



**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation  
respecting its participation at the 12<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly**

**Canadian Section of ParlAmericas**

**Panama City, Panama  
September 4-5, 2015**

# Report

## **PARLAMERICAS AND CANADA'S INVOLVEMENT**

ParlAmericas is an independent network made up of national legislatures that are also members of the Organization of American States (OAS). ParlAmericas members are committed to promoting parliamentary participation in the inter-American system and developing inter-parliamentary dialogue on issues of importance to the hemisphere. ParlAmericas seeks to encourage the sharing of experiences and best practices amongst its members, and works to strengthen the role of legislatures in democratic development and promote harmonization of legislation and hemispheric integration as instruments of sustainable and harmonious development in the region. For more information on the association, please consult [www.parl.gc.ca/IIA/](http://www.parl.gc.ca/IIA/).

### **12th Plenary Assembly of ParlAmericas**

#### **A. Introduction**

The 12th Plenary Assembly of ParlAmericas was held in Panama City, Panama from 4 to 5 September 2015. During the Assembly, two panels were offered, with each group discussing a separate theme. These themes were: Education, Health, Energy and Environment: Legislative Case Studies; and Migration, Security, Citizen Participation, and Democratic Governance: Legislative Case Studies. At the Plenary Assembly, Canada was represented by one parliamentarian:

- Senator Percy E. Downe (Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island).

#### **B. Inauguration of the 12th Plenary Assembly**

Introductory remarks were made by Javier Ortega (Member of the National Assembly of Panama and Chair of the 12th Plenary Assembly):

- Role of civil society in protecting human rights, not just in member states of ParlAmericas, but through the region as a whole.
- The Mission of ParlAmericas is to provide a forum for ongoing discussions of issues of regional importance, as part of the continued strengthening of democracy in the Hemisphere.

Marcela Guerra (Senator of Mexico and President of ParlAmericas):

- Role of the Assembly in generating “mechanisms of accountability and transparency.”
- Summit of the Americas held in Panama City earlier this year: such meetings, working with organizations like ParlAmericas and Parlatino, reinforce the progress of enhancing legislative transparency.
- The promotion of the participation of women in politics and civil society in the Hemisphere will be assisted by the Memorandum of Understanding

(MOU) recently signed between ParlAmericas and the United Nations agency UN Women.

- There must be more, and better, links between countries of the region. The Group of Women Parliamentarians of ParlAmericas is possibly the best example of how these improved links may be achieved.

Jennifer Simons (Speaker of the National Assembly of Suriname and President of the Group of Women Parliamentarians):

- The Assembly serves as “a space that allows us to strengthen the legislative work” of member parliaments.

Rubén de León (Speaker of the National Assembly of Panama):

- Interparliamentary ties need to be expanded and formalized in the service of democratization and transparency.
- Parliamentary powers are the basis of State institutions, hence the importance of parliamentary debate.

### **C. First Session of the Plenary Assembly**

- First item of business was approval of the Agenda, forming part of the Assembly’s annual report.
- Senator Guerra reiterated the importance transparency and gender equity in the political evolution of the region.
- ParlAmericas’ efforts to work with other regional organizations, particularly Parlatino (with which they recently held a meeting) and the OAS (with which ParlAmericas is currently organizing a session as part of the upcoming OAS Summit in Mexico City).
- The MOU between ParlAmericas and UN Women grew out of the meeting held in Argentina earlier this year.
- Administrative matters: recommendations from the meeting of the Board of Directors held earlier, and details related to elections to be held during the Plenary Session.
- Session wrapped up with the formal signing of the MOU.

### **D. Keynote Address**

Keynote Address by Dr. Marcel Salamín, Director of the Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Panama: “A Hemisphere in Crisis, An Uncertain Future”:

- The crisis derives from the “fragmented” nature of the region, within and between countries.
- Regionally, he described a “fragile multilateralism”, highly susceptible to forces within member states, or even local influences.

- Within nations, the old social order is no longer accepted as a given, particularly when it comes to distribution of wealth.
- Policy must, of course, be practical, but it cannot ignore the social dimension.
- The “virtuous and dialectical relationship” between political and economic policy has been upended, either by economic policies that ignore the social responsibilities of political and economic actors, or by an undue emphasis on political policies that ignore market reality.
- To address, or better yet, to prevent such occurrences, fair, transparent and responsive legislatures are essential.

