

Canadian Group
Inter-Parliamentary Union



Groupe canadien
Union interparlementaire

**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
to the 118th IPU Assembly and Related Meetings**

Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

Cape Town, South Africa
13 – 18 April 2008

Report

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Organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union

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 118th Assembly 150 national parliaments were members of the IPU and eight 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 118th 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 118th IPU Assembly, which took place in Cape Town, South Africa between 13 and 18 April 2008, addressed the following items:

- General Debate: General debate on the political, economic and social situation in the world with the overall theme of Pushing back the frontiers of poverty;

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

- First Standing Committee: The role of parliaments in striking a balance between national security, human security and individual freedoms, and in averting the threat to democracy;
- Second Standing Committee: Parliamentary oversight of State policies on foreign aid;
- Third Standing Committee: Migrant workers, people trafficking, xenophobia and human rights; and
- Emergency Item: The role of parliaments and the Inter-Parliamentary Union in ensuring an immediate halt to the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation in conflict areas and its environmental dimension, in facilitating the Palestinians' right to self-determination - particularly by ending the blockade in Gaza - and in accelerating the creation of a Palestinian State through viable peace processes.

A detailed report on the 118th IPU Assembly and Related Meetings is available online.²

3. The Canadian Delegation

Delegations from the parliaments of 130 countries attended the 118th Assembly. Of the 1,467 delegates who attended, 700 were members of national parliaments, of which 196 were women (28%) and eight were Canadian parliamentarians. These included:

The Honourable Donald H. Oliver, Q.C., Senator, Leader of the delegation

The Honourable Sharon Carstairs, P.C., Senator

The Honourable George J. Furey, Senator, Q.C.

Mr. Dean Allison, M.P.

Ms. France Bonsant, M.P.

Mr. Charles Hubbard, M.P.

Ms. Alexa McDonough, M.P.

Mr. Larry Miller, M.P.

4. Interventions made by the Canadian Delegation during the 118th IPU Assembly

Canadian delegates were actively involved in a variety of Assembly meetings and activities held during the 118th IPU Assembly.³ **Senator Furey, Ms. McDonough and Mr. Miller** attended meetings of the First Standing Committee; **Mr. Allison and Mr. Hubbard** attended meetings of the Second Committee; and **Ms. Bonsant and Ms. McDonough** attended meetings of the Third Committee. In addition, all delegates attended sessions of the Plenary Debate; **Ms. Bonsant and Ms. McDonough** attended the day long Meeting of Women Parliamentarians; and **Senator Furey** served as a member of the Drafting Committee for the First Committee. Delegates also attended

² See: <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/118/118.pdf>.

³ Resolutions adopted by the Standing Committees that met on the occasion of the 118th Assembly may be found at: <http://www.ipu.org/strct-e/stcnfres.htm#118>.

panel discussions that addressed Peace-building towards reconciliation, Maternal, newborn and child health, and The impact of the global economic meltdown.

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, **Senator Oliver** focused on the overall theme of “Pushing back the frontiers of poverty.” He said:

That it was a great honour to have an opportunity to speak on the topic of poverty reduction, the importance of which was known to all delegates. All the world's major religions talked about the need to help the poor, but poverty was still with us – even in wealthy nations such as Canada.

Canada, a G8 country, was fortunate to be one of the wealthiest countries in the world. It ranked fourth in the Human Development Index in the United Nations Development Programme Human Development Report 2007/2008. In spite of that, pockets of poverty remained. Low income tended to be concentrated among five groups: single parents, unattached persons aged 45 to 64, recent immigrants, persons with work-limiting disabilities and Aboriginal people living off reserves.

Canadians were blessed with almost unlimited opportunities, but many of those in poverty were unable to take advantage of them. He asked delegates to recall a description of poverty by the UNDP as "the denial of opportunities and choices most basic to human development – to lead a long, healthy, creative life and to enjoy a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity, self-esteem and the respect of others".

