

Canada - Africa
Parliamentary Association



Association parlementaire
Canada - Afrique

**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation respecting
its bilateral visits to Benin and Burkina Faso**

Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association

**Cotonou, Benin and Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso
September 5 to 12, 2010**

Report

The Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association was represented by the Honourable Mauril Bélanger, P.C., M.P., Co-Chair of the Association; Mrs. Lois Brown, M.P., Vice-Chair of the Association; the Honourable Paul Massicotte, Senator, Director of the Association; and Mr. Robert Carrier, M.P., Director of the Association. The delegation was assisted by Mr. Maxime Ricard, Secretary of the Association and Mr. Michael Dewing, Analyst for the Association.

OBJECTIVES

The Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association undertook bilateral visits to Cotonou, Benin and Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso from 5 to 12 September 2010. The visits had the following objectives:

- to strengthen bilateral relations and parliamentary cooperation;
- to engage parliamentarians on democracy, governance, economic issues, and the role of the media;
- to strengthen relations with regional organizations, most particularly the Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS); and
- to acquaint the delegates with the situation in each country and with Canada's activity in the region, through contacts with parliamentarians, government officials, civil society groups, and businesses.

To meet these objectives, the delegation met with Beninese and Burkinabe parliamentarians and government officials, representatives of political parties, Canadian representatives, business representatives, journalists, and members of non-governmental organizations. It also made site visits.

Key Issues

Benin is a relatively stable democracy. There are many political parties, as well as a strong civil society. The Ibrahim Index of African Governance ranks Benin as one of the best governed countries in Africa.¹ At the same time, Benin is severely underdeveloped. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2009 Human Development Index gives it a low ranking (161 out of 182).² Corruption remains a problem, and in 2009 Transparency International said that Benin had fallen lower on its annual Corruption Perceptions Index. At the same time, Benin has a vibrant media, with a mix of state-run and commercial outlets.

¹ See Mo Ibrahim Foundation, "The Ibrahim Index," <http://www.moibrahimfoundation.org/en/section/the-ibrahim-index> (accessed 4 October 2010).

² See United Nations Development Programme, "Human Development Report 2009 - HDI rankings," <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/> (accessed 7 October 2010).

Burkina Faso is one of the poorest countries in the world. The UNDP 2009 Human Development Index ranks it 177 out of 182 countries.³ Few people have had formal education, and more than 80% of the population relies on subsistence agriculture. Politically, Burkina Faso is relatively stable. Democracy was restored in 1991, and though opposition parties remain weak and disorganized, the Ibrahim Index of African Governance ranks Burkina Faso in the top 20 countries.⁴ President Blaise Compaoré has won every election since coming to power in a military coup in 1987. There is freedom of the press, and the privately owned media often criticize the government.

Benin and Burkina Faso face similar development challenges. Both rely on cotton exports and are vulnerable to external shocks. In addition, they have undiversified economies, inadequate basic services, and unreliable infrastructure. Both countries have plans to overcome these problems. Benin aims to diversify its economy by focusing on crafts, logistics, or agro-food. It also would like to take advantage of its access to the sea and improve the transportation infrastructure towards Burkina Faso and Niger. For its part, Burkina Faso plans to develop its mineral resources, improve its infrastructure, and increase the productivity of its agricultural and livestock sectors.

Both Benin and Burkina Faso are involved with several pan-African and regional organizations. They are members of the Pan-African Parliament (PAP), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU), and the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD). The PAP is a body of the African Union. ECOWAS is a 15-country regional economic community whose mission is to promote economic integration. WAEMU is made up of eight Francophone members of ECOWAS and it promotes regional monetary and economic convergence. CEN-SAD is a 23-member regional organization that also promotes regional integration.

Canada has historic ties with Benin and Burkina Faso through La Francophonie. In Benin, Canada is represented by the embassy in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, and there is an honorary consulate in Cotonou, which provides consular services, with the exception of regular passport services. In Burkina Faso, Canada has an embassy.

Canadian development assistance began soon after the two countries gained independence in 1960. In Benin, the programs of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) are focussed on urban sanitation, while in Burkina Faso they are focussed on basic education and local economic development. Neither country is on CIDA's current list of countries of focus.

The Association was interested in engaging parliamentarians and other participants in the political process on questions such as elections, freedom of the press, and health. It also explored opportunities for enhanced Canadian engagement with these two countries. As was the case on earlier trips in Eastern Africa, in North Africa, and in the Southern African Development Community region, the delegation was also interested in seeing how Benin and Burkina Faso are cooperating with their regional partners through organizations such as ECOWAS and the WAEMU.

³ United Nations Development Programme, "Human Development Report 2009 - HDI rankings," *op. cit.*

⁴ See Mo Ibrahim Foundation, "The Ibrahim Index," *op. cit.*

BENIN

A. Background

The Republic of Benin is located between Togo and Nigeria on the West African coast. Its population is 9 million. Formerly the French colony of Dahomey, it gained independence in 1960. The country oscillated between civilian and military rule until 1972, when Mathieu Kérékou established a military dictatorship that would last 17 years.

