

Canadian Group
Inter-Parliamentary Union



Groupe canadien
Union interparlementaire

**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation to the
Meeting of the Steering Committee of the
Twelve Plus Group**

Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

**London, United Kingdom
1 March 2010**

Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation to the Meeting of the Steering Committee of the Twelve Plus Group, Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

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 (44 members), the Asia-Pacific Group (27 members), the Arab Group (19 members), the Eurasia Group (7 members), the Latin American Group (19 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 <http://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

Nine parliamentarians from eight countries participated in the meeting of the Twelve Plus Steering Committee in London, United Kingdom on 1 March 2010. The countries represented were: Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, France, Latvia, 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 included issues and questions for consideration by the Twelve Plus Group at the 122nd IPU Assembly (Bangkok, 27 March to 1 April 2010). 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 London.

Respectfully submitted,

The Honourable Donald H. Oliver, Q.C., Senator
President, Canadian IPU Group

Appendix

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE House of Commons, London, UK Monday, 1 March 2010

Participation

Mr John Austin (Chair of the 12+ Group), Geert Versnick (Belgium), Senator Donald Oliver (Canada), Daniel Reisiegel (Czech Republic), Robert del Pichhia (France), Mrs Karina Petersone (Latvia), Krister Örnfjäder (Sweden), Mrs Doris Stump (Switzerland), Rt Hon Lord Morris of Aberavon (United Kingdom).

In attendance

Mr Marc De Rouck (Belgium), Mr Joseph Jackson (Canada), Mr Philippe Bourasse (France), Mrs Sandra Paura (Latvia), Ms Lena Eklof (Sweden), Mr Daniel Zehnder (Switzerland), Ms Emma Makey (United Kingdom), Mr Kenneth Courtenay (12+ Secretary), Ms Dominique Rees (12+ Secretariat), Ms Gabriella Liberotti (12+ Secretariat), Ms Gosia McBride (12+ Secretariat)

General

1. Opening Remarks

The Chair opened the meeting at 0930 and welcomed members to the last Steering Committee to be held in London. This was also his last Steering Committee meeting. He extended a special welcome to Krister Örnfjäder, who was attending the Committee for the first time.

The Chair informed members that Juan Moscoso Del Prado from Spain had been invited to join the Committee as a representative from southern Europe, but was unfortunately unable to attend. Apologies had also been received from Rudy Salles (France).

2. Adoption of the Agenda

The agenda was adopted.

3. Approval of the Minutes of the 12+ Steering Committee in London on Friday 25 September 2009

The Minutes were approved without comment.

4. Matters arising from previous meetings

The Chair reported that all the matters arising from previous meetings were covered in the agenda.

IPU Matters

5. Executive Committee Business

Invitation letters and papers for the Third World Conference of Speakers had been sent on 3 February.

The French proposal, agreed by the 12+, for a change to the Rules for the IPU Secretariat had not been considered by the Executive Committee. It would probably be considered in Bangkok.

Robert del Picchia (France), Geert Versnick (Belgium), Mrs Doris Stump (Switzerland) and Krister Örnfjäder (Sweden) reported on the meeting of the enlarged Executive Committee in Namibia on 15 and 16 February, which had included participants from Austria, Australia, Canada and Mexico. The enlarged Executive Committee had discussed reform of the IPU, its relationship with the UN, and how the IPU might be transformed into a treaty-based organisation. A report on these discussions would be circulated on 15 March, containing an initial formulation of a vision and mission statement for the IPU, as well as a catalogue of elements that could be included in a new relationship agreement with the IPU. A zero draft international convention on the IPU, prepared by Professor Goodwin-Gill, was to be circulated to members of the Executive Committee on 1 March.

Members of the Steering Committee discussed the advantages and disadvantages of such reform. Mr del Picchia suggested that a treaty might be used to develop new structures for the IPU on democratic standards, including possible peer review, and human rights. In terms of a new agreement with the UN, members felt that the UN needed to make it clear what it expected of the IPU, including whether this would involve some kind of oversight role. The UN Secretary General had not yet accepted any of the IPU's invitations to attend an Assembly. There was a consensus that the IPU should remain a stand-alone organisation within any formalised relationship with the UN, as this was the only way to guarantee the IPU could continue functioning as at present. This could also be more palatable to national governments. There were some legal difficulties associated with such a treaty, but Professor Goodwin-Gill had said precedents existed.

Some members, including the Chair, were sceptical that an agreement with the UN would bring about benefits, in particular for parliamentarians and national parliaments. Mrs Karina Petersone (Latvia) suggested that it might be better to simply continue scrutinising the UN at national level and questioned what the IPU's role would have been on Iraq if it had formalised its status. She added that before any formal changes in IPU-UN relations are promoted, the UN vision of future cooperation with the IPU should be made available and to that end the IPU ought to reiterate its invitation to the UN Secretary General. Mr Versnick suggested that a key motivation for reform was to defend the IPU against those campaigning for it to be replaced by a consultative assembly linked to the UN.

