

Canadian Group
Inter-Parliamentary Union



Groupe canadien
Union interparlementaire

**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
to the 120th IPU Assembly and Related Meetings**

Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
5 – 10 April 2009

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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 120th Assembly 153 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 120th 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 120th IPU Assembly, which took place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia between 5 and 10 April 2009, addressed the following items:

- General Debate: General debate on the political, economic and social situation in the world with the overall theme of Parliaments: Building Peace, Democracy and Development in times of crisis;
- First Standing Committee: Advancing nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, and securing the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty: The role of parliaments;
- Second Standing Committee: Climate change, sustainable development models, and renewable energies;

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

- Third Standing Committee: Freedom of expression and the right to information; and
- Emergency Item: The role of parliaments in mitigating the social and political impact of the international economic and financial crisis on the most vulnerable sectors of the global community, especially in Africa.

A detailed report on the 120th IPU Assembly and Related Meetings is available online.²

3. The Canadian Delegation

Delegations from the parliaments of 123 countries attended the 120th IPU Assembly. Of the 1,193 delegates who attended, 597 were members of national parliaments, of which 165 were women (27.6%) and nine 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 Dennis Dawson, Senator

Ms. France Bonsant, M.P.

Ms. Raymonde Folco, M.P.

Ms. Cheryl Gallant, M.P.

Ms. Denise Savoie, M.P.

Mr. Mario Silva, M.P.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott, M.P.

4. Interventions made by the Canadian Delegation during the 120th IPU Assembly

Canadian delegates were actively involved in a variety of Assembly meetings and activities during the 120th IPU Assembly.³ **Ms. Gallant** and **Mr. Silva** attended meetings of the First Standing Committee; **Senator Dawson** and **Ms. Bonsant** attended meetings of the Second Committee; and **Ms. Folco** and **Mr. Vellacott** attended meetings of the Third Committee. In addition, all delegates attended sessions of the Plenary Debate; several delegates attended the daylong Meeting of Women Parliamentarians; **Senator Oliver** and **Mr. Silva** served as members of the Drafting Committee for the Emergency Item; and, **Ms. Folco** served as a member of the Drafting Committee for the Third Standing Committee. Delegates also attended panel discussions that addressed the following issues: “Adolescent girls: The girls left behind?”; “Managing diversity”; and “Countdown to 2015”. **Senator Oliver** was a keynote speaker for the session on Managing Diversity.

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

² See: <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/120/120.pdf>.

³ Resolutions adopted by the Standing Committees that met on the occasion of the 120th Assembly may be found at: <http://www.ipu.org/strct-e/stcnfres.htm#120>.

- During the General Debate on the political, economic and social situation in the world, **Senator Oliver** focused on the overall theme of “Parliaments: Building Peace, Democracy and Development in times of crisis.” He said:

That although there had been good news recently concerning progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, and that statistics had shown a decline in illness throughout the world, nonetheless the abuse of human rights threatened to undermine the progress that had been made. The world was fraught by crises, but that should not distract parliamentarians from trying to build peace and democracy. Parliaments had a crucial role to play in fulfilling the wishes of their people. There were numerous disputes throughout the world which disaffected with democracy – that was not surprising, given the failure of democracies to set up acceptable regulatory regimes. The Aga Khan had been critical of the international community for allowing the rise of what he called “failed democracies”, characterized by factionalism, incompetence and poor governance. Winston Churchill had said “Democracy was the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried”. But he personally agreed with the Aga Khan that democracies were not living up to their potential. Democracy required constant vigilance and national parliamentarians had to help those who would suffer most. Diversity must be allowed for and educational improvement had to be promoted. Focus the software, rather than the hardware, of democracy. Parliamentarians had a crucial role to play in encouraging people to move away from the pursuit of self-interest.

Transparency and accountability were vital to a democracy as they allowed for scrutiny of the executive. Measures already in place should not be considered as set in stone, and democracy should always be open to new ideas. For example, in 2006 Canada had set up the post of independent Parliamentary Budget Officer, whose duty it was to scrutinize the government’s budget and to advise parliament accordingly. By pursuing new initiatives, the role of parliaments in building peace would be enhanced.

