



**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
Respecting its participation at the Annual Gathering of the
Group of Women Parliamentarians**

Canadian Section of ParlAmericas

**Mexico City, Mexico
June 24 and 25, 2014**

Report

INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Section of ParlAmericas attended the Annual Gathering of the ParlAmericas Group of Women Parliamentarians, entitled “**Moving from Formal to Substantive Equality**”, held in Mexico City, Mexico, on June 24 and 25, 2014. The Canadian parliamentary delegation was led by Mr. Randy Hoback, M.P., and was accompanied by the Honourable Suzanne Fortin-Duplessis, Senator, the Honourable Michael L. MacDonald, Senator, Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau, M.P., and Ms. Joyce Murray, M.P. The delegation was assisted by Mr. Leif-Erik Aune, Secretary to the Delegation.

This year’s meeting focused on recent experiences in promoting legislation, policy and programs benefiting women, as well as on barriers to gender equality in politics and society. The meeting also included a strategic planning sessions on empowering parliamentarians as agents of change. The Gathering was attended by 58 parliamentarians from 25 countries across the hemisphere.

The Group of Women Parliamentarians is the only permanent working group of ParlAmericas. It includes representatives from each of the sub-regions of the Americas: North, Central, South, and the Caribbean. The activities of the Group of Women Parliamentarians strengthen the work of women and men parliamentarians by providing a space to share and exchange experiences and knowledge from a gender equality perspective.

The Group is governed by its elected Executive Committee, composed of the President (who also serves as 2nd Vice-President on ParlAmericas’ Board of Directors), the Vice-President, and the Secretary. The current President of the Group is the Speaker of the National Assembly of Suriname, Dr. Jennifer Simons (2013-present). The current Vice-President is Martha González Dávila, Member of the National Assembly of Nicaragua. The current Secretary is Mónica Zalaquett, Member of the Chamber of Deputies of Chile.

Held annually, the meeting continues to steadily grow in popularity. The Group includes representatives from each sub-region in the Americas, namely, North America, Central America, South America and the Caribbean.

Meeting with Ms. Sara Hradecky, Canadian Ambassador to Mexico

Prior to attending the official inauguration of the Annual Gathering of the ParlAmericas Group of Women Parliamentarians, the members of the Canadian parliamentary delegation met with Ms. Sara Hradecky, Canadian Ambassador to Mexico. Mr. Randy Hoback, M.P., briefed Ambassador Hradecky on ParlAmericas’ recent activities, particularly those relating to Mexico. Ambassador Hradecky briefed the delegation on important anniversaries being celebrated in 2014, including the 70th anniversary of bilateral relations between Canada and Mexico, and the 10th anniversary of Canada’s and Mexico’s inter-governmental partnership on public policy issues, such as natural resources, immigration, and education. In addition, Ambassador Hradecky reminded the delegation that 2014 would mark the 20th Inter-Parliamentary Meeting between Canada

and Mexico, and reiterated that the Canadian Embassy would do its utmost to support this important interparliamentary conference.

THE MEETING

Official Inauguration

The 6th Annual Gathering of the Group of Women Parliamentarians, *Moving from Formal to Substantive Equality*, was opened on June 24, 2014, by the Honourable Raul Cervantes Andrade, President of the Senate of Mexico. Opening remarks were added by Senator Marcela Guerra of Mexico, Dr. Jennifer Simons, Speaker of the National Assembly of Surinam and President of the Group of Women Parliamentarians, and Mr. Randy Hoback, M.P., President of ParlAmericas.

Following the official inauguration, the opening speakers attended a press conference and answered questions regarding ParlAmericas, the Group of Women Parliamentarians, and the continued work of the organization to strengthen the role of women in the political sphere.

All attending parliamentarians then posed for an official photograph before proceeding to the working group sessions.