Senator Donald Oliver (Canada) asked whether geopolitical groups had been evenly represented at the Executive Committee and also about the IPU's relationship with Speakers. He commented that none of the documents appeared to say anything on the

importance of getting the United States back into the IPU. The Chair agreed that it would be very hard for the IPU to claim it was the parliamentary branch of the UN if the US was not a member. In his view the Conference of Speakers' main purpose was to raise the status of the IPU. He argued that the Conference should be focusing on scrutinising progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. It was suggested that one of the benefits of reform might be to encourage the US to rejoin the IPU.

Members agreed that Executive Members should produce a paper for the 12+ Group in Bangkok outlining the advantages and disadvantages of reform of the IPU along the lines proposed at the enlarged Executive in Namibia.

6. Consolidation of IPU Reform

The Chair noted that issues relating to a treaty and the IPU's relationship with the UN had already been covered in the discussion under item 5.

The Chair asked members whether there were any reactions to the 12+ response to the survey on reform of the Second Assembly. He also asked for an update on the Assembly in Quebec. Senator Donald Oliver (Canada) said that there had been an explicit oral agreement between Uganda, Canada and the President of the IPU that the spring and autumn 2012 assemblies would both be full assemblies and that he had confirmed this in a letter following the meeting. Since then the President had written a letter to say that the Quebec Assembly would only last three days. IPU officials had confirmed in confidence that Quebec had the capacity for a five day assembly. Members discussed the merits of a five day assembly versus a three day assembly. Members felt that the present committee cycle should not be changed, but that an additional two days might provide valuable additional time for workshops and panels. **Members agreed** that the 12+ group should be asked for its views in Bangkok.

The 12+ Chair's letter of 19 October on the need for a working group of Vice Presidents in the Executive Committee and a succession plan for the IPU Secretariat had not been discussed at the Executive Committee. It was **agreed that** Executive Committee members should ask firmly for this to be put back on the Executive Committee's agenda for Bangkok. The Chair would also write a further letter to the Secretary General and to the chairs of the geopolitical groups on this issue.

None of the Executive Committee members knew anything about the Executive Committee's agenda item on amendments to the Rules of the Standing Committees. This appeared on the English, but not the French version.²

7. Preparation of the 122nd IPU Assembly in Bangkok

a. Reports and Resolutions of the Standing Committees

No issues were raised on this point.

² The amendments referred to will be proposed to the Executive Committee in Bangkok by the IPU Secretariat and aim to clarify the rules concerning the designation and terms of office of the members of Standing Committee Bureaux (President and Vice-Presidents).

b. Emergency Item

The Chair reported that there was only one proposed Emergency Item on the IPU Website so far:

The solidarity of the international community, and in particular of parliaments and parliamentarians of the world, with the people of Haiti, in the face of the tragedy they are experiencing (Cuba).

The Chair noted that the Chilean earthquake had happened since this item was proposed. Geert Versnick (Belgium) told members that he had also been asked by a colleague on the Committee on Human Rights of Parliamentarians to bring up Myanmar, although it was questionable whether this could be proposed as an Emergency Item. The Chair said that Thailand was experiencing enormous refugee problems as a result and so the situation in Myanmar could be raised in the context of its impact on the IPU host country. It was **agreed** that this issue should be flagged up.

c. Proposed topics and rapporteurs for future Assemblies

The Chair reported that the UK might have the following item to propose:

Recalling the proceedings of the 110th Assembly in Mexico City when on the morning of Tuesday, 20 April 2004, during the General Debate on the political, economic and social situation in the world, the Assembly heard an address by Ms. Jessica Lange, UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador, who highlighted the role of parliamentarians in the protection of children and recalled their duties in the fields of legislative oversight and advocacy to prevent the abuse and exploitation of children. On the same occasion, the IPU and UNICEF launched a joint Handbook for Parliamentarians on Child Protection and invited Members to make use of the Handbook and ensure follow-up with concrete action at the national level.

Now, six, years later, the UK delegation believes it would be timely and constructive to develop this work further with a resolution which builds on the above and invites parliamentarians to discuss what sort of follow-up, which they were invited to pursue following the 2004 Assembly, has been possible. We believe it would be very valuable to talk especially about children who for reasons of war, domestic abuse, poverty and associated migration, or other reasons, become separated from their parents or carers and are therefore especially vulnerable.

Geert Versnick (Belgium) said that Belgium might be proposing an item on protecting the parliamentary mandate from undue interference and on the regulation of party campaign financing and election spending. Robert del Pichhia (France) said that France was considering proposing an item on demographics. The Chair said that it would be helpful if the 12+ Group could be formally notified.

d. IPU Committee on UN Affairs

This Committee would not be meeting in Bangkok.

8. Vacancies

Coordination Committee of Women Parliamentarians

The Chair reported that there was a substitute and a titular vacancy for the four year term.

