

Canadian Group
Inter-Parliamentary Union



Groupe canadien
Union interparlementaire

**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
respecting its participation at the
126th IPU Assembly and Related Meetings
Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
Kampala, Uganda
March 31 to April 5, 2012**

Report

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 126th Assembly 160 national parliaments were members of the IPU and ten 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 126th 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 126th IPU Assembly, which took place in Kampala, Uganda between 31 March and 5 April 2012, addressed the following items:

- General Debate: General debate on the political, economic and social situation in the world with the overall theme of Parliaments and people: Bridging the gap;
- First Standing Committee: Promoting and practising good governance as a means of advancing peace and security: Drawing lessons from recent events in the Middle East and North Africa;

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

- Second Standing Committee: Redistribution of power, not just wealth: Ownership of the international agendas;
- Third Standing Committee: Access to health as a basic right: The role of parliaments in addressing key challenges to securing the health of women and children; and
- Emergency Item: Inter-Parliamentary Union initiative for an immediate halt to the bloodshed and human rights violations in Syria, and the need to ensure access to humanitarian aid for all persons in need and to support implementation of all relevant Arab League and United Nations resolutions and peace efforts.

A detailed report on the 126th IPU Assembly and Related Meetings is available online.²

3. The Canadian Delegation

Delegations from the parliaments of 120 countries attended the 126th IPU Assembly. Of the 1,212 delegates who attended, 607 were members of national parliaments, of which 180 were women (29.7%) and eight were Canadian parliamentarians. These included:

The Honourable Donald H. Oliver, Leader of the delegation

The Honourable Salma Ataullahjan, Senator

The Honourable Dennis Dawson, Senator

The Honourable Mobina Jaffer, Senator

Mr. Scott Armstrong, MP

Mr. James Bezan, MP

Ms. Chris Charlton, MP

Ms. Jean Crowder, MP

4. Interventions made by the Canadian Delegation during the 126th IPU Assembly

Canadian delegates participated in a variety of Assembly meetings and activities during the 126th IPU Assembly.³ **Senator Oliver** spoke during the Plenary Debate; **Senator Dawson, Mr. Armstrong** and **Mr. Bezan** attended meetings of the First Standing Committee; **Senator Jaffer** and **Ms. Charlton** attended meetings of the Second Committee; **Senator Ataullahjan, Ms. Charlton** and **Ms. Crowder** attended meetings of the Third Committee and **Senator Ataullahjan** participated as a member of its drafting committee; and **Mr. Armstrong** spoke during the debate on the Emergency Item and **Senator Oliver** served as a member of its drafting committee. In addition, all delegates attended sessions of the Plenary Debate and **Senator Ataullahjan,**

² See: <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/126/126.pdf>.

³ Resolutions adopted by the Standing Committees that met during the 126th Assembly may be found at: <http://www.ipu.org/strct-e/stcnfres.htm#126>.

Senator Jaffer, Ms. Charlton and Ms. Crowder attended the daylong Meeting of Women Parliamentarians.

Delegates also participated in the following side events:

- Launch of the Global Parliamentary Report: The changing nature of parliamentary representation
- Panel discussion on Tackling malnutrition in young children: The role of parliamentarians
- Panel discussion on Making the law work for the response to AIDS: zero new infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths
- Informal panel discussion on Disaster risk reduction and sustainable development
- Workshop on Parliamentary oversight of government external loans and related processes (launch of a joint global survey report (IPU, World Bank and IMF)
- Informal meeting of young parliamentarians

Key interventions⁴ made by Canadian delegates during these Assembly activities were as follows:

- During the General Debate on the political, economic and social situation in the world, **Senator Oliver** focused on the overall theme of “Bridging the gap Parliamentary accountability: Living up to people’s expectations.” He said:

That he was honoured to speak on that very important topic. It was a great honour for all parliamentarians to serve their constituents. That honour carried great trust, and it was necessary to set aside individual private interests for the interests of the public. However, it was a fact that worldwide parliamentarians were less trusted than other State officials, including the police and the judiciary.

To bridge the gap between citizens and parliamentarians, democracy must be promoted. One way of achieving that was by improving communication with citizens through more transparency and ensuring that parliaments were more representative of the citizens they served.