- During the Standing Committee debate on “Climate change, sustainable development models, and renewable energies,” Ms. Savoie said:

That, despite their differences, all countries should unite to combat climate change in a paradigm shift such as that demonstrated by the United States, with which her country was now working cooperatively on energy and other issues as a result. Climate change posed opportunities and challenges for all countries, including Canada, where the Parliament was debating legislation to set emissions-reduction targets and enable participation in a North American cap-and-trade system for the sale of emissions permits. The need for that paradigm shift was also demonstrated by such issues as water; the black gold of the future; water resources should be treated with respect to avoid wastage or contamination. The current economic crisis similarly showed the results of short-term thinking and its impact on the most vulnerable. In that light, Canada endorsed the need for adoption of the three-pillar model sustainability in which environment, social and economic issues were equal factors in decision-making. Remaining oil supplies might then be used to shift to clean energy in meeting the

higher energy demands from the increases in population and industrialization. Only then could the world move towards a restored economy and begin building its future

- During the Standing Committee debate on “Climate change, sustainable development models, and renewable energies,” Ms. Folco said:

That access to government information in her country was regulated by a federal law under which such information was available to citizens and permanent residents who requested it. The law also provided for an independent monitoring mechanism and had established the position of Information Commissioner, whose functions included the investigation of complaints, to which the Commissioner would act as ombudsman. Only where a dispute was unresolved following the Commissioner’s investigation could a court ruling be sought. The Commissioner was appointed by the executive for a seven-year term. Canada was one of the relatively small number of countries where right of access to government documents was covered by legislation. New questions about the viability of that legislation, however, had been raised in the light of the rapid developments occurring in electronic communications. Canada was also among those countries that had shunned the principle of transparency following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 in the United States, to which it had reacted by adopting a counter-terrorism law. Numerous reform proposals had since been submitted to successive governments of which, thus far, none had been successful.

- As a keynote speaker for the Panel Discussion entitled “Managing diversity,” Senator Oliver told the assembled delegates:

That the IPU was working in partnership with the United Nations to implement the “Promoting Inclusive Parliaments” initiative, which focused on three objectives: developing representation of minorities; endowing parliaments with the tools to promote inclusivity; and reinforcing inclusive parliaments’ ability to act. The initiative was being financed by the Canadian International Development Agency.

Diversity was an appropriate topic because, as a consequence of the financial crisis, countries could not afford to have people not contributing to the economy because of their religion, gender or skin colour. No one should be denied education, jobs or participation in the political process; parliaments had to represent the diversity of their populations.

Canada had long been a country used to immigration, having been settled by Europeans in the 17th century. Immigrants had been welcomed ever since. In any major city, Chinese and Lebanese restaurants, Islamic schools, Irish pubs and synagogues could all be found close to each other and it was not uncommon to have more than 20 nationalities in a school class. Prior to the 1970s, most immigrants had been European or from the United States, English or French speakers, and either Protestant or Catholic. But from the 1960s, immigrants had increasingly arrived in Canada from China, India, the Philippines and indeed all corners of the world. The 2006 census had recorded more than 200 spoken languages, and the population was now divided into Aborigines, North American

natives, European settlers and recent arrivals. Eleven ethnic groups had a population of more than one million people and there were five million in the “visible minority” category. That was a Canadian term used in the Employment Equity Act, defined as persons, other than the indigenous, who were non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour. The visible minority population had grown from 5 per cent of the population in 1981 to 16 per cent in 2006. That growth was due to increasing immigration from non-European countries.

Canadians had adopted a pluralistic approach. Diversity had been embraced as a key Canadian value and in surveys was cited more than any other factor as something that made Canada unique. Diversity defined Canada for Canadians, even more so than ice hockey! That was because the country was vast but under-populated, with only 33 million people. Immigration was therefore needed to counter the effect of a falling birth rate. Another factor that contributed to its diversity was that Canada had been founded by the British and the French, who had brought together two legal systems, two religions and two languages. That meant that Canadians were used to accepting others. Multiculturalism had been an official policy since the 1960s, although it was not without criticism from those who thought that it emphasized the difference between communities rather than their common values. The Broadcasting Act required the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) to reflect the multiracial and multicultural nature of Canada and the school curriculum highlighted the contribution of minorities. The last two Governor Generals had been visible-minority women, who had come to Canada as children.