Human Rights of Parliamentarians

The Chair announced that there was a substitute and a titular vacancy. He reminded members that the 12+ already had two substitute and two titular members on this Committee and that with President Pimentel's term ending there would be no representation from Asia. Geert Versnick (Belgium) told delegates that he had heard there was a risk that a country with a poor human rights record might propose a candidate.

Standing Committee Bureaux

The Chair reported that all current 12+ members of the Bureaux were up for re-election except one substitute vice-president on the First Standing Committee.

9. Budget

Daniel Reisiegel (Czech Republic) told members that he had only just received the external auditor's report. The IPU administration had made improvements following comments made by the internal and external auditors. Before 2006 voluntary contributions had not actually been included in the budget, but they were now included. However, this item had been overvalued in 2007, 2008 and 2009. Every year projects were held up due to a lack of financial support. Members discussed why the level of voluntary contributions was always overestimated and also why so many projects were proposed. Geert Versnick (Belgium) said that the Executive Committee had been told that giving countries a catalogue of projects to choose from increased the chances of them finding one which they would like to sponsor. The list used to be even longer.

A second problem was the decrease in the value of the capital of pension fund investments due to the economic crisis. 12 people were still members of the legacy Pension Fund (since 2005 pensions of IPU staff had been transferred to the UNJSPF). Options were now being considered, including waiting to see if the investments would recover as, and if, economic conditions improved or offering the members lump sums in exchange for pension rights.

A procurement exercise had been carried out to try to reduce travel and accommodation costs. A travel agency had just won this contract and it remained to be seen if this would reduce costs.

10. IPU Membership

Members noted the document on IPU membership in their files.

11. Specialised IPU meetings held since the 121st IPU Assembly Geneva

The Steering Committee noted a list of the meetings held since the 121st Assembly. The Chair drew members' attention to the seminar in London on 22 and 23 February on human trafficking. A report on the seminar would shortly be available on the IPU Website.

12. Other Matters relating to the IPU

No other issues were raised.

12+ Matters

13. Programme of activities and timetable of meetings for the 122nd IPU Assembly

The programme of meetings were noted. Members noted that they were being asked to travel to the dinner by Sky train rather than by bus because of the bad traffic in Bangkok.

14. Membership

Nothing had been heard from Albania about rejoining the Group. There had also been no recent contact from Montenegro.

15. 12+ Chairmanship

The Chair reminded members that Bangkok would be his last Assembly because he was standing down as a Member of the UK Parliament. He assumed that he would be able to attend the Assembly as an official delegate, although this did depend on the date on which the British Prime Minister dissolved Parliament for the General Election. As Vice President, Robert Del Picchia (France) would be acting Chair after the Assembly until Geneva, when there would be a new election. The Chair encouraged prospective candidates to declare their candidature as soon as possible. He reminded members that the chairmanship also involved providing the secretariat of the 12+ Group, which could have a significant financial and staffing impact. The British office would have discussions with the French about planning and the budget for the Steering Committee in Paris.

16. Financial Matters

The current surplus for 2009 was £10,172.57, although two accrued invoices had yet to be received from Geneva which would bring the surplus down to about £4000. The balance of funds held at 31 December 2009 was £62,466.09.

17. Any Other Business

The Chair expressed concern about levels of co-ordination between parliamentary delegations for international assemblies within national parliaments. He noted that a paper produced by the President of the Socialist Group for the Council of Europe had included a resolution which said that the IPU had neither the desire nor the capacity to be the parliamentary dimension to the UN. He suggested there might be some merit in 12+ trying to meet the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly to discuss UN issues. Mrs Doris Stump (Switzerland) said that the Council of Europe project would not be followed up so the Steering Committee did not need to place too much significance on it. She said that some of her colleagues in the Swiss Parliament knew very little about the IPU. Geert Versnick (Belgium) commented that positive work had been done with the UN, but it was hardly noticed. He recommended the production of a brochure on the IPU for distribution to national parliaments. The Chair agreed that it would be useful to have published information but said that members also had a responsibility to spread knowledge of the IPU in their national parliaments.

18. Date of Next Meeting

The first meeting of the 12+ in Bangkok would take place on 26 March. The next Steering Committee meeting would be in Paris in the autumn.

The meeting closed at 1210.

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
ACTIVITY	Meeting of the Steering Committee of the Twelve Plus Group of the Inter- Parliamentary Union
DESTINATION	London, United Kingdom
DATES	March 1, 2010
DELEGATION	
SENATE	The Honourable Donald H. Oliver, Q.C.
HOUSE OF COMMONS	
STAFF	Mr. Joseph Jackson, Advisor
TRANSPORTATION	\$3,972.02
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 938.58
HOSPITALITY	
PER DIEMS	\$ 314.83
OFFICIAL GIFTS	
MISCELLANEOUS	\$ 48.60
TOTAL	\$5,274.03