Since 1867, Canada had benefited greatly from immigration; practically all races were represented in Canada’s major cities. On the whole, Canada was a tolerant and diverse society and that had made it a vibrant and open country.

However, parliamentarians must ensure that they represented all gender, language, religion and ethnic interests as all citizens should be able to

⁴ The Summary Record of interventions made by delegates during the 126th Assembly may be found at: <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/126/sr.pdf>.

express themselves. Similarly, parliaments must publish voting records and minutes of decisions in as accessible a way as possible. That should include greater use of social media. At the same time, the use of social media would help the flow of communication between parliaments and citizens, particularly younger people.

The level of dissatisfaction with the democratic process in many countries was a result of citizens being ill-informed of the work of parliamentarians. That was largely the fault of politicians, who had become, in the words of the Aga Khan, complacent about educating citizens about their work. According to the Aga Khan, the lack of will to address the democratic deficit had led in many instances to factionalism and subservience. Winston Churchill had once described democracy as the least worst system of government. It was vital that democracies were continually renewed if they were to survive and prosper into the future.

- During the Standing Committee debate on “Promoting and practising good governance as a means of advancing peace and security: Drawing lessons from recent events in the Middle East and North Africa,” Mr. Bezan said:

That the resolution should address the issues arising from the Arab Spring. Consideration should be given to how the governance of fledgling democracies was being developed. His delegation welcomed the efforts of the IPU, the United Nations and the Arab League in promoting democracy in the Middle East and North Africa. Particular attention should be paid to the important role played by youth as a catalyst for change in the Arab region. Good governance depended on respect for the rights of citizens. Individual human rights and freedoms must be respected, and the aspirations and needs of the people must be met. The separation of powers was also a crucial element of good governance, and the justice system must not be used to imprison opposition politicians, such as had been the case in Ukraine.

- During the Standing Committee debate on “Access to health as a basic right: The role of parliaments in addressing key challenges to securing the health of women and children,” **Senator Ataullahjan** in her capacity as a co-rapporteur on this topic said:

That deliberate emphasis had been placed in the draft resolution’s operative paragraphs on the concrete steps that parliamentarians could take in order to improve maternal, newborn and child health. They themselves had documented the need for accelerated action and the challenges to be overcome on that score, as indeed had governments and multilateral and NGOs. Attention must now be centred on implementation. The draft resolution thus urged parliamentarians inter alia to generate the political will necessary to achieve the MDGs by 2015, with an emphasis on the human-rights approach; to introduce and amend relevant legislation in conformity with international human rights obligations; to uphold gender

equality and the right to health, including access to maternal and child health services; to promote ratification of core international human rights instruments; to legislate for equal access to all health services for women and children; to criminalize all forms of violence against women and girls; to provide effective oversight of budgetary appropriations, commitments and programmes relating to maternal and child health; to ensure integrated and evidence-based health interventions and to adopt innovative approaches to health design and delivery. Crucially, the IPU was also requested to develop an accountability mechanism for monitoring implementation of the resolution between the date of its adoption and 2015.

Notwithstanding the many challenges and regional disparities to be addressed, the parliamentary actions identified were not unrealistic in the light of the capacity already demonstrated for overcoming complex problems in progressing towards the realization of certain MDGs. As for MDGs 4 and 5, their attainment was essentially dependent on the implementation of and accountability for the commitments made, while the improvement of maternal and child health was not so much a purely humanitarian objective as an indisputable need in view of the consequences for economic development and societal advancement. In fulfilling the commitments embodied in the MDGs and the Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health, the positive impact of parliamentary action could not be underestimated. The parliamentary role of awareness-raising, oversight and monitoring was also critical. In short, the commitments set out in the draft resolution constituted a good first step for the establishment of a clear, ambitious and robust framework for parliamentary action to improve maternal and child health.