Most of that progress had been due to three laws, which protected individuals’ access to jobs. The 1982 Charter of Rights and Freedoms gave all Canadians equality before the law. The 1985 Canadian Human Rights Act had prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion or gender. The 1995 Employment Equity Act had promoted diversity and made systemic discrimination illegal. The Act had targeted underrepresented groups, including women, persons with disabilities and visible minorities.

Racism was still, however, a fact of life. For example, recently a person of Asian ethnicity had applied for jobs under his own name and under a fictional white name, and found that the white name had received more offers. The world was pluralistic in fact, but not in spirit.

Diverse and inclusive societies attracted the best talent because people wanted to live and work in tolerant communities. Countries that were tolerant would be the most successful in years to come. As most Canadian minorities were foreign-born, diversity allowed Canada to reach out to foreign countries. In the words of the Canadian Prime Minister, pluralism was elemental to Canadian civil society.

An increase in ethnic diversity challenged parliaments’ ability to remain relevant. The Canadian political system had become more open over time. Women had been allowed to vote since 1918 but prior to 1920, provinces could still choose

who had the right to vote and some had property requirements that had to be met in order to be added to the electoral roll.

The right to vote in Canada had been universal since 1920. However, some were excluded until 1960, while women had been prevented from sitting in the Senate until 1929, based on a clause in the Constitution that only “qualified persons” could take seats. Five women had challenged that interpretation in court, had won, and the first woman senator had taken up her seat in 1930.

More recently, the focus had been on greater access during election. Employers were obliged to give workers sufficient time off work to vote, voting hours had been extended, and advanced or postal votes had been made available for those unable to reach the polls, while access had been made available to those in wheelchairs.

Of the 188 men in the ruling party, he was the only black person. While women accounted for almost half of the population, 35 out of 105 senators were women (one third), while 69 of 308 members of the House of Commons were women (22 per cent). The aboriginal population was around 1.3 million (4.4 per cent of the total) and there were four members from the aboriginal group in the House of Commons (1 per cent) and 7 senators (around 7 per cent). Visible minorities were also under-represented.

Parliamentarians should reach out to the youth, to new Canadians and minorities. If minority groups saw themselves reflected in parliament, they were more likely to feel fully represented. Electoral systems should be reshaped to promote diversity, and to ensure that parliaments reflected demography. The Canadian “first past the post” system might need an element of proportional representation to increase minority representation. There had to be increased communication links with citizens and greater explanation of parliament to them. Parliament should be more open to social diversity so that people could recognize themselves in their democratic institutions.

In response to interventions made during the question and answer session, **Senator Oliver** added:

That it was important to collect statistics on ethnic minorities as this was the only way to reliably measure progress. He did not personally favour quotas and such proposals had been rejected several times in Canada, for example in Nunavut in 1997, when a proposal for gender parity in this legislature had been rejected.

Furthermore:

Diversity would become less of an issue in the future as children were now growing up alongside children of different backgrounds. He said that it was not only the United States where somebody from a minority could reach the top; in Canada, a former Governor General, the person who represented Her Majesty the Queen, was an ethnic female who had not been born in Canada, but had emigrated from China. The current Governor General was a woman originally from Haiti. That proved Canada’s diversity.

5. Participation by Canadian Delegates in Related Meetings and Activities

Concurrent with Standing Committee activities associated with the 120th 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 184th 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 184th Session of the IPU Governing Council were held on 6 and 10 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 – in light of its desire to host an IPU Assembly at a later date – was the Governing Council's final decision regarding of the provision of visas for delegates to IPU assemblies. According to the summary record:

It endorsed the conclusions of a paper on the provision of visas and other matters relating to the attendance of delegates at IPU Assemblies. It emphasized that the IPU was founded on the fundamental principle that differences are resolved through discussion and dialogue. It was therefore of fundamental importance to the Organization that the representatives mandated by Member Parliaments to take part in IPU Assemblies could do so.

Since the IPU was not part of the United Nations and was therefore not covered by any of the international conventions relating to privileges and immunities, the Governing Council agreed that it should continue to conclude agreements with host parliaments in respect of its Assemblies and other meetings. Such agreements should restate the basic provision guaranteeing that all delegates could effectively attend the events.

