



**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
to the Bilateral Visit to the Seychelles**

**Canadian Branch of the
Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)**

**Victoria, Seychelles
September 9-12, 2010**

Report

A delegation of the Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association visited the Seychelles from September 9-12, 2010. The Canadian Branch was represented by the following delegation:

- Mr. Russ Hiebert, MP, Chair of the Canadian Branch, Leader of the delegation
- Ms. Carole Freeman, MP

The delegation was assisted by Stephanie Bond, Executive Secretary of the Branch.

The delegation undertook this activity immediately prior to the 56th CPA Conference held in Nairobi, Kenya. It has been the Canadian Branch's practice to conduct bilateral visits immediately prior to the annual CPA conference, if possible, to help reduce the overall costs to the association.

The CPA constitution encourages visits between member countries with the objective of giving parliamentarians an opportunity to trade views and to discuss matters of common interest and concern. During the 7th CPA Canadian Seminar in Ottawa in October 2009, several participants raised concerns with regards to democratic processes in their respective countries. In response to these concerns, and with the aim of advancing parliamentary democracy in all Commonwealth countries, the Canadian Branch committed to conducting a bilateral visit to the Seychelles in 2010 prior to the 56th CPA Annual Conference in Nairobi, Kenya.

The objectives of the visit to the Seychelles include an examination of:

- Differences between the Canadian and Seychelles parliamentary systems
- Role of opposition parties and MPs in Parliament
- Committee system
- Independence of the media
- Mechanisms for building institutional capacity and individual parliamentarian's capacities
- Methods of strengthening democracy throughout the Commonwealth
- Strategies of recovery following the economic downturn
- Trade Relations
- Anti-piracy measures

Meeting with the Lieutenant Commander Richard Sturman, European Union's Naval Force (EU NAVFOR) Liaison Officer

The visit commenced with a briefing from Lieutenant Commander Richard Sturman, EU NAVFOR Liaison Officer on anti-piracy measures in the Seychelles.

Piracy is a major concern for the Seychelles and the entire region and has extremely negative effects on the economy of the Seychelles, which relies heavily on tourism. Lieutenant Commander Richard Sturman provided an overview of anti-piracy measures including a thorough explanation of the NATO operation, "Nation Shield". Discussions focused on anti-piracy measures and the importance of rebuilding Somalia, which is the main source of piracy in the region. The risk posed by that failed state to the overall security of the region was agreed upon by those in attendance. According to Lieutenant Commander Sturman, as long as Somalia remains a failed state, the piracy problem will remain. The role of the European Union's Naval Force EU NAVFOR includes providing escorts to the World Food Program and securing transit corridors. Following the briefing, the delegation visited the Coast Guard of Seychelles and received further details on the partnership between the Coast Guard and EU NAVFOR to combat piracy. Mrs. Gillian Ormiston, Third Secretary-Political, British High Commission to Mauritius was also in attendance and provided an overview of the political, social and economic situation in the region.

Meeting with the CPA Executive Committee, Seychelles Branch

The meeting with the CPA executive committee was co- chaired by the two Vice-Presidents of CPA Seychellois branch, Hon. Marie-Louise Potter and Hon. Wavel Ramkalawan. Other members of the CPA executive committee in attendance included: Hon. Marie-Louise Potter, Hon. Wavel Ramakalawan, Hon. David Pierre, Hon. Nicholas Prea and Hon. Jeovanna Charles. The meeting commenced with the Hon. Marie-Louise Potter providing an overview of the electoral system of the Seychelles. The Hon. Marie-Louise Potter highlighted that the bilateral visit marked the first official visit from Canada. She noted that the Seychelles are one of the smallest and youngest members of the CPA and that she also looked forward to sharing notes on good practices and common approaches. Despite the differences in size and location, it was noted that all parliamentarians are in office to represent their people, develop laws and serve their constituents. The Hon. Marie-Louise Potter explained ongoing parliamentary reforms in the Seychelles, including some recent committee reforms. She also expressed a desire to strengthen the cooperation between the Seychellois and Canadian branches of the CPA.

