

Canadian Group
Inter-Parliamentary Union



Groupe canadien
Union interparlementaire

**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
respecting its participation at the meeting of the
Steering Committee of the Twelve Plus Group
Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
Paris, France
March 5, 2012**

Report

1. Introduction

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 (46 members), the Arab Group (19 members), the Asia-Pacific Group (30 members), the Eurasia Group (7 members), the Latin American Group (22 members) and the Twelve Plus Group (46 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 Twelve Plus Group and the Asia Pacific Group. Because Canada belongs to more than one geopolitical group, it submits candidatures for vacant positions within the Union through the Twelve Plus Group.

2. Background on the Twelve Plus Group

The Twelve Plus Group was formed in 1974 (as the Nine Plus Group) by IPU members from the European Community. Its purpose is to coordinate the action and policy of its member Groups and, where possible, to arrive at common positions on IPU matters. The word “Plus” was intended to indicate the openness of the Group to new members of the EC as well as other like-minded nations, such as Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand. Today, the Group has 45 members, including Central and Eastern European countries.¹

The Twelve Plus Group holds meetings on a regular basis during the IPU’s spring and fall Assemblies. These meetings provide a venue for the Group’s members to discuss the functioning of the Assembly and related meetings. Members also use these meetings to discuss administrative and substantive matters of consequence to the future activities of the Union.

The Chair of the Twelve Plus Group is elected for a term of office of two years. The Chair is advised by a Steering Committee of representatives from approximately seven to nine member countries and normally meets in the weeks prior to an IPU Assembly. The Steering Committee appoints a Vice-Chair among its members by consensus.

According to the *Guidelines of the Twelve Plus Group*, the Steering Committee shall include: the two most recent predecessors of the current Twelve Plus Chairperson (as long as they are members of their national IPU delegation); members of the Twelve Plus Group serving on the Executive Committee; further members, invited by the Chairperson on account of their particular abilities or merits, who could benefit the activities of the Twelve Plus Group as a whole.

¹ See www.ipu.org/strct-e/geopol.htm for a breakdown of geopolitical group membership in the IPU.

3. The Meeting of the Twelve Plus Steering Committee

Eight parliamentarians participated in the meeting of the Twelve Plus Steering Committee in Paris, France on 5 March 2012. The countries represented were: Austria, Belgium, Canada, Italy, France, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

The Canadian parliamentarian in attendance was **Senator Donald H. Oliver, Q.C.**, from the Senate of Canada.

The agenda for the meeting addressed issues and questions for consideration by the Twelve Plus Group at the 126th IPU Assembly (Kampala, 31 March – 5 April 2012). The purpose of the meeting was to debate and make recommendations concerning these matters. The attached appendix summarizes the decisions taken by the Committee on the occasion of its meeting in Paris.

Respectfully submitted,

The Honourable Salma Ataullahjan, Senator
President, Canadian Group of the IPU

Appendix 1

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE TWELVE PLUS GROUP STEERING COMMITTEE SÉNAT, PARIS, MONDAY 5TH MARCH 2012

Attendants:

Mr Robert del Picchia (France), *Chair*, Ms. Heidrun Silhavy (Austria), Mr François-Xavier de Donnea, (Belgium), Mr Donald Oliver (Canada), Ms. Barbara Contini (Italy), Mr Marek Ziołkowski (Poland), Mr Robert Walter (United Kingdom), Mr Krister Örnfjäder (Sweden), Mr Pierre-François Veillon (Switzerland).

Excused: Mr Norbert Lammert (Germany), Mr Josef Winkler (Germany), Mr Patrice Martin-Lalande (France).

The meeting started at nine o'clock, chaired by President of the Twelve Plus Steering Committee Mr Robert del Picchia (France).

1. Opening of the meeting

Mr Robert del Picchia (France), Chair, welcomed all present, especially new members of the Steering Committee: Ms. Barbara Contini (Italy) and Mr Pierre-François Veillon (Switzerland).

2. Adoption of the Agenda

The Chair noted that the draft Agenda did not call for any comment.

The Agenda was approved.

3. Approval of the Minutes of the meeting of the Twelve Plus Group Steering Committee, held in Paris on Monday 12th September 2011

The Minutes were approved without comment.