For her part, **Ms. Crowder** expressed support for the draft resolution. She said:

That it was important to retain in the draft resolution the emphasis on human rights, in particular the health needs and rights of indigenous women and girls. With reference to paragraph 16 of the report, the description of women most likely to die in their lifetime from pregnancy-related causes - poor, rural, inadequately educated and of unequal status in their communities - applied to indigenous women and girls in many countries. A mention in the draft resolution to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women would be welcome, given its value as a tool in the continuing efforts to examine the inequities facing women and children, particularly those in the vulnerable and disadvantaged groups mentioned in paragraph 22 of the report. Lastly, fistula was a condition so prevalent among women in the developing world that it deserved a mention in the preamble of the draft resolution in acknowledgement of the fact that it jeopardized their ability to live in their communities.

- On 20 March 2012 the Canadian Group proposed that the 126th Assembly include “The Situation in Syria” as an Emergency Item. Following negotiations with Egypt, France, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom it was decided to submit a joint proposal entitled: “Inter-Parliamentary Union initiative for an immediate halt to the bloodshed and human rights violations in Syria, and the need to ensure access to humanitarian aid for all persons in need and to support implementation of all relevant Arab League and United Nations resolutions and peace efforts.” During the debate on this Item, **Mr. Armstrong** said:

As outlined in our explanatory memorandum, it has now been just over a year since protests calling for democratic reforms in Syria began. Since that time, terrible images and testimonials of violence and suppression have been broadcast around the world. The United Nations now reports that the violent crackdown by the Syrian government against its own population has resulted in over 8,000 fatalities. Tens of thousands more have been displaced. The significant deterioration of the political, security and humanitarian situation in Syria over the last year poses grave risks to the country’s population and to international peace and security. We are deeply troubled by the fact that, in the face of the violence by forces of the Syrian government, humanitarian workers have been permitted only limited access to besieged zones to deliver assistance and evacuate the wounded.

After her trip to one of the hardest-hit areas, Baba Amr, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator reported on March 12th that: “No building was untouched and there was clear evidence of the use of heavy artillery and tanks.” More recently, the statement by the President of the UN Security Council on March 21st expressed grave concern over “the deteriorating situation in Syria which has resulted in a serious human rights crisis and a deplorable humanitarian situation.” Colleagues, I would submit to you that the scale and intensity of the violence in Syria, and the deteriorating humanitarian and human rights situation there, constitutes an emergency that must be addressed by delegates at the 126th IPU Assembly. Indeed, the Secretary General of the United Nations recently stated, and I quote: “The situation in Syria has become now the most troubling and most concerning issue for the international community and for humanity.”

As our draft resolution makes clear, the legitimate aspirations and concerns of the Syrian people must be addressed as a matter of urgency. We must use this parliamentary forum to send a clear message of solidarity to those same people. In so doing, we must first and foremost issue an unequivocal and resounding call for an immediate end to the violence and human rights abuses in Syria.

- During the Third Standing Committee’s consideration of topics for the 127th and 128th Assemblies, Canada proposed that the Committee study “The use of social

media to enhance citizen engagement and democracy.” Speaking in support of this proposal, **Ms. Charlton** said:

That information and communication technologies (ICT) now enabled parliamentarians to reach out across distances to their public and to react swiftly to developments. In addition to facilitating communication with young people, social media provided many groups, including women, with an alternative to traditional forums in lobbying for change, while at the same time increasing expectations with respect to such matters as accountability and transparency. Barriers to communication and participation nonetheless persisted on account of the growing digital and democratic divides engendered by the gulf in technological expertise. Parliamentarians therefore used a combination of ICT and more traditional engagement tools. The new ICT-based participation in the democratic process did not, however, intrinsically contribute to democracy insofar as ICT could be used to enhance government controls. Social media were nonetheless perhaps changing the view of democracy and its functioning, particularly in countries where access to more traditional platforms of communication and democratic participation was limited. Although the IPU was already involved in various ITC-related activities, a number of social media issues intersected with its long-standing priorities, including democratic governance, political participation and youth engagement. Her delegation’s proposed topic therefore merited consideration in the light of the opportunities and challenges created by social media.

Following a short debate on this proposal, its title was amended to read: “The use of the media, including the social media, to enhance citizen engagement and democracy.” Thereafter, **Ms. Charlton** was named by the Committee as a co-rapporteur for this topic.

