

Canadian Group
Inter-Parliamentary Union



Groupe canadien
Union interparlementaire

**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
respecting its participation at the
122nd IPU Assembly and Related Meetings
Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
Bangkok, Thailand
March 27 – April 1, 2010**

Report

1. Background¹

The IPU is the international organization of Parliaments of sovereign states. It was established in 1889. The Union is the focal point for world-wide parliamentary dialogue and works for peace and cooperation among peoples and for the firm establishment of representative democracy. To this end, it:

- Fosters contacts, co-ordination, and the exchange of experience among parliaments and parliamentarians of all countries;
- Considers questions of international interest and concern and expresses its views on such issues in order to bring about action by parliaments and parliamentarians;
- Contributes to the defence and promotion of human rights – an essential factor of parliamentary democracy and development; and
- Contributes to better knowledge of the working of representative institutions and to the strengthening and development of their means of action.

The IPU supports the efforts of the United Nations, whose objectives it shares, and works in close cooperation with it. It also cooperates with regional inter-parliamentary organizations, as well as with international intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations which are motivated by the same ideals.

At the close of the 122nd Assembly 155 national parliaments were members of the IPU and nine regional parliamentary assemblies were associate members. Most members are affiliated to one of six geopolitical groups that are currently active in the IPU.

2. Agenda for the 122nd IPU Assembly

The IPU Assembly is the principal statutory body that expresses the views of the Inter-Parliamentary Union on political issues. Twice a year it brings together parliamentarians to study international problems and make recommendations for action.

The agenda for the 122nd IPU Assembly, which took place in Bangkok, Thailand between 27 March and 1 April 2010, addressed the following items:

- General Debate: General debate on the political, economic and social situation in the world with the overall theme of Parliament at the heart of political reconciliation and good governance;

¹ Source for this section: <http://www.ipu.org/english/whatipu.htm>.

- First Standing Committee: Cooperation and shared responsibility in the global fight against organized crime, in particular drug trafficking, illegal arms sales, human trafficking and cross-border terrorism;
- Second Standing Committee: The role of parliaments in developing South-South and Triangular Cooperation with a view to accelerating achievement of the Millennium Development Goals;
- Third Standing Committee: Youth participation in the democratic process; and
- Emergency Item: The role of parliaments in strengthening the solidarity of the international community towards the people of Haiti and Chile in the wake of devastating major disasters, and urgent actions required in all disaster-prone countries to improve disaster-risk assessment, prevention and mitigation.

A detailed report on the 122nd IPU Assembly and Related Meetings is available online.²

3. The Canadian Delegation

Delegations from the parliaments of 124 countries attended the 122nd IPU Assembly. Of the 1,248 delegates who attended, 621 were members of national parliaments, of which 178 were women (28.7%) and six were Canadian parliamentarians. These included:

Mr. Blaine Calkins, M.P., Leader of the delegation
 The Honourable Sharon Carstairs, P.C., Senator
 The Honourable Dennis Dawson, Senator
 The Honourable Wilbert J. Keon, Senator
 Ms. France Bonsant, M.P.
 Mr. Mario Silva, M.P.

4. Interventions made by the Canadian Delegation during the 122nd IPU Assembly

Canadian delegates participated in a variety of Assembly meetings and activities during the 122nd IPU Assembly.³ **Senator Keon** and **Mr. Calkins** attended meetings of the First Standing Committee; **Mr. Silva** attended meetings of the Second Committee; and **Senator Dawson** and **Ms. Bonsant** attended meetings of the Third Committee. In addition, all delegates attended sessions of the Plenary Debate; **Ms. Bonsant** attended the daylong Meeting of Women Parliamentarians; **Senator Dawson** served as a member of the Drafting Committee for the Third Standing Committee. Delegates also

² See: <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/122/122.pdf>.

³ Resolutions adopted by the Standing Committees that met on the occasion of the 122nd Assembly may be found at: <http://www.ipu.org/strct-e/stcnfres.htm#122>.

attended a panel on “The Role of Parliaments in fulfilling the Convention on the Rights of the Child” and a special presentation on “The progress in implementing Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5 relating to child survival and maternal health.”