4. Matters related to previous meetings

This item did not call for any comments.

MATTERS RELATED TO THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

5. Matters related to the Executive Committee

The Chair reminded colleagues that the Twelve Plus Group had entrusted its working group on the IPU Strategy with the task of finding possible saving sources in the organisation's budget.

Mr François-Xavier de Donnea (Belgium), Rapporteur of the working group, mentioned the discussion note sent on 30th January, and how three members of the group – Ms. Prammer, Mr Lammert and Mr Örnfjäder – as well as Mr Lorentzen, had reacted to it. The question was about where to apply budget cuts. The objectives, and sub-objectives of the IPU Strategy for 2012-2017 had been ranked by the Twelve Plus according to their priority – high, medium or low. Only two out of nine – the fifth and sixth ones, regarding international development goals and conflict prevention – had been deemed secondary. But to simply discard some objectives, or even some sub-objectives, would be unrealistic. On the other hand, there were definitely too many activities planned to fulfil them. Having fewer would allow for more relevant savings. Mr Lammert agreed, but MM. Örnfjäder and Lorentzen did not want to decide out of hand the idea that whole categories should be discarded. They cited the fifth and sixth objectives, for which there were very low funds anyway. However, the 2012 budget did not allow for a decision on where cuts could be implemented. To that end, a more detailed analysis of various planned activities and their allocated resources was needed. The Subcommittee on Finance seemed the most appropriate body for the task. Mr Örnfjäder had actually suggested adding an extra column in the table of strategic directions of the IPU. The idea was to show, for each performed activity, how much was allocated to it – either within the primary budget or voluntary contributions – and the share of wage costs. From this, it would be up to the members of the working group to decide where cuts should be applied – although diverging opinions would be likely. Some positions were not related to any objective or sub-objective in particular, such as the organising of Assemblies or the operating of the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians. Even though those activities were central to the organisation, their costs had to be thoroughly examined. Importantly, the savings had to apply to the primary budget, since members' contributions depended on it. To some extent, one could rely on voluntary contributions to restrict cuts, but it was highly unlikely that the economic situation would allow an increase that could compensate the 409,000 Swiss Francs deficit. The last item on the discussion note regarded staff costs. The United Nations' pay scales had been applied to the IPU staff, and this should not be questioned. However, other payroll factors could be acted upon, and Mr Lorentzen said he wished the staff were reduced by 10%. Cuts in activities, for instance, should imply staff reductions. Similarly, money could be saved by checking whether each position's wages matched the corresponding responsibilities. But information was missing about this too. The Subcommittee on Finance, with help from the General Secretariat, should issue a report prior to a possible reform which would not save much money anyway. Members of the working group had suggested other means of saving. Mr Örnfjäder and Ms. Prammer had talked about possibly organising IPU Assemblies in Geneva as of 2014, or even to suppress one of the two yearly Assemblies as a last resort. Another solution would be for the hosting country to cover the Secretariat's travel expenses. However in that case, there might be fewer countries willing to host an Assembly. It was

also suggested that accompanying personnel might be excluded, but this would not affect the IPU's budget, as it did not cover such costs. Finally, cuts could be made within travel expenses – although this might affect the organisation's influence – or publication costs, for instance by favouring online publications to paper documents.

The next step would be to get the list of budgeted activities for 2012 which the Secretariat planned to maintain in 2013, as well as their detailed costs, so that the members of the working group could rank them according to their priority. The ranking could be debated in Kampala, first within the working group, and then within the Twelve Plus Group.

The Chair agreed with the idea of adding a fourth column to the table of strategic directions in order to state which activities were effectively carried out and at what cost. He wondered, however, what percentage such activities had within the whole IPU budget compared to, say, travel expenses or staff costs. The primary budget had decreased by about 8%, but due to fluctuations of the Swiss Franc, its setting currency, members' contributions had barely been reduced. Now, the member States' efforts would be in vain if they could no longer afford for their Parliamentarians to attend IPU meetings: thus, the French delegation in Kampala would consist of just five Parliamentarians, instead of eight. This was why the Executive Committee would have to be as firm as it had been the previous year when it set up the 2013 budget, and demand further reductions of allocated funds.

