algerian and Tunisian parliamentarians expressed their desire to increase ties. Algerian parliamentarians in particular called for the creation of a Canada-Algeria parliamentary friendship group.

The delegation took note of the strong security presence in Algeria. The delegation was escorted by police motorcycles everywhere it went, and it observed the frequent police road blocks and the presence of policemen throughout Algiers. The security presence was not as noticeable in Tunisia.

During its meetings in both Algeria and Tunisia, there was discussion of the situation of North African immigrants in Canada. In particular, the delegation heard that many Algerian immigrants in Canada complain they are not able to practise their professions. It also heard there were few complaints from Tunisians living in Canada.

The issue of direct flights to Canada was mentioned often. Algerians expressed their gratitude for the twice-weekly flights between Montreal and Algiers that began in June 2007. Tunisians looked forward to the beginning of direct flights to Canada, which are expected within a couple of years.

On the subject of regional integration in North Africa, the delegation learned that, as a result of the outstanding Sahara issue, it was happening mainly at the bilateral level and through the business world. It also learned of infrastructure projects, such as the building of a trans-Saharan highway, which should improve regional integration.

The status of women was the subject of much discussion in both Algeria and Tunisia. The delegation enquired about the steps being taken to increase parliamentary representation, as well as the general situation regarding women. It heard about Algeria's work on measures to increase representation. In Tunisia, the delegation expressed its admiration at the progress the country had made in areas such as equal pay for men and women and its programs for mothers of young children. It was impressed that Tunisia has a law that gives special status to female prisoners who are pregnant, and that once they give birth they are moved to a separate location in order to raise their child.

The global economic situation was also the subject of much discussion, and there was general agreement that protectionism should be avoided. The Canadian delegation expressed its hopes that tariffs would be lowered. There was also discussion of the challenges of creating employment for the countries' many young people and of the situation of illegal migration.

The media appeared to be relatively free in Algeria. There was media presence at meetings with parliamentarians and the delegation was able to meet with a number of working journalists, including journalists representing foreign news services. The delegation's visit was the subject of stories in a number of different Algerian papers. In Tunisia, on the other hand, the media was tightly controlled. The delegation was concerned with the lack of press freedom there and at the restrictions placed on journalists.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For their help in making the visit a success, the delegation would like to thank Ambassador Patrick Parisot and the staff of the Canadian Embassy in Algiers, particularly Mr. Lajos Àrendàs, Ms. Nawal Lebah, Mr. Nicolas Ouerdane, and Mr. Sébastien Moffett.

For their help with the Tunisian leg of the visit, the Association would like to thank Ambassador Bruno Picard and the staff of the Canadian Embassy in Tunis, especially Mr. Ridha Blel.

Respectfully submitted,

The Hon. Raynell Andreychuk, Senator
Co-Chair
Canada-Africa Parliamentary
Association

The Hon. Mauril Bélanger, M.P.
Co-Chair
Canada-Africa Parliamentary
Association

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association
ACTIVITY	Bilateral Visits to Algeria and Tunisia
DESTINATION	Algiers, Algeria, Tunis, Tunisia
DATES	February 15-20, 2009
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Mobina S.B. Jaffer; Hon. Terrance Stratton
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Hon. Mauril Bélanger; Johanne Deschamps; Larry Miller; Candice Hoepner
STAFF	Julie Lalande Prud'homme; Michael Dewing
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 37,633.62
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 13,960.77
HOSPITALITY	\$ 1,355.03
PER DIEMS	\$ 5,232.74
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 1,746.98
MISCELLANEOUS/INTERPRETATION	\$ 5,391.80
TOTAL	\$ 65,320.94