Key interventions made by Canadian delegates during these Assembly activities were as follows:

During the General Debate on the political, economic and social situation in the world, **Mr. Calkins** focused on the overall theme of “Parliament at the heart of political reconciliation and good governance.” He said:

That the impetus for political reconciliation often came from parliaments, whose comprehensive representation enabled them to tackle issues relating to complex national histories. In Canada, Parliament had been a mechanism to bring together the country's vast geographic area, diverse citizenry and two official languages. It also had a role to play in balancing the powers of the Executive and ensuring that individual rights and the interests of the vulnerable were protected.

An example of political reconciliation was the act of issuing a formal public apology in Parliament. The Canadian House of Commons had offered such an apology to Japanese Canadians for their treatment during the Second World War, to Chinese Canadians for the head tax and resulting exclusion of Chinese immigrants, and most recently to former students of Indian residential schools in relation to the mistreatment of aboriginal children. Those landmark apologies were followed by the establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission to consider issues relating to Indian residential schools.

However, the complexity and potential implications of such apologies should not be understated. In certain cases, the actions that had prompted the apology had taken place many years or even decades previously, and records, survivors and witnesses might no longer exist. It might also be challenging to ensure that compensation mechanisms were fair and accountable, from the perspectives of both the victims and the State. The rights of victims and the accused also had to be balanced.

Internationally, Canada had encouraged political reconciliation and good governance through parliamentary mechanisms. Election monitoring was key to democratic development, and Canadian parliamentarians had taken part, for instance, in the monitoring of elections in Ukraine. The work of Canada's network of parliamentary associations was also important.

As the IPU Assembly demonstrated, parliamentarians had valuable tools at their disposal to promote good governance, committee work being one that enabled a variety of stakeholders to inform their policy recommendations. In Canada, the Public Accounts Committee was able to

call public servants before it and monitor the implementation of audit recommendations.

Parliamentarians also had a role to play in examining executive policies to ensure that rights were protected. That important process had been relevant when legislation had been introduced following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. Parliamentary Committees had played an important role in considering the definition of terrorism. It was important that all parliamentarians committed themselves to the protection of rights in the international arena.

During the Standing Committee debate on “Youth participation in the democratic process,” **Senator Dawson** said:

That Canada prided itself on being a historic pillar of participatory democracy. Nonetheless, it regrettably faced a decline in voter participation in all elections, particularly among first-time voters, whose disaffection perhaps stemmed from disinterest or lack of time. The end result, however, was that the electoral machine instead focused on communicating with the older generation of more reliable voters through such traditional methods as television and newspapers, as opposed to the Internet and its social networking sites, the use of which it reserved for non-election periods with a mind to cost considerations. Few countries encouraged Internet voting, yet it was associated with the wider participation of young people in the machinery of democracy. The harnessing of cyberspace was therefore a challenge to be addressed head on. On that score, the IPU could set a clear example by webcasting its deliberations.

During Special presentation on “The role of parliaments in achieving Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5 relating to child survival and maternal health **Senator Keon** said:

That Canada would be hosting the meeting of G8 nations in 2010. Canada had decided to raise awareness of maternal and child health as one of the key challenges in the field of security and development. The Canadian Prime Minister had announced a major initiative on maternal and child health. Few issues were more important, as the United Nations had recognized. There was still a shockingly high number of women who died in childbirth. Canada wanted to seize the moment and hoped that parliamentarians would be as supportive as possible of its ambitions to make maternal health and early childhood development a top social priority

5. Participation by Canadian Delegates in Related Meetings and Activities

Concurrent with Standing Committee activities associated with the 122nd IPU Assembly were the meetings of several related committees and working groups. This section identifies those meetings that were attended by Canadian delegates.

(a) The 186th Session of the IPU Governing Council

The Governing Council is the plenary policy-making body of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Several committees and working groups are subordinated to it and report to the Council on their work. Meetings of the 186th Session of the IPU Governing Council were held on 28 March and 1 April. A detailed report on the work and decisions of the Governing Council is available online.⁴ All Canadian delegates attended at least one session of the Governing Council.