At the same time, noting that the IPU was an international organization inspired by the same ideals as the United Nations, whose objectives it shared and with whom it had concluded an agreement of cooperation, the Governing Council agreed that the IPU would respect travel bans decided by the United Nations.

The Council recommended that the IPU should codify its positions on some of the other issues that might arise when enforcing the basic principle, and that in so doing it should draw inspiration from United Nations practice. With regard to possible exceptions on national security grounds, it recommended observance of the practices described in the 1985 UN Juridical Yearbook, whereby in the rare instances where security concerns had been invoked by the host country as a reason to restrict the travel of delegates, the United Nations did not insist on the entry of persons in respect of whom substantial evidence of improper activities had been presented, the burden of proof in such matters lying with the host country.⁵

⁴ See: <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/121/121.pdf>.

⁵ See: <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/121/121.pdf>, page 14.

(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 5 to 9 April.⁶ The Committee conducted 9 hearings with delegations from countries where it had cases pending and with representatives of the sources. The Committee examined a total of 67 cases in 32 countries. The Committee submitted to the Governing Council the cases of 238 parliamentarians in 19 countries around the world affecting individuals from the following jurisdictions: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Burundi, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ecuador, Egypt, Eritrea, Iraq, Lebanon, Mongolia, Myanmar, Palestine/Israel, Philippines, 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).

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

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

⁷ Minutes of the meetings of the Asia Pacific Group and the Twelve Plus Group are available from the Canadian IPU Secretariat upon request.

A meeting of the Asia-Pacific Group (APG) was held on 5 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 122nd 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 4, 7, 8 and 9 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 121st Assembly (Geneva, October 2009)

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

Three visits for parliamentarians to education, health and nutrition, and social transfer projects for vulnerable children and adolescents were held on 7 April. **Ms. Folco** participated in the health and nutrition visit, which included a trip to a health post and meetings with families in their homes and with relevant officials.

(e) Countdown to 2015: Maternal, Newborn and Child Survival - Field Visit

On 7 April, **Ms. Gallant** took part in a site visit coordinated by The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health. The purpose of the visit was to sensitize parliamentarians from G8 countries to the reality of maternal and child health challenges in a developing country.

(f) Visit to the Ethiopian Arbitration and Conciliation Center

Several delegates took part in a field visit to a CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency) funded project on 6 April at the Ethiopian Arbitration and

Conciliation Center (EACC). The purpose of the meeting was threefold: to get an overview of the contribution of Alternative Dispute Resolution to the improvement of access to justice in Ethiopia; to review Canada's contribution to Ethiopia's efforts to improve the rule of law through support to justice institutions; and, to better understand how Ethiopian CSOs working on justice issues will be affected by the new Charities and Societies Law and will cope with the new legal environment.

(g) Visit to the Improving Productivity and Markey Success Project Site

On 8 April several delegates visited the Improving Productivity and Markey Success (IPMS), a CIDA funded bilateral project implemented by the International Livestock Research Institute in collaboration with the Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MOARD). It is a five year project (2005-10) with a budget of \$19.9M. The goal of the project is to contribute to improved agricultural productivity and production through market-oriented agricultural development, as a means for achieving improved and sustainable rural livelihoods in Ethiopia.

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 Dennis Dawson, Senator
Canadian Group IPU

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
ACTIVITY	120th IPU Assembly and Related Meetings
DESTINATION	Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
DATES	5 – 10 April 2009
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Donald H. Oliver, Q.C., Leader of the Delegation Hon. Sharon Carstairs, P.C. Hon. Dennis Dawson
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Ms. France Bonsant, M.P. Ms. Raymonde Folco, M.P. Ms. Cheryl Gallant, M.P. Ms. Denise Savoie, M.P. Mr. Mario Silva, M.P. Mr. Maurice Vellacott, M.P.
STAFF	Mr. Mark D'Amore, Secretary to the Delegation Mr. Joseph Jackson, Advisor Mr. Michael Dewing, Analyst
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 63,525.65
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 40,848.98
HOSPITALITY	\$ 1,631.49
PER DIEMS	\$ 4,750.10
OFFICIAL GIFTS	384.95
MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES	\$ 589.50
TOTAL	\$111,730.67