Mr François-Xavier de Donnea (Belgium) noted that on top of direct costs, each activity had indirect costs due to the amount of time the IPU Secretariat dedicated to it. Suppressing a number of activities should therefore have an impact on the number of civil servants, travel expenses or communication costs. Only proper detailed accounting for each activity – taking general costs into account – would avoid linear cuts, which were blind in essence.

Mr Krister Örnfjäder (Sweden) reminded that he represented the Twelve Plus Group on the Subcommittee on Finance. The Subcommittee was due to meet again on 13th March and, with help from outside consultants, would look for solutions to the Inter-parliamentary Union's funding problems, especially by finding a way to save at least 409,000 Swiss Francs. He noted that the IPU's income could be increased thanks to the voluntary contributions, whether they came from member States or from the private sector. The Secretariat would set up a specific toolbox to encourage such contributions, but members of the delegations could also approach their Governments and countries' businesses. Furthermore, budget cuts needed to be consistent with the IPU Strategy for 2012 to 2017. The budget situation called for cuts to objectives 5 and 6, as suggested by the Twelve Plus, especially as there were international organisations better suited to act within those fields. The Inter-parliamentary Union should focus on activities it could best deal with and on sectors where it could have the highest impact. However, simply linear cuts could annihilate some activities. Priorities should therefore be set, to which end more detailed information was needed, especially regarding the direct and indirect costs of each activity and the exact content of objectives, sub-objectives and actions. Before decisions were made, what happened on the field and with planned implementations should be known, so that such decisions effectively reduced the IPU

budget. Other possible saving sources were the organising of Assemblies and staff costs. All options should be considered: one single yearly Assembly, two Assemblies in Geneva, shorter Assemblies, a tighter Agenda, or excluding accompanying staff. Mr Örnfjäder had tried to match the items of the IPU Strategy in Mr de Donnea's table and the IPU's general 2012 budget data. Such cross-matching clearly showed fields where action could be taken and those where it could not. Unfortunately, the Twelve Plus was the only Geopolitical Group to use such a document. All others referred to the budget set by the Secretariat.

Mr Robert Walter (United Kingdom) thanked Mr de Donnea and Mr Örnfjäder for their work.

He noted that the Twelve Plus was the only Geopolitical Group to have been truly engaged in looking for saving means, on top of not being fully backed up by the Secretariat. The Secretariat would rather wait till the end of the storm, as shown by its budgetary estimates over the next years. Those showed increased costs in 2013 and 2014, which national Parliaments were not willing to accept. Therefore, the Secretariat had to be reminded that funds should be frozen. Regarding wage costs, he wondered whether the IPU could use the pay scales of coordinated organisations such as NATO, the OECD or the Council of Europe. He added that communication between Parliamentarians from all countries was one of the very reasons for the Inter-parliamentary Union. It would therefore fail in its mission, should it restrict meeting opportunities such as the annual Assemblies. Furthermore, he thought the IPU should better target its activities, even if that meant suppressing secondary activity fields. He noted that staff costs made up for about 66% of the organisation's expenses, and suggested the possibility of using outer consultants to examine the management of the Inter-parliamentary Union. Although he knew from experience that such consultants usually only suggested decisions already known to be necessary, their work could perhaps strengthen the legitimacy of those decisions, especially for the staff, and allow the IPU to lighten its structure whilst being able to fulfil its objectives.

Mr Donald Oliver (Canada) also acknowledged Mr de Donnea's analysis. He stressed that three major items would be considered by the IPU's Executive Committee and would certainly lead to decisions in Kampala: the structure of the second annual Assembly, including its contents, expenses, operating; the role of the Standing Committees; and the operating of the IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs. The Inter-parliamentary Union had a permanent observer's status at the United Nations Organisation, which set it apart from all other parliamentary organisations. All agreed on the need to strengthen the relationship between the two bodies, even though the IPU's Special Committee hardly operated on a democratic basis, since its members were directly appointed by the Union's President, who did not consult the Geopolitical Groups and acted in all but transparency. However, considering the relationship between the two international organisations, it could be suggested that the UN itself fund some IPU activities. Mr Oliver reminded the Committee members that Mr de Donnea thought that objectives 7 and 8, namely the relationship with members and communication, should be primary. In terms of communication, precisely, what actions were being taken? Had the website been improved? Finally, as suggested by Mr de Donnea, the Executive

Committee should consider priorities on a five-year, or at least three-year, basis, rather than do it once a year as it currently did.

