

Canadian Group
Inter-Parliamentary Union



Groupe canadien
Union interparlementaire

**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
to the 119th IPU Assembly and Related Meetings**

Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

**Geneva, Switzerland
13-15 October 2008**

And

**Report of the Canadian Delegation to Informing Democracy:
Building Capacity to Meet Parliamentarians' Information and
Knowledge Needs**

Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

**Geneva, Switzerland
16 October 2008**

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Organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union

1. Background

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 119th Assembly, 154 national parliaments were members of the IPU and eight regional parliamentary assemblies were associate members. Most of these members are affiliated to one of six geopolitical groups that are currently active in the IPU.¹

2. Agenda for the 119th 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 119th IPU Assembly, which took place in Geneva, Switzerland between 13 and 15 October 2008, addressed the following items:

- Panel discussions on the subject items chosen for debate during the 120th Assembly in April 2009:
 - Advancing nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, and securing the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty: The role of parliaments;

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

- Climate change, sustainable development models, and renewable energies;
 - Freedom of expression and the right to information.
- Report of the IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs
 - Emergency Item: The role of parliaments in containing the global financial crisis and its economic impact, both on developing and developed countries

A detailed report on the 119th IPU Assembly and Related Meetings is available online.²

3. The Canadian Delegation

Of the 1,197 delegates who attended the 119th IPU Assembly, 532 were members of national parliaments, of which 158 were women (29.7%) and three were Canadian parliamentarians. These included, from the Senate of Canada:

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

The Honourable Sharon Carstairs, P.C.

The Honourable Denis Dawson

4. Contributions made by the Canadian Delegation during the 119th IPU Assembly

The Canadian delegates participated in the full range of meetings and related panel sessions held during the 119th IPU Assembly.³

During the emergency debate on “The role of parliaments in containing the global financial crisis and its economic impact, both on developing and developed countries,” **Senator Oliver** said:

That Canada had one of the best regulatory financial systems in the world, as a result of which it had handled current global market turmoil quite well. The structure of Canada’s financial institutions continued to benefit the Canadian people. Large investment dealers had been bank-owned since the late 1980s, as a result of which they were regulated on a consolidated basis by the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions. Canadian capital requirements for financial institutions were well above minimum international standards and higher than in other jurisdictions. Canadian institutions had met, and continued to meet their capital requirements. The IMF had concluded that Canada’s financial system was mature, sophisticated and well-managed, and able to withstand shocks such as the present crisis.

Canada’s housing market and mortgage system was sound, and did not have a large sub-prime component. It had not witnessed the proliferation of products and marketing practices that had led to the serious problems that had occurred in the United States. Canadian households had smaller mortgages than United States households, relative to

² See: <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/119/119.pdf>.

³ Resolutions adopted by the Standing Committees that met on the occasion of the 119th Assembly may be found at: <http://www.ipu.org/strct-e/stcnfres.htm#119>.

the value of their homes and their disposable incomes. According to the IMF, the rise in Canadian house prices over recent years had been fully supported by sound economic factors such as low interest rates, rising incomes, and growing populations. The Government had recently taken further steps to maintain the availability of longer-term credit in Canada, by purchasing up to US\$ 25 billion in insured mortgage pools through the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation. That action would help Canadian financial institutions to raise longer-term funds, and make them available to consumers, home-buyers and businesses. The relief for consumers and home-buyers came at no fiscal cost to tax-payers, and would earn a rate of return for the Government that was over the Government's own cost of borrowing. As insured mortgage pools already carried government backing, there was no additional risk to the tax payer. Such action built on recent steps taken by the Bank of Canada to provide increased volumes of term liquidity across a broader range of collateral. When approving the budget, Parliament had increased the amount of collateral that banks would accept. The Finance Committee in the House of Commons and the Senate were vigilant and constantly probed key witnesses on unemployment rates, inflation and the fiscal situation.