Mr. Russ Hiebert, MP, expressed his appreciation for the warm welcome on the occasion of the first Canadian visit to the Seychelles, and referred to the recent participation of the Hon. David Pierre in the 7th Canadian Parliamentary Seminar held in 2009. Ms. Carole Freeman, MP also remarked on the shared colonial history and languages of Canada and the Seychelles. She noted that, like Canada, many Commonwealth countries are currently in a minority government situation.

The Hon. Marie-Louise Potter then highlighted the recent elections in Kenya and the importance of maintaining democracy in the region to help ensure stability for all countries. The independence of the media was also discussed at length with divergent views shared by the opposition and the government Members of Parliament from the Seychelles. The importance of an independent media was stressed by the Canadian delegation. A discussion of Canada's national media and Seychelles state-funded television stations and newspapers ensued. The Canadian delegation explained that

the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) is very successful in operating at arm's length from the government regardless of the fact that they are publicly funded. It was agreed that it is essential that the media find its balance in the Seychelles given the new political paradigm. The Hon. Marie-Louise Potter explained that there is a pressing need to build the capacity of the national media. For example, in the Seychelles, the cost of attaining a radio license and the restrictions on the eligible groups that can apply for a radio station license are viewed as deterrents to liberalizing the media by those opposition members in attendance. The delegation was informed that the President of the Seychelles also holds the portfolio of the Ministry of Information. A lack of freedom of assembly was also of concern to opposition members. The physical location of the new Parliament was an additional preoccupation of the opposition as there is no public transportation to allow for participation of citizens. During the discussions, Mr. Hiebert stressed that, as members of the CPA, all countries must allow democracy to flourish. He reiterated that by allowing citizens to express themselves, stability is enhanced, not compromised.

A discussion ensued on the history of the Seychelles and the move from a one-party state. Party financing was discussed and the Canadian delegation explained donation restrictions and the role of Elections Canada. There are no limitations on foreign donations to parties in the Seychelles, and the opposition expressed much concern that construction of the new Parliament buildings was funded by the People's Republic of China.

Election rules, the committee system, independence of the judiciary, the parliamentary calendar, the election of the Speaker and the role of Private Member's bills were also discussed. It was noted that the Seychelles has never experienced a change of government in its history.

Meeting with the Chairpersons of Committees

A meeting on the role of committees included Hon. Terence Mondon, Chair of the Finance and Public Accounts Committee; Hon. Marie-Antoinette Rose, Chair of Committee on Government Assurances; and Jeovanna Charles, member of the Standing Orders Committee.

The Hon. Terence Mondon, Chair of the Finance and Public Accounts Committee, explained that the National Assembly had recently participated in an IPU seminar on empowering and strengthening committees. The IPU seminar brought to light the importance of working together in committee and the political maturity required to make committees work.

The Hon. Jeovanna Charles, member of the Standing Orders Committee, described the committee's responsibility for ethics and access to information. Ms. Carole Freeman explained that Canada is in a minority situation therefore, the parties must work together or risk paralyzing the country. It was agreed that at the committee level, Parliamentarians are able to ask more tough questions. There is a separation of powers and Parliamentarians are able to take the government to task in defence of the interests of the electorate.

The process of election of committee chairs was also explored. The Canadian delegation discussed the importance of engaging the opposition, and the crucial role of the opposition in the committee system. The Canadian delegation stressed the importance of the opposition holding the chair of the Public Accounts committee in Canada. Mr. Russ Hiebert welcomed the participation of the Hon. Marie-Antoinette Rose, Chair of Committee on Government Assurances at the upcoming 8th Canadian Seminar in Ottawa.