Mr Krister Örnfjäder (Sweden) thought that reviewing the frequency or structure of the annual Assemblies should not be rejected out of hand. A Geneva Assembly cost 400,000 Swiss Francs on average, half the cost of an Assembly hosted elsewhere! Naturally, such meetings were justified, but they could also be a saving source. In any case, the Twelve Plus should offer concrete proposals to the Subcommittee on Finance in order to save money.

Mr Marek Ziolkowski (Poland) noted that the era of abundance had ended and that the Welfare State was going through a crisis. In this very restricted financial context, a unique budgetary document, as suggested, would help knowingly consider all possible saving sources.

However, the possible reduction of yearly Assemblies would affect the very reason of being of the IPU, namely to allow Parliamentarians to talk to each other. As such, the structure of delegations was sometimes problematic in countries where there were more political parties in Parliament – as in Poland. Finally, the alignment of civil servants' pay scales on those of the UN should not be questioned. However, some activities, and even some objectives, should be funded thanks to voluntary contributions.

Mr Pierre-François Veillon (Switzerland) thought that five-year budgetary forecasts would be much more effective than the current system. The Twelve Plus had the means to put pressure on the IPU budget, and the IPU should maintain a certain level of activity, though it primarily remained a meeting place - hence why clear priorities were needed. As for voluntary contributions, they would not be part of the regular budget, since they would apply to targeted and one-off actions.

Mr Krister Örnfjäder (Sweden) agreed with the idea of a five-year budget. But would the Twelve Plus be able to determine an appropriate amount, as this alone would guarantee any trust in this proposal?

Mr Donald Oliver (Canada) noted that he had been under heavy pressure to reduce the annual 400,000 Canadian dollars' contribution paid by his Parliament to the IPU. The Assembly in Quebec City in October 2012 would cost 5 million Canadian dollars! Furthermore, Canada, as other countries, agreed to high voluntary contributions through the CIDA, which allowed the funding of many projects. The President of the IPU had recently been to the Middle-East to try and raise funds following the success of the Global Organization of Parliamentarians against Corruption, or GOPAC, which had recently received funds of 6 million dollars over three years from the Middle-East. Action should be taken accordingly.

Mr Pierre-François Veillon (Switzerland) stressed that a difference should be made between voluntary contributions and the regular budget, which should increase after 2013.

The Chair confirmed that voluntary contributions, at 1.2 million Swiss Francs in 2012, were not part of the regular budget, since they applied to targeted and one-off actions.

Mr François-Xavier de Donnea (Belgium) welcomed the consensus to get further information on activities planned in the budget, as well as their carrying out. He reminded colleagues of the importance of objective 4 – developing the parliamentary aspect of the UN work. This would avoid the *ad hoc* establishment of a parliamentary assembly within the UN, which would have affected the IPU's credibility. The IPU could further adjust its activities to those of the UN and give it this parliamentary dimension. In return, perhaps the UN could further contribute to the funding of the IPU. Regarding communication-related actions, especially redesigning the website, it was still too early in the year to notice results. Furthermore, establishing priorities over a three-year, or preferably a five-year period, was indeed desirable. The IPU's ambitions would still have to be restricted, but the nine objectives could be maintained, even if that meant suppressing some activities. Indeed, suppressing objectives 5 and 6 might very well save funds, but would prevent the IPU, for instance, from contributing to the possible recovery of a government after a severe crisis. In any case, debating objectives every year was not relevant. They would benefit from being established over a longer period. Voluntary contributions should obviously be strongly encouraged, even though they applied to targeted activities, which would not reduce the overall expenses. Having both yearly Assemblies in Geneva should not be excluded. If it was, a higher financial implication from the hosting country could be considered. Finally, adopting different pay scales could be considered, but this might cause many problems within the Secretariat, and the resulting savings would after all be small.

