

Canadian Group
Inter-Parliamentary Union



Groupe canadien
Union interparlementaire

**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
to the Meeting of the Steering Committee of the
Twelve Plus Group**

Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

**London, United Kingdom
2 March 2009**

Report

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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 (40 members), the Asia-Pacific Group (26 members), the Arab Group (18 members), the Eurasia Group (7 members), the Latin American Group (19 members) and the Twelve Plus Group (45 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.

1. 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

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

Chairperson on account of their particular abilities or merits, who could benefit the activities of the Twelve Plus Group as a whole.

2. The Meeting of the Twelve Plus Steering Committee

Eight parliamentarians from seven countries participated in the meeting of the Twelve Plus Steering Committee in London, United Kingdom on 2 March 2009. The countries represented were: Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, France, Greece, Latvia, and the United Kingdom.

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 119th IPU Assembly (Addis Ababa, 5-10 April 2009). 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 London.

Respectfully submitted,

The Honourable Donald H. Oliver, Q.C., Senator
President, Canadian Group IPU

Appendix

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE
London (Jubilee Room)
Monday 2 March, 2009 at 0930**



*Group of the Twelve Plus
in the Inter-Parliamentary Union*

*Groupe des Douze Plus
à l'Union interparlementaire*

Participation

Mr John Austin (Chair of the 12+ Group), Senator Donald Oliver (Canada), Mr Daniel Reisiegl (Czech Republic), Senator Robert del Picchia (France), Mrs Elsa Papadimitriou (Greece), Mrs Karina Petersone (Latvia), Dr Roger Berry (United Kingdom), Mr Nigel Evans (United Kingdom).

In attendance

Mr Marc De Rouck (Belgium), Mr Joseph Jackson (Canada), Ms Sylvie Andrisova (Czech Republic), Mr Philippe Bourasse (France), Mr Bertrand de Cordovez (France), Mrs Kalliopi Mermigki (Greece), Mrs Sandra Paura (Latvia), Mr Kenneth Courtenay (12+ Secretary), Ms Dominique Rees (12+ Secretariat), Ms Gabriella Liberotti (12+ Secretariat), Ms Libby Preston (12+ Secretariat)

1. Opening Remarks

Apologies had been received from Asta Moller (Iceland), Brigitta Gadiant (Switzerland), Rudy Salles (France) and Geert Versnick (Belgium).

2. Adoption of the Agenda

The agenda was adopted.

3. Approval of the Minutes of the 12+ Steering Committee meeting in London on Monday 15 September 2009

The Minutes were approved without comment.

4. Matters arising from previous meetings

The Chair reported that he had been unable to make progress with the other geopolitical groups on the need for a revised agreement between the IPU and Assembly host country regarding provision of visas

IPU Matters

5. Reports from the Executive Committee

Robert del Picchia (France) reported that an extraordinary 2 day meeting of the Executive Committee had taken place at the end of January to discuss the situation in Gaza. An Italian, Mr Filippo Grandi, Deputy Commissioner General of UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) who had extensive experience of the Gaza region, gave an excellent presentation and responded very well to questions. Debate in the Committee had, at times, been heated but the President's declaration had been supported by the majority. He praised the President's handling of the meeting.

The Committee agreed a series of meetings. On 7 and 8 May an economic crisis summit meeting would take place in Geneva. Experts would be invited to give presentations on a range of topics. The Council would be asked in Addis for a budget appropriation to cover interpretation costs and so on, amounting to 157,000 Swiss Francs. On 14 December an environmental conference would be held in Copenhagen on the occasion of the UN Climate Change Conference (COP15). The meeting was deliberately timed to allow parliamentarians to focus attention on the environment immediately before the ministerial session of the UN Conference, which would be held on 15 and 16 in Copenhagen. The one problem caused by this timing was that hotels were already heavily booked. The costs of interpretation and so on would again be met from IPU budgets.

There was some discussion about the hosting of Assembly meetings in 2011. As 12+ Members were aware, Canada had bid to host the Assembly but the visa issues remains unsolved. Panama had also now offered to host the meeting. The Secretary General had sent a representative to look at possible conference venues.