During the panel discussion on "Advancing nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, and securing the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty: The role of parliaments," **Senator Dawson** said:

That Canada supported the CTBT and despite the fact that 179 countries had signed the Treaty, it could not enter into force until the 44 States possessing nuclear technology had ratified it. Of those States, nine had still not ratified the Treaty. Canada, as one of those 44 States, had ratified the Treaty in December 1998. The CTBT remained a crucial piece of unfinished business on the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation agenda. It was an integral part of a rules-based, multilateral non-proliferation and disarmament architecture, which constrained the ability of States to develop new nuclear weapons, and prevented nuclear weapon States from increasing their arsenals. The verification system had been implemented provisionally by the CTBTO and had demonstrated its effectiveness in detecting suspected nuclear weapons test explosions all over the world. Furthermore, the Treaty's International Monitoring System collected data that was applied to new civil scientific applications, as well as compliance verification. Canada played an active role in encouraging other States to ratify the Treaty, in order to ensure its entry into force and the completion of the International Monitoring System. All States would benefit from the entry into force of the CTBT, since it would constitute a major step towards a safer and more secure world. His delegation therefore called on all States to ratify the Treaty without further delay.

5. Participation by Canadians in Related Meetings and Activities

Concurrent with Standing Committee activities associated with the 119th IPU Assembly were the meetings of several 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 119th 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 13 and 15 October. During the Council's consideration of the IPU's budget proposal for 2009, **Senator Oliver**, in his capacity as Chair of the Asia Pacific Group indicated:

That the Asia-Pacific Group believes that excellent progress has been made in accounting transparency and accountability. The Group plans to use some of the expertise among its members between assemblies to give thought to such budgetary issues as: exchange rates; an enhanced role for parliamentary auditors; and a defined budgetary role for the IPU's new vice-presidents. The Asia-Pacific Group intends to do considerable work to determine what types of development projects they would like to see in the Asia-Pacific region. This input will be passed on to the IPU Executive to assist with the ongoing budgetary process.

There is a need for the IPU to channel funds in ways that will assist those nations not on track to meet the Millennium Development Goals for 2015. There are 68 nations that are not on track to meet these targets. The IPU can play an active role by directing future budgetary expenditures and activities towards those IPU members who require assistance meeting the MDG targets.

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 first elected to this committee in April 2004 and since 2008 has served as its President. Her current term expires in April 2011. The Committee meets four times a year, including on the occasion of the IPU's statutory Assemblies.

The Committee met from 11 to 14 October.⁴ It conducted eight hearings with delegations from countries where it had cases pending and, in total, examined 63 cases

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

in 33 countries, including including 18 public cases affecting 239 individuals from the following jurisdictions: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Burundi, Cambodia, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ecuador, Egypt, Eritrea, Lebanon, Mongolia, Myanmar, Palestine / Israel, 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 12 and 14 October, 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 committee
- Functioning of the Advisory Committee on UN Affairs
- IPU 2009 Draft Budget
- Future meetings of the APG and its Working Group

Meetings of the Twelve Plus Group were held on 4, 7, 8 and 9 April. Agenda items considered included:

- 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

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

- 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)

6. Future IPU Assemblies

On the occasion of the 118th IPU Assembly, the IPU Governing Council deferred its decision on the question of Canada's offer to host the 122nd IPU Assembly in 2010 on the grounds that more time was required to examine the IPU's visa issuance policy for host parliaments. To this end, the IPU Secretary General was asked to develop concrete proposals that could be considered by the IPU's governing bodies in October 2008.

During the 119th Assembly, the IPU Executive Committee revisited this matter. According to the summary record of its deliberations:

The Committee considered the venues for the 122nd and 124th Assemblies. It recommended, following a unanimous vote, that the 122nd Assembly be held in Thailand, the only potential host whose invitation had already been studied by the Executive Committee following completion of the procedure and received the blessing of the Council. It received a delegation from Venezuela to hear the status of that parliament's invitation, noting that the procedure for the approval of the venue had yet to be completed. Regarding the 124th Assembly, the Committee was informed that the Parliament of Canada had maintained its invitation to host this Assembly in 2011. It expressed continuing misgivings about the question of visas being granted to all participants and decided to resume discussion of the matter at its next session.⁶

7. 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.

⁶ Source: <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/119/119.pdf>, page 13.

Informing Democracy: Building Capacity to Meet Parliamentarians' Information and Knowledge Needs

Organized Jointly by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Associations of Secretaries General of Parliaments and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions' Section on Library and Research Services for Parliamentarians

1. Introduction

A one-day conference, *Informing Democracy: Building capacity to meet parliamentarians' information and knowledge needs*, was held in Geneva, Switzerland, on 16 October 2008. Jointly organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments (ASGP) and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions' (IFLA) Library and Research Services for Parliaments Section, this event brought together over 200 participants from more than 70 delegations, including parliamentarians, secretaries general and those responsible for library and research services.