Mr Krister Örnfjäder (Sweden) thought that the Twelve Plus should absolutely refrain from suggesting a review of the staff's pay scales to the Secretariat, unless another valid and effective solution had been found beforehand.

The Chair reminded the Committee that contributions to the IPU were higher than others paid per number of Parliaments to other inter-parliamentary assemblies. As a comparison, the UNESCO currently experienced a large deficit, made worse by the fact that the United States and Israel had stopped paying their contributions. Expenses had therefore had to be restricted in several fields: travel expenses had been cut, temporary staff reduced, many activities suppressed or postponed, and the whole working capital used. Those were some of the radical measures the UNESCO had implemented in the face of an extremely dire budgetary context. Regarding the IPU's budget, Mr de Donnea's working group would meet again in Kampala. Parliaments that had not already done so could send him their general comments before mid-March, as Mr Örnfjäder would draw a completed budget table following the next meeting of the Subcommittee on Finance on Tuesday 13th March. The Twelve Plus Group, consisting of the main contributors to the IPU budget, could legitimately request a reduction. Indeed, its member countries, often seen as rich, could no longer support such level of expenses, as some of them were in huge debt.

6. Preparation of the 126th Assembly in Kampala, Uganda.

The Chair stated that the general discussion at the 126th Assembly would be the following: "Bridging the gap between Parliaments and citizens." Two meetings would also be held to debate children's malnutrition and rights regarding the fight against

AIDS. The Twelve Plus Group had a rapporteur in each of the three Standing Committees. To this day, no emergency item had been suggested, but the situation in Syria deserved a strong reaction from the IPU. The Twelve Plus could suggest an emergency item about this, provided that some countries from the Arab Group agreed.

Mr Robert Walter (United Kingdom) had actually thought about suggesting an emergency item on Syria, since the situation there required a strong reaction from the IPU. The proposal would benefit from being put forward by the Twelve Plus, but support from delegations of the Arab Group was paramount.

Mr Marek Ziołkowski (Poland) suggested that the idea be put forward to President Radi.

The Chair, too, thought that a draft resolution could be considered jointly with members of the Arab Group. He then asked members about possible subject proposals for the 128th Assembly in Quito.

Mr Pierre-François Veillon (Switzerland) suggested a theme on strengthening the role of Parliament in States emerging from conflict or in transition. Sharing experiences about this would be very beneficial following work done for the IPU by the Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, a Geneva-based NGO. This would complement the subject of the Arab Spring, currently covered by the First Standing Committee.

Mr Krister Örnfjäder (Sweden) said that the Norwegian delegation wished to suggest to the second Standing Committee the subject of the role of Parliaments in fighting climate change and in adopting new technologies to reduce green-house gases emissions due to fossil fuels.

Mr Donald Oliver (Canada) suggested that the third Standing Committee study the use of social media and the Internet in strengthening the citizens' democracy. Indeed, the growing use of new technologies required Parliamentarians to go beyond traditional practice and come up with a more interactive relationship with the voters.

The Chair added that these social media depended on highly profitable businesses that could possibly fund some IPU activities! Regarding this, the Assembly in Quito would incur high costs which would have to be thoroughly examined.

Mr François-Xavier de Donnea (Belgium) suggested that the second Standing Committee cover the subject of alternative funding development aid.

Regarding the cost of Assemblies, **Mr Krister Örnfjäder (Sweden)** noted that any decision on their structure or frequency would have to be made at least two years prior to its implement.

7. Vacancies

The Chair said that Mr Pierre-François Veillon, as agreed, would complete Ms. Doris Stump's term, his predecessor on the Executive Committee. The term would end in October 2013. There were two vacancies on the Committee on the Human Rights of

Parliamentarians. As agreed in Bern, Mr Ulf Nilsson (Sweden) would, at the 127th Assembly in Quebec City, take the substitute's position becoming available during the 126th Assembly in Kampala. But, should he so wish, Mr Nilsson could obviously apply to one of the vacant permanent positions. A substitute's position was vacant on the Committee on Middle East Questions. Both permanent and substitute position had to be filled on the Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians. French Senator Ms. Michele André had announced she had applied for this position.