Elsa Papadimitriou (Greece) praised the way in which the President had handled the extraordinary meeting. She had met with him on the eve of the meeting and had been impressed by the preparatory work he had undertaken. The meeting had been difficult to chair but the President had managed to build sufficient consensus for a statement to be released in his name. She welcomed the climate conference and approved of its timing. There were a number of other platforms available to parliamentarians to highlight the Kyoto protocols in the lead up to Copenhagen, one example was the OSCE, where Greece currently held the position of Chair-in-Office. Robert del Picchia (France) added that the Executive Committee had agreed that the President should accept an invitation to travel to Gaza and Israel at the end of February.

The Chair hoped that the role of the Vice Presidents would be discussed at the Executive Committee meeting in Addis Ababa. Elsa Papadimitriou (Greece) said an option could be for one Vice President to have a mandate relating to finance and administration, and for the remainder to act as geographical representatives of the President. Each geopolitical group would then be represented by a Vice President. She agreed the roles needed to be finalised. Karina Petersone (Latvia) suggested that the Executive Committee ask the Bureau to circulate, in Addis, two or three possible ways in which the roles of the Vice Presidents could be defined. It was agreed that the 12+ Executive Committee members (Robert del Picchia and Elsa Papadimitriou) would draft one possible mandate and propose to the Committee at its meeting in Addis.

6. Preparation of the 120th IPU Assembly in Addis Ababa

a. Reports and Resolutions of the Standing Committees

The revised draft resolutions were circulated. The 12+ rapporteurs were:

Committee I: Mr Price (Australia)

Committee II: Mr Fuchtel (Germany)

Committee III: Mr. Dismore (United Kingdom)

Elsa Papademitriou (Greece) circulated amendments that had been proposed by the Greek delegation.

b. Emergency item

The Chair informed Members that the 12+ had not received any formal notification of an emergency item. The most obvious topic was the world financial crisis but this may not be classed as an emergency item, especially given that a separate conference was planned for 7 and 8 May.

Robert del Picchia (France) thought it would be odd for parliamentarians not to debate such a significant subject, the public would expect it of them. The situation was also changing rapidly and there would be a lot to discuss post the G20 meeting. Donald Oliver (Canada) echoed these comments, parliamentarians needed to have an opportunity to hear each others views, the debate itself would be more important than the resolution. It would also act as useful preparation for the May meeting. Nigel Evans (United Kingdom) agreed, things were changing rapidly and it would be of great benefit to hear from other parliamentarians. The Chair suggested that the title of the emergency item could focus on the impact of the crisis on the most vulnerable people.

Roger Berry (United Kingdom) suggested that the causes of the crisis also be discussed to try and prevent a repeat. Robert del Picchia (France) suggested that the focus could be on the impact on African countries given the location of the meeting. Elsa Papademitriou (Greece) also thought it was important to understand the evolution of the crisis but she suggested a focus on the democratisation of globalisation. Countries needed to unite together to tackle the crisis, the debate should be about political rather than economic solutions. Donald Oliver (Canada) thought it would be difficult to debate the causes of the crisis in Addis because the United States would not be represented. **(Post Meeting Note: See Item 11)** He suggested debate be confined to the role of parliamentarians and the impact of the crisis on the most vulnerable. The conference in Geneva could examine the causes of the crisis because experts and academics could be invited to highlight what had happened in the USA.

Karina Petersone (Latvia) agreed that the debate should focus on the role of parliaments in response to the financial crisis, as well as in ensuring global solidarity so that the most vulnerable did not suffer disproportionately. The Chair thought that it would be impossible for the debate not to touch on the causes but he thought the title should focus on the Millennium Goals and the impact on the vulnerable. Roger Berry (United Kingdom) said that some countries, such as Mexico and Argentina, had experienced financial crises before the current one, but countries had not listened to their experiences. As internationalists, IPU members needed to have the humility to

listen and learn from others. The Chair thanked members for their comments. He suggested the Committee nominate a representative to draft a title and rationale to propose as an emergency item. Donald Oliver (Canada) agreed to take on this role, his contact details would be circulated to members.

c. Proposed topics and rapporteurs for future assemblies

The Chair said he had not been notified of any subjects but asked Members to give some thought to possible topics .