In 1991, Benin became the first African country to successfully make the transition from dictatorship to democracy. Nicéphore Soglo was elected president and parties supporting him won the most seats in the Assemblée nationale. In 1994, an independent body to supervise elections – the Commission électorale nationale autonome (CENA) – was established. Mr. Kérékou returned to power in 1996, and, in keeping with the constitution, stepped down at the end of his second term ten years later.

The 2006 presidential election was won by Boni Yayi, an independent. President Yayi vowed to fight corruption and he introduced reforms to the electoral system, including a computerized permanent electoral list called the Liste électorale permanente informatisée (LEPI). In 2008, a number of deputies in the Assemblée nationale withdrew their support for President Yayi, accusing him of acting unilaterally. However, the opposition parties were unable to coordinate their efforts, and some often voted with the government. In 2010, several parties formed a coalition and chose Adrien Houngbédji as its presidential candidate for the 2011 election.

As mentioned above, the economy of Benin is based on the agricultural sector, principally cotton, and transit trade with Nigeria. The economy is undiversified and is vulnerable to external shocks. Economic growth over the last decade has resulted in modest increases in per capita income and improvements in human development, but growth slowed during 2009 as a result of the world economic slowdown.⁵ Benin has a very high level of poverty, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) estimates that during the 2002-2007 period, 75.3% of the population lived on less than \$2 a day.⁶ In the area of health, despite recent improvements, child and maternal mortality remain very high.⁷ According to UNICEF, the under-5 mortality rate went from 184 per 1,000 in 1990 to 121 in 2008. The life-time risk of maternal death is about 1 in 20.⁸

⁵ World Bank, "Benin: Country Brief," September 2010, <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/AFRICAEXT/BENINEXTN/0,,contentMDK:20180404~pagePK:141137~piPK:141127~theSitePK:322639,00.html> (accessed 22 September 2010).

⁶ United Nations Development Programme, "Population living below \$2 a day (%)," *Human Development Report 2009*, <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/indicators/103.html> (accessed 22 September 2010).

⁷ World Bank, "Benin: Country Brief," September 2010, *op. cit.*

⁸ UNICEF: "Benin: Statistics," http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/benin_statistics.html (accessed 12 October 2010).

With its good reputation as a stable democracy and as an active player in international peacekeeping, Benin has enhanced its international stature. Benin's most important foreign relationship is with neighbouring Nigeria, the main regional power. Benin relies to a large extent on export trade to that country, and the two countries cooperate on security matters. Benin's other important relationship is with its francophone neighbours – Burkina Faso, Niger, and Togo.

Abroad, France, the former colonial power, remains Benin's key ally, its principal aid partner, and a significant trade partner. French businesses have a strong presence in Benin, but China has become a major source of imports, displacing France into third place, behind the United States. Benin is an active member of La Francophonie. Benin has played a mediating role in the political crises in Liberia, Guinea-Bissau, and Togo, and provided a contribution to the UN force in Haiti. Benin has also acted as a spokesperson for other West-African cotton-producing countries, such as Burkina Faso, Mali, and Chad.

China has a significant presence in Benin and has been involved with a number of major infrastructure projects. Over a third of Benin's \$1.6 billion of imports come from China. In addition, some 13% of Benin's \$US1 billion of exports go to China, making it Benin's second most important export partner, after India, which accounts for 20%.⁹

Canada's relations with Benin are based mainly on membership in La Francophonie, on cooperation, and on shared concerns over governance and security in Africa. There is little trade between the two countries (\$9.1 million in 2009) and the limited Canadian investments in Benin are mainly in the oil, port infrastructure and environmental sectors.¹⁰

Canadian development assistance to Benin began shortly after it gained independence in 1960. Today, CIDA's bilateral projects in Benin focus on the sector of urban sanitation. In 2008-2009 disbursements in Benin amounted to \$10.79 million.¹¹

As noted above, Canada has an honorary consulate in Cotonou. The Honorary Consul, Mr. Joseph-Louis Hounton accompanied the delegation throughout its visit. The delegation benefitted from his knowledge of Benin and from his wide range of contacts and would like to thank him for his warm welcome.

B. Meetings and visits

1. Visit to a waste recycling project and to a composting project

The delegation visited two development projects managed by Oxfam Québec, both centred on recuperating and reusing solid household waste. Cotonou, a city of one million people, does not have organized garbage collection or a city dump, and the disposal of waste is a serious problem. The first project involved the recuperation of

⁹ Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bn.html>.

¹⁰ Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, "Canada-Benin Relations," August 2008, http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/cotedivoire/bilateral_relations_bilaterales/canada_benin.aspx?menu_id=77&menu=L.

¹¹ Canadian International Development Agency, "Benin," <http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/benin-e>.

bottles and other containers by women in the Dantokpa market, while the second was a composting project that transforms household organic waste into compost that is used to grow vegetables for market.

The Dantokpa market is one of the largest in West Africa. It covers 24 hectares in the centre of Cotonou and some 26,000 people work there. The stall holders – mostly women – trade in all kinds of items, including produce, textiles, electronic goods, household items, and jewellery.