The purpose of the conference was to permit an exchange of perspectives on the challenges faced by parliamentarians seeking the information and knowledge they require to perform their duties effectively. To this end, its agenda focused on the evolving information needs of parliamentarians and the important role that can be played by parliaments, secretaries general, and library and research services in meeting those needs.

A detailed report of this event is available online.⁷

2. The Canadian Delegation

Members of national and subnational parliaments, the ASGP, as well as representatives of legislative libraries took part in this event. The following Canadian Senators were in attendance: The Honourable Donald H. Oliver, Q.C., and The Honourable Dennis Dawson

3. The Panel Sessions

The conference program included the following panel sessions.

- Parliamentarians' evolving information and knowledge needs
- The value of dedicated parliamentary library and research services
- Innovative strategies to meet parliamentarians' evolving needs
- Sharing good practices and building capacity: Strategies to assist parliamentary institutions

Senator Dawson served as a panellist for the first session. In this capacity he spoke of the evolving roles of parliamentarians in light of the possibilities and opportunities created by new technologies. He has been using the services of Canada's Library of Parliament for more than 30 years and has witnessed how it has adapted to changing

⁷ See: <http://www.ipu.org/splz-e/asgp08.htm>.

technology and demands. Technology has led to the democratization of information, with both parliamentarians and the public having greater access to material on the work of parliament and parliamentarians. With greater access comes the need for more filtering and fact-checking. He pointed out that material on public information websites such as Wikipedia is often inaccurate. He relies heavily on parliamentary library and research services because he knows he will receive a response that is impartial, unbiased and analyzed by experts.

The other challenge, he stressed, was to provide information in a way that makes it usable. All the information may be publicly available, but until a specialist has evaluated and synthesized it, the knowledge needed can remain elusive to parliamentarians and the public alike. As he explained: “It is not about who owns what ... As parliamentarians, we just want access to information in a form that makes sense to us.”

He concluded by emphasizing that parliamentarians play four distinct roles – in the chamber, in committees, in their constituencies or regions, and on the international stage. These roles cross the lines between parliamentary institutions, and it is essential for parliamentarians that procedural staff and library and research staff work closely together so that parliamentarians may carry out their democratic duties.

4. Conclusion

Informing Democracy was conceived as a means to facilitate the exchange of ideas among parliamentarians, secretaries general and parliamentary library and research staff. In the final analysis, participants agreed that the debate had come full circle with common understanding on several key points, notably the importance of working in collaboration – as partners – to build capacity.

It was noted repeatedly that all parliamentarians – no matter their geographic, political or individual circumstances – are struggling to extract useful and reliable information from a growing range of sources. As a result, they are increasingly reliant on their library and research services to synthesize and analyze required information and knowledge in an accessible format and in a timely manner. This trend, however, is placing great pressure on parliamentary information providers to adapt their methods and practices to meet client needs.

In terms of next steps, it was agreed that conference must not be an end, but the beginning of an enduring engagement and partnership between the IPU, the ASGP, and IFLA’s Library and Research Services for Parliaments Section. Participants suggested that these groups organize regional meetings to explore common challenges. They also called for the coordination of initiatives undertaken by these groups to improve the sharing of best practices and resources as well as the quality and delivery of support.

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	119th IPU Assembly and Related Meetings, and Informing Democracy: Building Capacity to Meet Parliamentarians' Information and Knowledge Needs
DESTINATION	Geneva, Switzerland
DATES	October 13 to 15, 2008, and October 16, 2008
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Donald H. Oliver, Q.C. Hon. Sharon Carstairs, P.C. Hon. Dennis Dawson
HOUSE OF COMMONS	
STAFF	Mr. Mark D'Amore, Secretary to the Delegation Mr. Joseph Jackson, Advisor
TRANSPORTATION	\$18,844.33
ACCOMMODATION	\$15,970.49
HOSPITALITY	\$ 396.51
PER DIEMS	\$ 3,361.93
OFFICIAL GIFTS	260.00
MISCELLANEOUS	\$ 161.88
TOTAL	\$38,995.14