Elsa Papadimitriou (Greece) said that the Greek delegation had proposed some topics, namely:

Committee I: Crisis Management: The involvement of National Parliaments and International Parliamentary Assemblies

Committee II: Democratising Globalisation

Committee III: E-democracy and Child Pornography: Protecting the Rights of the Child.

Nigel Evans (United Kingdom) was particularly interested in the subject proposed for Committee III. He would be interested in a wider exploration of e-democracy, looking at how parliamentarians were equipped with new technologies to assist their work. Elsa Papadimitriou (Greece) reported that a seminar on e-democracy would take place on 6 March, she thoroughly recommended one of the speakers, Nicholas Dunlop. Nigel Evans (United Kingdom) said that some parliamentarians were poorly equipped in terms of research and information services. He suggested that the IPU could look into this subject and suggest minimum standards. Robert del Picchia (France) advised that the IPU held an annual meeting on this subject. He thought a 2007 IPU report on the ways in which Parliaments supported the work of Parliamentarians might be of interest to Mr Evans.

Karina Petersone (Latvia) also thought that e-democracy was a topical issue. The IPU could ask for a report on how well Parliaments were equipped to use new technologies but she stressed that the electorate needed to have access, and the ability, to use the same technology. The Chair thought the digital divide would be an interesting topic. Donald Oliver (Canada) suggested that the IPU were already looking into the issues raised. For example, an IPU seminar on parliamentary use of technology had taken place in Geneva last October. He also explained the measures that national parliaments could take to tackle internet based child pornography.

d. IPU Committee on UN Affairs

The Chair reported that this would be discussed at the next meeting of the Executive Committee.

7. IPU Reform

Robert del Picchia (France) updated the Committee on behalf of Rudy Salles. He reported that the allocation of committee time, as trialled at the 119th Assembly in Cape Town, had been judged to be a success and suggested it would be permanently adopted. In relation to Palestine, he said that the President of the French National Assembly had received a letter from the President of the PNC. The letter did not

faithfully represent the decisions that had been taken in regard to Palestinian representation at the IPU. The French Assembly had responded clarifying the representation that the IPU had agreed, copies of the response were circulated. Finally, in Addis Ababa, the Executive Committee planned to discuss an amendment to rule 2 of the statutes which would widen the definition of observer status.

8. Appointment of the Secretary General

The Chair said that Executive Committee papers on this subject had been circulated last September, though had not yet been issued to Council. He assumed they would be discussed at the Committee's meeting in Addis. Donald Oliver (Canada) highlighted that the current Secretary General, Anders Johnsson, would need to announce his intentions by June. Robert del Picchia (France) said that the appointments process must demonstrate that the IPU operated according to democratic principles. The Chair observed that the role would be advertised through the IPU and member parliaments. Individuals could apply or parliaments could propose a candidate. Roger Berry (United Kingdom) was surprised to learn that parliaments could propose a candidate, he thought this could provide an unfair advantage to those candidates. The Secretary General was a technocrat, employed to run the organisation. It should be a straight forward advertisement for individuals only. The Chair said that in other parliamentary organisations it was common for member parliaments to submit candidates. Nigel Evans (United Kingdom) agreed with Mr Berry. He suggested the Executive Committee impose restrictions on monies that could be spent on campaigning; it would be wrong if a national parliament secured the role through lobbying. Donald Oliver (Canada) said that the IPU had a history of governments becoming involved in elections. It was clear that the Indonesian Government had been involved in the last Presidential race. The Chair shared the concerns expressed but added that in the past nominations had only been accepted from parliaments. He was pleased that the Executive Committee had agreed to allow individuals to apply, this was an important step forward.

Karina Petersone (Latvia) expressed concern that the current Secretary General would have an unfair advantage by declaring his intention in June, whilst other candidates would have to wait until the appointments process began in the autumn. The Chair responded by saying that Mr Johnsson was required to make his intentions known a year before his term of office expired in June 2010. Robert del Picchia (France) said that other candidates could announce their intentions before the autumn deadline. He stressed that the process must be an open competition regardless of Mr Johnsson's decision. The Chair agreed. He said that the papers indicated that the Executive Committee would produce a shortlist of 5 candidates who would then be interviewed. Two or more names would then be proposed to the Council who would decide through a vote. Roger Berry (United Kingdom) asked how parliamentarians would get to question the candidates. The Chair thought that the candidates proposed to the Council would address each geopolitical group. Robert del Picchia (France) commented that each Executive Committee member could nominate up to 5 candidates. The Committee would then vote and the top 5 scoring candidates would then be interviewed. Following the interviews the Committee Members would select 2 or more candidates to proceed to the next round, which would include attending a meeting of each geopolitical group. He

added that as Secretary General of the IPU, the appointee would have political power, vested through the organisation, so must be more than a technocrat.