#### **E. Panel Session I. “Education, Health, Energy and Environment: Legislative Case Studies”**

Participants:

- Moderator: Member of the Chamber of Deputies Alicia Comelli (Argentina)
- Education: Senator Blanca Margarita Ovelar de Duarte (Paraguay)
- Health: Senator Humberto Costa Lima (Brazil)
- Energy: President of the Senate Chester Humphrey (Grenada)
- Security: Member of the National Assembly Gladys Lopez (Cuba)

A workshop session was held in which panelists exchanged experiences and best practices in their respective fields. Each working group then filled out a questionnaire about the session, which will be released in due course.

#### **F. Presentation on Gender-Sensitive Parliaments by IPU**

The presentation arose out of the International Parliamentary Union’s *Plan of Action for Gender Sensitive Parliaments*, agreed to in Quebec City in 2012. The seven “Action Areas”, as itemized by the Plan are:

- Increase the number of women in parliament and achieve equality in participation;
- Strengthen gender equality legislation and policy;
- Mainstream gender equality throughout all parliamentary work;
- Institute or improve gender-sensitive infrastructure and parliamentary culture;
- Ensure that responsibility for gender equality is shared by all parliamentarians – men and women; and
- Encourage political parties to be champions of gender equality; and.

- Enhance the gender sensitivity of, and gender equality among, parliamentary staff.

Member states will be assessed, through a questionnaire, and the results will be analyzed and published at a later date.

### **G. Strategic Consultation: Part I**

Overview of “Improved Effectiveness of Parliaments in Latin America and the Caribbean”, project by Alisha Todd, Director General of ParlAmericas:

The project, recipient of \$8 million in assistance from the Government of Canada (spread out over four years), aims to “strengthen the capacity of parliamentarians in the Caribbean and Latin America to carry out their functions more effectively and contribute to policymaking related to issues of national and regional significance.”

Following a presentation from Ms. Todd on the objectives and processes of the study, there was a roundtable discussion during which delegates contributed their own national perspectives and opinions on the project.

### **H. Panel Session II. “Migration, Security, Citizen Participation, and Democratic Governance: Legislative Case Studies”**

#### **Further roundtable and discussions.**

- Moderator: Representative German Blanco (Colombia)
- Migration: Senator Tanisha Tynes (Bahamas)
- Environment: Member of the Chamber of Deputies Ignacio Urrutia Bonilla (Chile)
- Citizen Participation: Member of the National Assembly Ana Matilde Gomez (Panama)
- Democratic Governance: Member of the National Assembly Marllely Vasconez (Ecuador)

As its title suggests, the session consisted of discussion and analysis of the experience of respective parliaments regarding the topics listed. Parliamentarians spoke of the way these issues have been addressed, in terms of practices instituted and resources dedicated. Furthermore, strategic partners were identified for the purpose of promoting ongoing debate and the widespread adoption of those best practices.

Ultimately, the key underlying element is citizen participation. In the words of Ana Matilde Gomez, there is “no democracy without citizen participation.”

There followed a series of presentations and discussions involving delegates and representatives of other international organizations.

## **I. Official closing of the Plenary Assembly**

The results of the elections held earlier in the Session were announced. Among the successful candidates was Gina Godoy, member of the National Assembly of Ecuador, who is the new President of the Group of Women Parliamentarians.

Similarly, it was announced that the 13th Plenary Assembly would be held in Brazil.

Javier Ortega, (Member of the National Assembly of Panama and Chair of the 12th Plenary Assembly) and Marcela Guerra (Senator of Mexico and President of ParlAmericas) then delivered the concluding remarks.

Overall the theme was best summed up by one of the delegates who praised the exchange of parliamentary and governmental experiences among delegates which took place here. Such exchanges, and the discussions they stimulate, provide important feedback and ultimately, guidance for the way forward.

Respectfully submitted,

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

## Travel Costs

<b>ASSOCIATION</b>	Canadian Section of ParlAmericas
<b>ACTIVITY</b>	12 <sup>th</sup> Plenary Session
<b>DESTINATION</b>	Panama City, Panama
<b>DATES</b>	September 4-5, 2015
<b>DELEGATION</b>	
SENATE	Hon. Percy E. Down, Senator
HOUSE OF COMMONS	
STAFF	
<b>TRANSPORTATION</b>	<b>\$ 2,606.60</b>
<b>ACCOMMODATION</b>	<b>\$ 578.55</b>
<b>HOSPITALITY</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>
<b>PER DIEMS</b>	<b>\$ 354.75</b>
<b>OFFICIAL GIFTS</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>
<b>MISCELLANEOUS/ REGISTRATION FEES</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 3,539.90</b>