Of interest to the Canadian IPU Group was the Governing Council's final decision with respect to the length and format for the 127th IPU Assembly to be held in Quebec City in October 2012. Regarding these issues, President Gurirab said:

Let me first remind you that we took a decision six months ago to hold this Assembly in 2012 in Quebec at the kind invitation of the Canadian Parliament. Since then, the Canadian hosts have explained to us that when it was agreed that the first assembly of 2012 would be in Uganda, they were under the impression that the second assembly hosted by them would also be a major meeting lasting five days. We have discussed this matter in the Executive Committee and had the Canadian delegation. We have also examined the financial statutory consequences of extending the second assembly of the year to five days.

The Executive Committee recommends that we should accept Canada's proposal to have a five day assembly. The first three days would follow the traditional format of the second assembly of the year, and the extra two days would be devoted to additional sessions on issues of shared political relevance to the IPU membership.

The Executive Committee has made it very clear that this would be an exceptional ruling and that it does not expect to have to take another similar decision in the future. At the same time, the Committee confirms that the statutory provisions regarding the size of delegations to IPU assemblies, which are set out in Article 10 subparagraph 2 of the statute, need to be upheld. This means that members can only register five delegates, seven for the larger countries, as is customary during the second assembly of the year. Let me also say that we had further discussions with our Canadian hosts regarding the issue of visas, and they have assured us that they will do all that is necessary to uphold the IPU's visa policy. That is information I provide to Council and that settles well with everybody. That is how we will proceed.

⁴ See: <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/122/122.pdf>.

Thereafter, the Council:

... decided that the 127th IPU Assembly, to be held in Quebec City in October 2012, would follow the normal format of the second Assembly of the year, to which two extra days of meetings would be added. The composition of delegations to the Assembly would follow the normal statutory provisions for the second Assembly of the year.⁵

(b) The Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians

In 1976, the IPU adopted a “Procedure for the examination and treatment of communications concerning violations of the human rights of parliamentarians,” applicable to parliamentarians who are, or have been, subjected to arbitrary actions (e.g. State harassment, arbitrary arrest and detention, unfair trial, violation of parliamentary immunity) during the exercise of their mandate, whether the Parliament is sitting, in recess or has been dissolved by unconstitutional or extraordinary measures.

The IPU’s Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, is comprised of five parliamentarians representing different regions of the world and is responsible for the treatment of such complaints. The Committee holds hearings and undertakes onsite missions. If it does not prove possible to reach a satisfactory settlement of the case during a first phase of confidential examination and communication with the authorities of the countries concerned, public reports and recommendations for specific measures are submitted by the Committee to the Governing Council and thus are made public.

Senator Carstairs was elected to this committee in 2004. The Committee meets four times a year, including on the occasion of the IPU’s statutory Assemblies.

The Committee met from 27 to 31 March.⁶ The Committee conducted 13 hearings with delegations from countries where it had cases pending and with representatives of the sources. The Committee examined a total of 293 cases in 32 countries. The Committee submitted to the Governing Council in 19 countries around the world affecting individuals from the following jurisdictions: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Burundi, Cambodia, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ecuador, Eritrea, Lebanon, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Niger, Palestine/Israel, Philippines, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Turkey and Zimbabwe.

(c) Geopolitical Group Meetings

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).

⁵ See: <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/122/122.pdf>, page 14.

⁶ The resolutions of public cases adopted by this committee may be found at: <http://www.ipu.org/iss-e/hr-cases.htm>.

There are six geopolitical groups formally recognized by the IPU: the African Group (42 members), the Arab Group (17 members), the Asia-Pacific Group (26 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 Asia Pacific Group and the Twelve Plus Group. Since Canada belongs to more than one geopolitical group, it submits candidatures for vacant positions within the Union through the Twelve Plus Group.⁷

A meeting of the Asia-Pacific Group (APG) was held on 27 March and 1 April. Agenda items considered included:

- Briefing by the Group's representatives on the work of the Executive Committee
- Report of the Asia-Pacific Working Group
- Emergency Item
- Vacancies to be filled
- Nominations to drafting committees
- Subject items for the 124th Assembly
- IPU budgetary issues
- The work of the IPU Advisory Committee on UN Affairs
- Future meetings of the APG and its Working Group

Meetings of the Twelve Plus Group were held on 28-31 March and 1 April. Agenda items considered included:

- Report on work of the Group's Steering Committee
- Report from Group representatives on the work of the Executive Committee and its subsidiary bodies
- Emergency item
- Reports and draft resolutions of Standing Committees
- Appointments to drafting committees
- Positions to be filled
- Matters relating to the Twelve Plus Group
- Schedule of Group meetings for the 123rd Assembly (Geneva, October 2010)

(d) Field visits organized by the IPU and UNICEF to projects for vulnerable children and adolescents

Three field visits for parliamentarians took place on 29 March 2010. Two - on the protection of child trafficking victims/unsafe migration and early childhood development - were co-organized with UNICEF while the third, to a baby-friendly hospital and community health centre, was co-organized with PMNCH. A total of 30 parliamentarians

⁷ See: <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/122/122.pdf>, page 23, for further details.

from 21 countries, including Ms Bonsant, participated in the visits, which took place as a prelude to the special presentation on progress in implementing MDGs 4 and 5 and to the panel discussion on the Convention on the Rights of the Child.⁸

(e) Canada – Thailand Relations

On 25 March, members of the Canadian delegation received a comprehensive briefing at the Canadian Embassy from Canada's Ambassador to Thailand, Ron Hoffman, and other embassy counsellors. A range of issues were covered, including the evolving political situation at that time within Thailand and in the surrounding region – Burma, Cambodia, and Laos – as well as the investment, trade, immigration, consular and cultural relations between Canada and all of these countries. Multilateral issues of concern to Canada were also discussed, such as regional security, democratic development and human rights, and the role of China in Southeast Asia.

The Ambassador and his staff accompanied the delegation for lunch at a Bangkok restaurant, "Cabbages and Condoms." This restaurant "was conceptualized in part to promote better understanding and acceptance of family planning and to generate income to support various development activities of the Population and Community Development Association (PDA),"⁹ a non-governmental organization (NGO). During the lunch, members of the delegation met with Mr. Mechai Viravaidya, the founder and chairman of the PDA. Since 1974, the PDA has initiated community-based family planning services throughout Thailand, programs in the domains of rural development, environmental conservation and poverty reduction, as well as activities targeting HIV/AIDS education and prevention.

The second half of the day involved a site visit to a portable school in the outskirts of Bangkok, which receives support from Canada by way of its partnership with an NGO, the Centre for Architecture and Human Rights-Thailand. The school project was designed to create a safe learning environment and nursery for the children of migrant construction workers. A basic medical clinic is also on-site. The project helps migrant women by providing a classroom for their children which enables them to work during the day, while also providing work opportunities for those women not participating in construction jobs. The delegation was briefed on the work of the Mercy Centre, which runs the school and nursery, and Canada's contributions to the project. The visit concluded with a tour of the school facilities and adjacent construction camp.

6. Follow-up

Following each statutory IPU Assembly the Canadian IPU Group prepares this report, which is tabled in the House of Commons and the Senate. It also forwards relevant IPU reports and resolutions to parliamentary committees and government departments and

⁸ Minutes of the meetings of the Asia Pacific Group and the Twelve Plus Group are available from the Canadian IPU Secretariat upon request.

⁹ See: <http://www.pda.or.th/restaurant/about.asp>.

sends letters to Ottawa-based diplomatic missions concerning the IPU's report and recommendations on the human rights violations of former or serving parliamentarians.

Respectfully submitted,

Mr. Blaine Calkins, M.P.
Canadian Group of the IPU

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
ACTIVITY	122nd IPU Assembly and Related Meetings
DESTINATION	Bangkok, Thailand
DATES	March 27-April 1, 2010
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Sharon Carstairs, P.C. Hon. Dennis Dawson Hon. Wilbert J. Keon
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Mr. Blaine Calkins, M.P., Leader of the delegation Ms. France Bonsant, M.P. Mr. Mario Silva
STAFF	Mr. Serge Pelletier, Secretary to the Delegation Mr. Joseph Jackson, Advisor Ms. Allison Goody, Advisor
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 81,889.32
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 16,481.03
HOSPITALITY	\$ 362.96
PER DIEMS	\$ 8,945.43
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 485.60
MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES	\$ 148.92
TOTAL	\$ 108,313.26