9. Vacancies

Committee on Middle East Questions

The Chair announced that Mr Carter (New Zealand) had assumed ministerial office and Mr de Donnea (Belgium) was now a titular member, this meant that there were vacancies for one titular and one substitute member resulting from these changes, in addition to an existing substitute vacancy. These were not designated 12+ positions and it may be thought that the 12+ had enough places, but there was nothing to stop individual delegations nominating candidates..

First Standing Committee

The Chair said that the 12+ would need to select a titular member and substitute vice president to replace Lord Morris (United Kingdom) and Mr Podgorean (Romania).

Third Standing Committee

The Chair announced that there was a 12+ vacancy for a substitute vice president.

The vacancies would be discussed at the 12+ meeting in Addis.

10. Budget

The Chair reported that the budget documentation had only just been received from Geneva. Initial consideration showed that the fund for voluntary contributions had only received 25% of the amount estimated and although there was an operating surplus, the budget was actually in deficit if the pension fund obligations were taken into account. Daniel Reiesiegel (Czech Republic), who was also an internal auditor, noted that the position of the voluntary fund had not improved from the previous year. He thought that the current financial climate would make it more difficult to secure contributions. He would consider the budget in more detail and make the Committee aware of any concerns.

11. Membership

The Chair reported that the suspension of Guinea would be considered at the Addis Assembly and also the possible reaffiliation of Bangladesh. Donald Oliver (Canada) asked if there was any news on the reaffiliation of the United States. The Chair understood that 5 representatives from the US Congress would attend the Assembly in Addis. There was a suggestion that if the US were to seek reaffiliation, it would request that the Assembly always meet during the Easter recess. This timing would cause difficulties for some other member countries.

12. Specialised IPU meetings held since the 119th IPU Assembly in Geneva

The Steering Committee noted a list of the meetings held since the 119th Assembly.

13. Other Matters relating to the IPU

a. Selection process for Assembly host countries

The Chair said that the issue of visas (affecting the UK in 2004 and Canada's wish to host an Assembly) had been discussed before but he understood further concerns had been expressed on the process and selection of host countries in regard to their politics and human rights records. Concerns had also been expressed about conference facilities. He explained that from a 12+ perspective the Addis facilities posed a problem because the meeting room only had a capacity of 115. Delegations would only be able to send 2 or 3 representatives to the morning meetings. Interpretation facilities were also limited meaning only English and French interpretation would be possible. A letter from IPU HQ on the facilities was circulated. It was agreed that the invitation to the 12+ meetings would include a note explaining the situation.

Turning to human rights, the Chair reported that the Ethiopian Opposition Leader, Birtukan Mideksa, was currently imprisoned. The Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians could not take up her case because she was not a parliamentarian. The Secretary General had written to the Speaker of the Ethiopian Parliament about the case. The United Kingdom would be raising the case with the Ethiopian Ambassador. He urged other member countries also to raise the matter. Roger Berry (United Kingdom) echoed this view, it would be difficult to defend holding the IPU Assembly in Ethiopia in such circumstances. Donald Oliver (Canada) reported that a Canadian was also wrongly imprisoned in Ethiopia at present. The Canadian Government had raised the matter only last week. The Chair agreed to relay parliamentarians' concerns to the Ethiopian Ambassador.