The two working group sessions would be organized by expert presenters, and would include presentations by parliamentarian panelists, namely Imani Duncan-Price of Jamaica, Margarita Escobar of El Salvador, the Honourable Suzanne Fortin-Duplessis, Senator, of Canada, Constanza Moreiera of Uruguay, Minister Alvina Reynolds of St. Lucia, Verónica Mendoza of Peru, Marie Jossie Etienne of Haiti, and Senator Marcela Guerra and Dulce María Sauri Riancho of Mexico. Panelist presentations would be followed by facilitated discussion, including questions and comments, with attendees.

Session 1— Achievements in Guaranteeing Equality: Experiences Promoting Legislation and Programs Benefitting Women

The first working group session was opened by Senator Guerra, who introduced the guest speaker and expert Ms. Teresa Incháustegui Romero. Ms. Incháustegui is an experienced former Member of the Chamber of Deputies of Mexico and public servant, who founded the Centre of Studies for the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality, and has held several positions at the National Women's Institute of Mexico.

Ms. Incháustegui's opening presentation on progress and challenges in the gender equality agenda of the Americas summarized the development of a gender equality agenda spanning over 30 years.

Ms. Incháustegui said that the gender equality agenda is here to stay, although there has been difficult, yet fruitful, progress since these first instruments were ratified the early 1980's. She divided progress and challenges into the broad areas of conventions and treaties, and contributions by governmental agencies, non-state actors, academia, and other groups and individuals. She then outlined the current pending agenda, beginning with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and the 1975 International Women's Year, and other regional conferences, dealing with

manifold challenges ranging from protection for migrants, to childhood health, and violence, employment, and of course politics and public life, among other issues pertaining to gender equality.

Ms. Incháustegui also discussed backward steps and stagnation in international efforts toward gender equality, including increased rates of violence, and unmet objectives. She called for international harmonization of secondary and tertiary legislation towards affirmative action and gender-sensitive human rights.

As a panelist on the first working group, Senator Fortin-Duplessis shared personal experiences and discussed Canada's progress in achieving equality for women and increasing their role in society. Senator Fortin-Duplessis observed that Canada has managed to increase the presence of women in Parliament without having to resort to legislating quotas, and has focused on creating equal opportunities rather than producing equal results, Senator Fortin-Duplessis listed several legal instruments and conventions, as well as policies and programmes, which Canada has brought to bear toward gender equality, and encouraged all attendees to continue their efforts with diligence.

In addition to interventions by parliamentarians from across the hemisphere, Ms. Joyce Murray, M.P., discussed participation by women on private and public sector executive boards.

Session 2—Barriers to Real Equality

The second working group session opened with a presentation by guest expert Ramona Biholar, who is a lecturer at the Faculty of Law of the University of the West Indies, Jamaica. Professor Biholar began her presentation by considering manifold barriers to real equality, including gender stereotypes, societal expectations, and legal and conventional frameworks that reflect a gender insensitive framework.

Professor Biholar also reviewed constitutional and legal instruments, as well as international and regional efforts toward transformative equality, or equality as change, and echoed the progressive general recommendation that “the lives of women and men must be considered in a contextual way, and measures adopted towards a real transformation of opportunities, institutions and systems so that they are no longer grounded in historically determined male paradigms of power and life patterns.”

She concluded by stressing that ensuring *de jure* and *de facto* equality through the development and implementation of legislation, policy, and programmes are top-down approaches, which press forward the empowerment of women and the promotion of their rights.

Panelists and meeting participants discussed gender-based power paradigms, and cultural factors affecting participation by women in business and political life.

Among other interventions, Ms. Joyce Murray, M.P., spoke to gender-based violence and its linkages to levels of education, poverty and institutions. Ms. Murray further discussed violence against indigenous women in Canada, and invited participants and panelists to speak to research showing the effectiveness in punitive and preventative mechanisms.

Meeting participants discussed the need for an organic integration of legal actors and measures, and questioned the effectiveness of punitive measures, such as minimum imprisonment sentences as a means to curtailing violence against women; participants acknowledged, however, the need for minimum sentences to combat impunity.