Mr Donald Oliver (Canada) and **Mr Pierre-François Veillon (Switzerland)** respectively announced that Canadian Senator Salma Attaullahjan and a Swiss Parliamentarian had applied.

The Chair said that a permanent position was also vacant on the Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law. Finally, there were three vacancies for the Twelve Plus Group on the Advisory Group of the IPU Committee on United Affairs. The Chair had received applications from Messrs. Thomas Silberhorn (Germany) and Dennis Dawson (Canada). **Mr François-Xavier de Donnea (Belgium)** announced he too would apply.

The Chair reminded colleagues that application forms should be returned to the Secretariat of the Twelve Plus Group by 27th March at the latest.

8. Inter-parliamentary Union membership

The Chair informed colleagues that the Executive Committee would have to decide about the Haitian Parliament's request for renewed subscription and on that of the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (EMCCA) for Associate Membership. The Chair also said that generally speaking, a growing number of organisations were being given observer status at the IPU. So far, about fifty representatives of Associate Members or of observer organisation attended the Union's Assemblies. And although Associate Members did pay some contributions – albeit lower than that of full Members –, observers did not pay anything. So far, extra costs incurred by such numerous presence had been covered by the Union. The budgetary context being what it was, it might be good to suggest to the Executive Committee that observer status should from now on imply some contribution, even a very low one. *(Approval)*

9. Special IPU meetings since the 125th Assembly in Bern.

The Chair stated that the annual parliamentary hearing jointly organised by the IPU and the UN had been held at the United Nations in New York on 28th and 29th November. The parliamentary assembly for the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness had been held in Busan (Korean Republic) from 29th November to 1st December 2011. The parliamentary assembly for the UN Climate Conference had been held in Durban (South Africa) on 5th December 2011. It should be made sure that all special meetings had had constructive results.

10. Other matters related to the IPU

The Chair asked Executive Committee member Mr Donald Oliver to present the main items on the Agenda of the 263rd session of the Executive Committee in Kampala, as well as the schedule of the 127th Assembly, to be held in Quebec City in October 2012.

Mr Donald Oliver (Canada) stated that the Executive Committee would have to implement the 2012-2017 IPU Strategy in Kampala. To this end, it would have to carry on exchanges about whether the new schedule, adopted on a trial basis for the second yearly Assembly, would meet the members' expectations. The first series of consultations on the subject allowed Geopolitical Groups to express various suggestions and recommendations on the structure and operating of the Standing Committees, the selection of members of their bureaus, the decisions on items on the Agenda and the appointment of rapporteurs. All these items would have to be decided upon.

This morning, during the discussion following Mr de Donnea's report on the Union's budget, it was suggested that one of the two yearly Assemblies be suppressed. But wasn't it the IPU's goal to strengthen inter-parliamentary exchange? As stated by the Chair, the Executive Committee would have to decide on the Haitian Parliament's request for renewed subscription and on that of the EMCCA for membership. It would also have to consider the situation of some member Parliaments. Finally, the Executive Committee would have to discuss the state of the partnership between the IPU and the UN system, which some would like to strengthen. The Advisory Group of the IPU Committee on United Affairs, whose working modalities had been approved by the Governing Council during its 182nd session (Cape Town, April 2008), had carried out important work to this end.

Mr Donald Oliver also reminded that during its 185th session, the Governing Council had granted the Canadian Parliament's wish to host the 127th IPU Assembly in Quebec City. For the following session, he decided that this Assembly would use the model of the second yearly Assembly, with two extra days of meetings, and that the structure of delegations would be consistent with statutory provisions applicable to the second yearly Assembly. The Assembly in Quebec City, to be held in one of the most multiethnic and multicultural countries in the world, would have as its main theme, *"Citizenship, identity and linguistic and cultural diversity: The challenges of an interdependent world."* In accordance with agreements with the hosting Parliament, the latter would cover the costs of the two extra days of meetings at the 127th Assembly.

The Chair thanked Mr Donald Oliver for those specifications.