Donald Oliver (Canada) reported on the latest developments with regard to Canada's wish to host the Assembly in 2011. The Secretary General had contacted the former legal counsel to the Secretary General of the United Nations for a legal opinion on the visa issue. The opinion should be produced in time for the meeting in Addis. He was disappointed to learn that the Secretary General had authorised a visit to Panama, who had also offered to host the Assembly in 2011. The Chair was puzzled as to why a legal opinion was necessary. The visa requirement was set out in a letter of agreement between the host country and IPU, it was not a legal, but political, matter. It was a ludicrous situation because without resolution of the visa issue, no country that had signed the international travel ban would ever be able to host an Assembly. Robert del Picchia (France) believed that the Secretary General had sought legal opinion in an attempt to influence the other Executive Committee members.

b. Contingency Fund for Extraordinary Meetings

The Chair said that the parliaments of Executive Committee members were responsible for the cost of sending members to meetings and visits. For example, members of the Middle East Committee had been asked to pay to participate in a visit to Israel and the Occupied Territories. A member of the UK delegation had also recently been invited to represent the Committee on Middle East Questions at the extraordinary meeting held in Geneva to discuss the situation in Gaza. Members had been asked to pay their own costs. Roger Berry (United Kingdom) thought the policy of requiring members to pay their own costs was unreasonable and regressive. He was concerned that a poorer country might not be able to send its members and would therefore be discouraged from participating in committee activities. He suggested that the IPU have a contingency

fund to pay for such activities. Donald Oliver (Canada) added that the IPU did pay travel costs for the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians.

Elsa Papadimitriou (Greece) saw the validity of the principle but she thought that parliamentarians and national parliaments should make a conscious decision about the commitment required when seeking appointment to a committee. It would mean a significant increase in budget if the IPU were to fund more travel. Robert del Picchia (France) thought that the IPU should not establish a committee if the funding was not clear. However a distinction needed to be drawn between meetings of the IPU and its committees, and meetings where IPU members were invited to attend. The French delegation rarely approved funding for attendance at the latter meetings. Budgets were not infinite, choices had to be made. If the IPU was to fund travel for committees difficult decisions would have to be taken around selection of participants. Karina Petersone (Latvia) agreed, each country had to be free to make its own choices about the activities in which it became involved. Although she could see a case for a contingency fund in the event of emergency meetings. And she supported the opinion that the IPU should only create institutions, the activities of which it can bear the costs of. The Chair asked the Executive Committee members to note the comments.

c. IPU Committee on Korean Reunification

Donald Oliver (Canada) circulated a draft document regarding the establishment of a committee on Korean Peace and Reunification. The purpose of the committee would be to generate parliamentary dialogue, promote human rights and inter-Korean dialogue, and stimulate the economic development of North Korea. The Committee could also play an active part in reuniting families separated across the North-South border. He hoped that efforts made by parliamentarians could add to the Governmental efforts already being made. Private funds would be raised to support the Committee's work. Support had been gained from Vietnam, Indonesia and also, he hoped, China. The draft would be circulated to the Asia Pacific geopolitical group at its meeting on 20th March. If that group approved the proposal he hoped the 12+ group would also provide its endorsement. The Chair said he would circulate the draft proposal to the 12+ group when Mr Oliver was ready.

12+ Matters

14. Programme of activities and timetable of meetings for the 120th IPU Assembly in Addis Ababa

The programme of meetings and details of the dinner were noted.

15. Membership

The Chair had nothing new to report. Montenegro, Azerbaijan and Ukraine remained unaffiliated.

16. Financial Matters

Papers relating to the 12+ current financial situation were circulated. Donald Oliver (Canada) asked about the cost of bank charges. The Secretary explained that some charges related to telegraphic transfers and some resulted from payments being made in different currencies. He would prepare a detailed analysis for the 12+ meeting in Addis. The Chair suggested that contribution rates would stay the same for 2010; this was agreed.

17. Date of Next Meeting

The Chair would circulate, by email, proposed dates for the autumn meeting.

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
ACTIVITY	Meeting of the Twelve Plus Steering Committee of the Inter-Parliamentary Union
DESTINATION	London, United Kingdom
DATES	March 2, 2009
DELEGATION	
SENATE	The Honourable Donald H. Oliver, Q.C.
HOUSE OF COMMONS	
STAFF	Mr. Joseph Jackson, Advisor
TRANSPORTATION	\$3,246.26
ACCOMMODATION	\$1,549.20
HOSPITALITY	
PER DIEMS	\$ 480.76
OFFICIAL GIFTS	
MISCELLANEOUS	
TOTAL	\$5,276.22