Meeting with officials from Trade Division, Ministry of Finance

Mr. Charles Morin, Chief Negotiator for Seychelles Accession to the WTO, Ministry of Finance and Mr. Ziyaad Ebrahim, Director for Trade, Ministry of Finance, provided an overview of current Canadian interests in the Seychelles and the trade relationship between Canada and the Seychelles. Mr. Morin remarked that many Canadians of Seychellois-origin send remittances to their families on the island. Mr. Morin explained that the greatest opportunities for trade expansion between the two countries exist in the service sector. There is also room for growth in the financial services sector, insurance and tourism. Mr. Morin stated that technical assistance in the fishing sector is required and Canada could play a lead role. Mr. Morin provided an update on the progress of WTO accession and the current status of free-trade agreements in the region. Technical assistance is also required in fields of trade and intellectual property protection. There is also a need for skill development despite the high literacy rate in the Seychelles.

Meeting with the Media Advisory Committee, National Assembly

The delegation met with the Hon. Michel Marie, Chairperson of the Media Advisory Committee; and committee members the Hon. Gervais Henrie and the Hon. Vicky Theresine. Members of the media in attendance included: Mrs. Marie-Anne Lepathy of Seychelles Nation; Ms. Marceline Evenor of Seychelles Broadcasting Corporation; and Ms. Sharon Telemarque of GemPlus.

The Hon. Michel Marie, Chairperson of the Media Advisory Committee, provided an overview of the roles of the committee. In doing so, he noted the increasing pressure from the House to improve the working relationship with the media and referred to recent initiatives to improve the capacity of journalists, including training workshops. The Hon. Gervais Henrie, member of the committee and former journalist, stressed the importance of establishing a code of conduct for the media.

Ms. Sharon Telemarque explained the role of GemPlus, which is a gender and media association, that advocates and reports on gender issues. GemPlus is an NGO, which provides media training and organizes outreach activities on gender-based topics. The Hon. Vicky Theresine explained that the Media Advisory Committee is looking into how best the national media can promote the work of Members of Parliament.

The importance of independence of the media was raised by the Canadian delegation and was discussed at length. It was highlighted that the lack of independence of the media is a grave concern for democracy in the Seychelles. The journalists present were asked if they feel free to report freely without sacrificing their job security at the state-run media outlets. However, the lack of response to the question led the

delegation to conclude that political pressure and self-censorship are barriers to media independence in the Seychelles. The costly licensing fee was again identified as a major limitation to media competition. Ms. Carol Freeman further identified the need for some form of private broadcasting in Seychelles. Mr. Hiebert promoted the need for freedom of expression and an outlet for the public to express their views. He further stated that such exchanges are good for democracy and the government does not have a role in the editing the news of the day. The role of the Canadian Radio and Telecommunications Corporation (CRTC) in granting licenses was explained. It was agreed that there must be a will to embrace divergences of viewpoints given the new political paradigm. The journalists present discussed the lack of investigative journalism and the role of the internet in promoting free speech. It was reiterated that the President is responsible for the Ministry of Information. The Hon. Gervais Henrie, committee member, explained that creating more radio stations is not necessarily the solution; rather fostering fair and independent media coverage is the answer.

In conclusion, the delegates would like to express their appreciation to the Parliamentary Research Branch of the Library of Parliament for the excellent background information provided in preparation for the bilateral visit. Special thanks are also offered to Mr. Robert Orr, High Commissioner of Canada to Tanzania, Comoros, the Seychelles and Zambia and the officers and staff of the Canadian High Commission for their extremely professional assistance.

Respectfully submitted,

Mr. Russ Hiebert, M.P., Chair
Canadian Branch
of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)
ACTIVITY	Bilateral Visit to the Seychelles
DESTINATION	Victoria, Seychelles
DATES	September 9-12, 2010
DELEGATION	
SENATE	
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Carole Freeman, M.P. Russ Hiebert, M.P.
STAFF	Stephanie Bond
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 39.75
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 2,501.68
HOSPITALITY	\$ 121.93
PER DIEMS	\$ 92.45
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 280.04
MISCELLANEOUS/REGISTRATION FEES	\$ 6.69
TOTAL	\$ 3,042.50