5. Participation by Canadian Delegates in Related Meetings and Activities

Concurrent with Standing Committee activities associated with the 126th 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 263rd Session of the IPU Executive Committee

The IPU’s Executive Committee held its Meetings in Kampala on 29 and 30 March and 4 April. **Senator Oliver**, who was elected to the Executive for a four year term in October 2010, participated in these meetings. The proceedings of the Executive Committee were devoted to discussing and making recommendations on agenda items to be addressed and ratified by the IPU’s Governing Council. A summary of its decisions may be found online.⁵

⁵ See: <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/126/126.pdf>.

b. The 190th 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 190th Session of the IPU Governing Council were held on 1 and 5 April. All Canadian delegates attended at least one session of the Governing Council. A detailed report on the work and decisions of the Governing Council is available online.⁶

During the Council's consideration of future Assemblies Senator Oliver presented a video message from the Speakers of the Senate of Canada and the House of Commons, during which IPU members were invited to attend the 127th Assembly to be held in Quebec City from 21-26 October 2012. For his part Senator Oliver said:

As President of the Canadian Group of the IPU, and on behalf of all the members our Group, I would like to extend an invitation to the IPU's 127th Assembly in Québec City. The Parliament of Canada feels tremendously honoured to have been selected to host this major event in October 2012. We are particularly proud since 2012 marks Canada's 100th anniversary since its formal affiliation with the IPU. The Canadian Group and the IPU have been working closely to plan and prepare for this event. We are building a memorable program that excels not only in its content, but in its innovative form and delivery. This will be an exceptional Assembly that will address the contemporary challenges and opportunities facing parliamentary democracies. To best support our programming we are inviting high profile speakers to ensure engaging and informative discourse. This five day assembly will include sessions where the values of the IPU will be fused with the Canadian experience of - and perspective on - parliamentary democracy. The overall theme will focus on the challenges of citizenship, identity, and linguistic and cultural diversity. Our dynamic program will be enhanced by the cutting-edge technology of the Québec City Convention Centre - a state of the art facility known for its world class reputation and expertise in hosting green events. Beyond the Convention Centre, the cobblestone streets of Québec City will welcome you to the cradle of French-speaking North America. It is a city central to Canadian history, filled with francophone character, and home to exceptional international and French-Canadian cuisine. We sincerely hope to see all of you in Quebec City this October. Thank you very much.

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),

⁶ See: <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/126/126.pdf>.

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

A meeting of the Asia-Pacific Group (APG) was held on 30 March. Agenda items considered included:

- Briefing by the Group's representatives on the work of the Executive Committee
- Report from the ASEAN+3 Group
- Emergency Item
- Vacancies to be filled
- Nominations to drafting committees
- Subject items for the 128th Assembly
- Future meetings of the APG and its Working Group

Meetings of the Twelve Plus Group were held on 30 and 31 March and 3, 4, 5 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
- Meetings of the Women Parliamentarians and the Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians
- Emergency item
- Reports and draft resolutions of Standing Committees
- Appointments to drafting committees
- Positions to be filled
- Panel discussions
- Matters relating to the Twelve Plus Group
- Schedule of Group meetings for the 127th Assembly (Quebec City, October 2012)

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

During meetings of the Asia Pacific and the Twelve Plus Group, **Senator Oliver** reported on the work of the IPU's Executive Committee and invited delegates to the 127th Assembly.

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 Salma Ataullahjan, Senator
President, Canadian Group of the IPU

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
ACTIVITY	126th Assembly of the IPU and Related Meetings
DESTINATION	Kampala, Uganda
DATES	March 31 to April 5, 2012
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Donald H. Oliver, Q.C. Hon. Salma Atallahjan Hon. Dennis Dawson Hon. Mobina S. B. Jaffer
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Mr. Scott Armstrong Mr. James Bezan Ms. Chris Charlton Ms. Jean Crowder
STAFF	Mr. Serge Pelletier, Secretary to the Delegation Mr. Joseph Jackson, Advisor Ms. Allison Goody, Analyst
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 80,764.67
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 25,287.84
HOSPITALITY	\$ 317.16
PER DIEMS	\$ 5,002.34
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 504.12
MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES	\$ 409.12
TOTAL	\$ 112,285.25