During the second working group session, parliamentarians agreed unanimously to join their voices with those of the international community to condemn the Chibok schoolgirls kidnapping in Nigeria, and to participate in the global rallying cry for the safe return of the schoolgirls.

Strategic Planning Session — Breaching the Gap: Parliamentarians as Agents of Change

The strategic planning session is a newly implemented meeting format adopted by the Group of Women Parliamentarians, and is designed to develop actionable recommendations for parliamentarians to strategically prioritize and focus actions with a view to achieving concrete results.

The session was facilitated by Keila Gonzalez, who is the National Democratic Institute's resident director in Mexico, and has coordinated international conference supporting parliaments and civil society toward strengthening and expanding democracy worldwide.

The strategic planning session saw participants narrow a long list of policy priorities to three key strategic objectives, with a view to identifying priorities, themes and strategies for a regional agenda for the coming year, to finding common ground on issues that all parliamentarians would make commitments to action, and to identifying tools for building the capacities of parliamentarians. Through discussion and selection, the session participants selected "women's political leadership", "labour and economic empowerment of women", and "preventing violence against women, including femicide and the trafficking of women and girls" as the three themes for a regional agenda.

Among a list of possible priorities, the parliamentarians felt that the above themes offered the most political and technical feasibility, and were consistent with existing international obligations whose commitments could be made (at least in part) within a 12-month span.

Through a facilitated process, participants developed creative approaches and action plans, and proposed concrete steps toward achieving the three selected thematic objectives. This process yielded proposed paths of engagement and individual action, as well as raised issues of concern, and initiatives where parliamentarians could use their mandates to effect progress and change. Commitments and actions were prescribed and accepted through general consensus in the areas of community development, in education, through media, and through the mandates, privileges and powers of individual parliamentarians.

While widely applauded as a creative and insightful process, the strategic planning session left some participants asking for an additional stage to include specific commitments by each individual participant, rather than general prescriptive recommendations that were open to loose interpretation.

Closing Addresses and Final Remarks

The Gathering of the Group of Women Parliamentarians closed with concluding remarks by Senator Marcela Guerra and Dr. Jennifer Simmons, who thanked the meeting participants and reiterated calls for commitment and action, and reminded the attendees that parliamentarians hold the key for change through legislation and advocacy on behalf of the electorate.

CONCLUSION

The Canadian perspective on gender issues provides an insightful foil to inter-American discussion on equality, as several countries in the Americas have legislated quotas for women candidates and for elected office holders. The Canadian experience has been that women are nearly as likely as men to be elected to office, provided that they stand for election, and the Canadian effort, therefore, has been to encourage more and more women to stand for election.

The ParlAmericas Group of Women Parliamentarians remains a consistently strong pillar and the high rates of attendance and participation at its annual Gatherings underscore the importance of gender equality and strengthening the role of women in politics as public policy priorities.

The Canadian parliamentary delegation applauds the leadership of Dr. Jennifer Simons and of Senator Marcela Guerra for organizing a most successful conference. The delegation also thanks Ambassador Sara Hradecky and the Canadian Embassy for its interest and support of this parliamentary activity.

Respectfully submitted,

Mr. Randy Hoback, M.P.
Chair,
Canadian Section of ParlAmericas

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Section of ParlAmericas
ACTIVITY	Annual Gathering of the Group of Women Parliamentarians
DESTINATION	Mexico City, Mexico
DATES	June 24-25, 2014
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Suzanne Fortin-Duplessis, Senator Hon. Michael L. MacDonald, Senator
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Mr. Randy Hoback, M.P. Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau, M.P. Ms. Joyce Murray, M.P.
STAFF	Mr. Leif-Erik Aune, Secretary to the delegation
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 6,291.34
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 3,568.58
HOSPITALITY	\$ 0.00
PER DIEMS	\$ 1,063.55
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 252.91
MISCELLANEOUS/ REGISTRATION FEES	\$ 15.36
TOTAL	\$ 11,191.74