The combination of knowledge and skills that people used to pursue their livelihoods was referred to as human capital. People living in poverty had a harder time investing in human capital. As a result, they suffered economically and socially. That had consequences not only for their own productivity, but for that of their children and grandchildren, who might also be deprived of the chance to participate fully in economic and social life. So the consequences of poverty were real and could last for generations.

Under the Canadian federal system, most social services were provided by the provincial and territorial governments. They received federal government money to help them fund those services. That was done primarily through the Canada Social Transfer, whereby the federal government transferred tax funds to the provinces, which in 2008-2009 amounted to \$ 8.5 billion.

In the 1970s, a report by the Special Senate Committee on Poverty drew attention to that issue, and provided a voice for the poor. The Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology was currently studying the social issues relevant to Canada's largest cities, and the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry was examining the issue of rural poverty. In December 2006, it produced an interim report with a view to developing recommendations concerning that poorly understood situation.

Regarding Canada's international aid efforts, he reminded delegates that one-fifth of humanity lived on less than US\$ 1 a day. Canada supported the UN Millennium

Development Goals, and supported the efforts of developing countries to achieve them. The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) concentrated most of its country-to-country assistance in 25 development-partner countries, 14 of which were in Africa. The Canadian Government had recently announced a number of initiatives to support poverty reduction in Africa. Recent contributions to organizations such as the African Development Bank and the World Food Programme put the government on track to meet the commitment of doubling Canadian assistance to Africa.

Other commitments Canada had made since February 2006 included \$ 450 million to strengthen health systems in Africa, an increase in annual funding of basic education in Africa; \$ 250 million to the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, \$ 150 million of which would be focused on Africa; and \$ 45 million to the polio eradication initiative, of which \$ 22.5 million would go to Africa.

- During the debate on “The role of parliaments in striking a balance between national security, human security and individual freedoms, and in averting the threat to democracy **Mr. Miller** said:

That terrorism was one of many aspects that contributed to the erosion of democracy and human rights. All countries must do their part to fight terrorism. Terrorists must be removed from society, since they had no respect for life. Religion was often used as an excuse by terrorist organizations for committing terrorist acts. Terrorism should not, however, be allowed to be perceived as being conducted in the name of religion. Terrorists must be incarcerated, and remain incarcerated since they would not allow themselves to be rehabilitated.

Since poverty constituted a serious threat to human rights, Canada was committed to providing foreign aid to developing countries and encouraged other developed nations to assume their responsibilities in that regard. For several years in Canada, grass-roots producers, in particular cereal farmers, had been unable to make a reasonable living, and that need of farmers must be considered in the assessments of why food prices were currently rising so steeply.

All countries must be stringent and dedicated in their respect for democracy. On the issue of the political situation in Zimbabwe, he said that all democratic nations had a responsibility to put appropriate pressure on Zimbabwe to respect the democratic will of its people. While that pressure must come from all democratic countries around the world, it should begin in Zimbabwe’s neighbouring countries. Canada was ready and committed to do everything it could in that regard.

- During the Panel Discussion entitled “Leading the change for maternal, newborn and child health” **Ms McDonough** told the assembled delegates:

That it was valuable to hear of progress that had been made, but it was also valuable to be reminded that some developed countries were not living up to their obligations. She thanked the delegate from Pakistan for pointing out that spending on warfare far exceeded that on mothers and children. Parliamentary campaigners for nuclear disarmament were forever emphasizing that fact.

She added that it was sad to hear of prosperous countries taking health workers from less prosperous ones and noted that in Canada there are a large number of doctors attracted from South Africa.

5. Participation by Canadian Delegates in Related Meetings and Activities

Concurrent with Standing Committee activities associated with the 118th IPU Assembly were the meetings of a number of related committees and working groups. This section identifies those meetings that were attended by Canadian delegates. In instances where key activities are not reported in the IPU's official report on the 118th IPU Assembly, further details are provided below.

1. The IPU Governing Council

The Governing Council is the plenary policy-making body of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. A number of committees and working groups are subordinated to it and report to the Council on their work.