Mr Donald Oliver (Canada) deemed it useful that the Steering Committee of the Twelve Plus Group give their opinion on the situation of some member Parliaments before the Executive Committee discussed them.

The Chair acknowledged the problem that the meeting of the Executive Committee would be held before that of the Steering Committee of the Twelve Plus Group. But the sensitivity of the two representatives of the Group on the Executive Committee could be

relied upon. Furthermore, the item would be debated during the plenary of the Twelve Plus Group.

Mr Krister Örnfjäder (Sweden) informed colleagues that he intended for the Inter-parliamentary Union to apply for the 2013 Peace Nobel Prize, in accordance with the Nobel Committee's criteria. In 1901 and 1903 respectively, Inter-parliamentary Union co-founders Frederic Passy and William Randal Cremer had both received the Peace Nobel Prize, and six other public figures had received the high distinction for their work within the organisation. However, the Union itself had never been commended for its long-term action towards peace. Receiving the Prize would strengthen its credibility. However, the IPU would have other contenders. Its application would have to be reinforced by being put forward and backed by several Parliaments and Governments from all continents and Geopolitical Groups.

The Chair thought that, should the Inter-parliamentary Union receive the Peace Nobel Prize, it would grow more notorious. Member Parliaments and Governments would welcome the Prize, and this would help justify financial efforts granted to the IPU. Finally, the significant sponsorship allocated by the Nobel Committee would benefit the restricted budget. For all these reasons, Mr Krister Örnfjäder's call for action should be heard.

11. Schedule of activities and meetings at the 126th Assembly of the IPU in Kampala.

The Chair stated that the first meeting of the Twelve Plus would be held on Friday 30th March at 2.15pm, in the Gardenia room of the Imperial Royal Hotel. The following meetings would be held on Monday 2nd April, Tuesday 3rd April and Wednesday 4th April from 8 to 9am – the latter still to be confirmed –, and on Thursday 5th April from 9 to 10am. The Group's formal dinner was planned on 30th March at 7.45pm, in the Rwenzori room of the Kampala Sheraton Hotel.

12. Twelve Plus Group Membership – requests for Membership from the Parliaments of Ukraine and Azerbaijan.

The Chair said that the Steering Committee had to adopt a recommendation on membership requests from the Ukrainian and Azerbaijani Parliaments before the Group made its decision at the plenary in Kampala, via two separate votes with a two-third majority. Those countries were the only ones not to belong to any Geopolitical Group within the IPU. As stated in the Twelve Plus Group's rules, its members had to belong to the Council of Europe and abide by the democratic principles of the European Convention on Human Rights, which included having a democratic multi-party system. The former condition was officially followed by Ukraine and Azerbaijan, however the latter was problematic. Indeed, the Committee for commitments and obligations of member States of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) had been worried over criminal prosecutions in Ukraine against several former members of the Government, such as Ms. Ioulia Timochenko, its weak judiciary, the lack of integration of the main PACE recommendations and of the Venice Commission in the

new electoral code – applicable to the legislative elections on 29th October –, and the slowing down of the reform of authorities. The monitoring committee had also asked that the separation of powers, the role of the Parliament and the freedom of the press be effectively guaranteed in Azerbaijan, while the OSCE and the European Parliament had noted that the implementation of Human Rights was somehow difficult in that country. Logically, Azerbaijan should join the Eurasian Group, but due to neighbourhood conflicts and historically difficult relationships with some members, this was a problematic option. The Steering Committee should therefore wonder whether those countries should better be left outside the Twelve Plus or, on the contrary, be welcomed, so this could hopefully have an influence on them. The Chair suggested that the representatives of their delegations be heard in Kampala before any decision was made.

Mr Marek Ziołkowski (Poland) agreed with this suggestion. He also said that, even though the Ukrainian democracy was not completely up to Twelve Plus standards, it would make sense geographically if Ukraine joined the Group, as the country was a neighbour of Poland. This would also help this country to move forward, especially thanks to representatives of the Opposition within its delegation. The establishment of a parliamentary Assembly of Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine had been a positive experience, which should prompt the Twelve Plus to integrate Ukraine. On the other hand, Azerbaijan would probably be better suited to the Eurasian Group.