Meetings of the Governing Council were held on 14 and 18 April. During the Council's consideration of future interparliamentary meetings, the question of Canada's offer to host the 122nd IPU Assembly in 2010 was raised. According to the summary record:

The Council approved the venue of Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) for the 120th Assembly. It also considered a policy statement to cover the provision of visas and other matters relating to the attendance of delegations at IPU Assemblies. At the request of several delegations which expressed the need for more time to consider the proposed policy, the Council decided to defer the matter to its next session. The Council noted that several parliaments, including those of Canada and Venezuela, had expressed an interest in hosting the 122nd Assembly, and asked the Secretary General to work with those parliaments with a view to developing concrete proposals that could be considered by the IPU's governing bodies at their session in October 2008 in Geneva.

2. 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 13 to 17 April.⁴ The Committee conducted 12 hearings with delegations from countries where it had cases pending and with representatives of the sources. The Committee examined a total of 70 cases in 35 countries. The Committee submitted to the Governing Council 40 cases of 218 parliamentarians in 20 countries around the world affecting individuals from the following jurisdictions: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Burundi, Colombia, Ecuador, Egypt, Eritrea, Honduras, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Palestine, Philippines, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Turkey and Zimbabwe.

3. 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).

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 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.⁵

Meetings of the Asia-Pacific Group (APG) were held on 13 and 17 April, with **Senator Oliver** serving as the chair for these meetings. Agenda items considered included:

- Briefing by the Group's representatives on the work of the Executive Committee Evaluation of IPU reform
- Report of the First meeting of the Asia-Pacific Working Group
- Emergency Item
- Nominations to drafting committees
- Amendments to the Rules of Procedure for the (APG)
- Composition of the APG Working Group
- Future meetings of the APG and its Working Group

Meetings of the Twelve Plus Group were held on 12, 15, 16 and 17 April. Agenda items considered included:

⁴ The resolutions of public cases adopted by this committee may be found at: <http://www.ipu.org/iss-e/hr-cases.htm>.

⁵ Minutes of the meetings of the Asia Pacific Group and the Twelve Plus Group are available from the Canadian IPU Secretariat upon request.

- Report from Group representatives on the work of the Executive Committee and its subsidiary bodies
- Evaluation of IPU reform
- Emergency item
- Reports and draft resolutions of Standing Committees
- Appointments to drafting committees
- Positions to be filled
- Panel discussions
- Matters relating to the Twelve Plus group
- Schedule of Group meetings for the 117th Assembly (Geneva, October 2007)

4. UNICEF Field Visit

Several delegates took part in a UNICEF field trip on 15 April, which included visits to the following projects:

- a. mothers2mothers (m2m) – an educational, psychosocial mentoring and support organization. m2m complements already existing programmes aimed at preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS;
- b. The Isibindi programme, which aims to create a safe and caring community for children and youth at risk who have been rendered vulnerable by HIV/AIDS, especially those in child-headed households; and
- c. Mount View Primary School, which implements the Safe and Caring Child Friendly School (CFS) model.

5. Women on Farm Project

On 12 April the delegation visited a CIDA supported initiative known as the “Women on Farm Project.” The Women on Farms Project (WFP) works with women in agriculture to empower and strengthen the capacity of women who live and work on farms to claim their rights and fulfill their needs.

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 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,

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

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
ACTIVITY	118th IPU Assembly and Related Meetings
DESTINATION	Cape Town, South Africa
DATES	April 13 to 18, 2008
DELEGATION	
SENATE	The Hon. Donald H. Oliver, Q.C. Hon. Sharon Carstairs, P.C. Hon. George J. Furey, QC
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Mr. Dean Allison, M.P. Ms. France Bonsant, M.P. Hon. Charles Hubbard, M.P. Ms. Alexa McDonough, M.P. Mr. Larry Miller, M.P.
STAFF	Mr. Mark D'Amore, Secretary to the Delegation Mr. Joseph Jackson, Advisor Mr. Michael Dewing, Analyst
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 92,819.63
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 21,722.21
HOSPITALITY	\$ 351.07
PER DIEMS	\$ 7,025.54
OFFICIAL GIFTS	810.60
MISCELLANEOUS	\$ 886.28
TOTAL	\$123,615.33