Mr Krister Örnfjäder (Sweden) deemed it easier to deal with such matters between peers, but said he was in favour of the Chair's proposal.

Mr Robert Walter (United Kingdom) reminded that Ukraine and Azerbaijan were active members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and that their representatives had been elected via a process that had been deemed free and fair by international observers. These young democracies might well be under scrutiny, but other members of the Twelve Plus were too, such as Bosnia Herzegovina and Serbia. Joining the Group could help them.

Ms. Barbara Contini (Italy) thought that the difficult relationship between Azerbaijan and the Eurasian was not enough to justify this country to join the Twelve Plus, but she agreed with Mr Robert Walter. Despite the difficulties acknowledged in Ukraine, this country could only be helped by joining the Group: for instance, the Opposition would have extra means of expressing itself.

The Chair stressed that Mr Norbert Lammert (Germany) had stated that he was not particularly favourable to Ukraine and Azerbaijan joining the Group. Given such discussions, the Steering Committee could adopt a recommendation that was rather favourable, but with reservations.

Mr Donald Oliver (Canada) said he was favourable to this, and to the hearings suggested by The Chair.

This was decided.

13. Matters related to the Twelve Plus Group

The Chair said he had received a membership request from the President of the Assembly of Montenegro, even though this country had been a Twelve Plus member since the 2010 Assembly in Bangkok. As Montenegro had not acted at all within the Group, The Chair suggested its contributions' arrears – 596 euros per year – be cleared and to invite the country to join the Group's work, whilst faithfully fulfilling the ensuing financial obligations.

14. Financial matters

The Chair stated that the French Group, now the account holder, had received £51,671.40, or €59,790.88, on 31st December 2010. The sum had been deposited on current and deposit accounts. As at 31st December 2011, 46 out of 47 countries had paid their yearly contributions, amounting to a total of €42,910.34, namely 98.5% of the expected amount – €43,558. As at 5th March, the Twelve Plus's account was in credit of €71,000. Taking into account bank charges and money transfer fees – an amount of €237.39 –, expenses amounted to a total of €48,293.17 for 2011. As this amount was 8% higher than that of income, the Group had started a lifestyle reform, which applied both to general working costs and the organisation of Steering Committees. Furthermore, the 5% reduction of contributions called for renewed vigilance. As at 29th February 2012, 18 out of 47 countries had paid their contributions, amounting to €16,898, namely around 41% of the expected amount, now €41,394. This situation was common at this time of year; the Twelve Plus was not in difficulty.

15. Date of the next meeting

The next meeting was set to be held on Monday 17th September 2012.

16. Any other business

Mr Krister Örnfjäder (Sweden) thought that they should not wait until September to discuss budget-related items to be presented by the Secretariat following work in Kampala. Discussions could be held via Skype or any other equivalent medium.

The Chair noted that the Secretariat should avoid making contact again at the last minute, but he suggested waiting until 17th September to discuss the items: by then, there would still be over a month to go before Quebec City.

Mr Krister Örnfjäder (Sweden) reminded colleagues that the Subcommittee on Finance had been created to avoid the situation mentioned by the Chair. He suggested that they should not wait until September to send out signals, especially as the reforms would then be quickly implemented.

Pierre-François Veillon (Switzerland) enquired whether the Executive Committee could start working on the 2013 budget as early as Kampala: it should especially discuss "financial resource mobilisation".

Mr Krister Örnfjäder (Sweden) hoped that the meetings of the Subcommittee on Finance and the Executive Committee would lead to fruitful discussions in Kampala. The Secretariat's reflections should be assisted, but members should also take an active role by making clear proposals within a reasonable timeframe, so that they could be taken into account.

The meeting ended at 12.25 pm.

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
ACTIVITY	Meeting of the Steering Committee of the Twelve Plus Group
DESTINATION	Paris, France
DATES	March 5, 2012
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Donald H. Oliver, Q.C.
HOUSE OF COMMONS	
STAFF	Mr. Joseph Jackson, Advisor
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 10,263.31
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 1,818.21
HOSPITALITY	
PER DIEMS	\$ 567.06
OFFICIAL GIFTS	
MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES	
TOTAL	\$ 12,648.58