At the waste recycling project, about 400 women make their living recuperating bottles and cleaning and reselling them. In addition to helping organize the collection of bottles, the project built a new recuperation centre (Centre de récupération de bouteilles du Marché Dantokpa) after the original one burnt down, as well as a meeting place for the women's association. The project also teaches the women to read and write.

The delegation was met by a large group of women, who performed dances and a skit. It saw how the bottles are re-used and toured the facilities and part of the market.

The delegation then visited a 15-hectare composting project located on land near the Cotonou airport, which, for safety reasons, cannot be used for other purposes. The delegation met the Compost Management Committee (Comité de gestion du composte). The Committee explained how household waste is composted and the compost is used to fertilize vegetables, which are then sold. Indeed, the vegetables are in demand with Cotonou restaurants. With the success of the project, which is now self-sufficient, the market gardeners make enough money to support their families.

2. Meeting with Civil Society Groups.

The delegation held a reception for representatives from a number of civil society groups, including Social Watch, Nouvelle Éthique, Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF)/Gender, Dignité Féminine, and the Amicale des anciens du Canada. Together, they held a frank and lively discussion about the groups' efforts to improve governance and human rights. These include sensitizing women about their rights, fighting corruption, and monitoring the government's commitments to meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), with a view to ensuring accountability and transparency. Much of the discussion revolved around gender issues such as forced marriage, female genital mutilation, the education of girls, and the participation of women in politics. The groups pointed out that though laws prohibit discriminatory practices in these areas, the challenge is to make these laws known and respected in what remains a very traditional society. The groups also talked about the ways in which they work together.

3. Meeting with the Speaker of the National Assembly

The delegation travelled to Porto Novo, the capital of Benin, about half an hour from Cotonou. There it visited the Assemblée nationale, which is housed in an historic Portuguese building. On the way, it passed the new Assemblée nationale building, which is under construction.

The Assemblée nationale is a unicameral legislature with 83 members who are directly elected through a list system of proportional representation. The last elections were held in 2007, and the presidential coalition known as Forces Cauris pour un Bénin

émérgent (FCBE) won the most seats. Since then, however, divisions have emerged within the FCBE, but the opposition parties are also prone to instability and shifting alliances.

After visiting the chamber, the delegation met with the Speaker of the Assemblée nationale, Mr. Mathurin Nago. He began by talking about the good relations between Canada and Benin, at the country level, at the parliamentary level, and through interparliamentary associations such as the Assemblée parlementaire de la francophonie (APF) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). He said that Canada was appreciated for its good education system, for which many Beninese students travel to Canada, and for its welcoming immigration policy.

Asked whether there were any irritants in the relationship, the Speaker noted that obtaining visas to visit Canada is a significant problem. Beninese citizens must travel to the Canadian Embassy in Accra, Ghana, a 680-kilometre round-trip that passes through Togo. Border-crossing hours are limited and the crossings themselves are time consuming. In addition, Ghana is English-speaking, which poses additional challenges for French-speaking Beninese. The Speaker pointed out that this had caused problems for Beninese deputies who wanted to attend an APF meeting in Canada. He also noted that though Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire – where the Canadian Embassy accredited to Benin is located – is in a French-speaking country, it is even further away.

4. Meeting with a Committee Chair and Deputies

The delegation met with the Chair of the Committee on Law, Administration and Human Rights (Commission des lois, de l'administration et des droits de l'homme), Ms. Héléne Keke Aholou, along with deputies Ms. Amissétoù Affo Djobo Oloude, Mr. Denis Oba Chabi, Mr. Augustin Ahouanvoebla, Mr. Moussa Soule Sabi, Mr. Donatien Wohou, and Mr. Amadou Taïo. Speaker Nago chaired the meeting.

Speaker Nago gave an overview of Benin's administrative structure, its political party system, and the functioning of the Assemblée nationale. He pointed out that because elections will be held in 2011, members are in pre-electoral mode. He also gave an overview of Benin's economy, identifying as challenges the heavy reliance on the agricultural sector, congestion in the Port of Cotonou, and security problems in the Dantokpa market. He pointed out that women are undertaking much of the economic activity in the commercial sector.

In response to questions, the Speaker and the deputies talked about the importance of micro-credit for small businesses, the popularity of the Canadian education system in Benin, and the resources allocated to deputies, and the budget of the Assemblée nationale. In further discussion on the latter, the deputies said they could use financial assistance to help with transcribing and publishing the debates. Once again, the issue of obtaining visas was raised.

5. Meeting with the Minister Responsible for Information Technologies and Communication

The delegation met with the Minister-Delegate to the President in Charge of Communications and Information Technologies (Ministre Délégué auprès du Président de la République Chargé des Technologies de l'Information et de la Communication),

Mr. Désiré Adadja. He began by noting that he obtained his engineering diploma at the École Polytechnique in Montreal.

In discussing relations between Benin and Canada, Minister Adadja said there has been progress, but the potential exists to do much more. He pointed out that Canada and Benin both have populations that are concentrated in urban areas, while having vast remote areas that require services. Both countries require the use of technology to meet these challenges. He also talked about the roughly 100 Beninese students studying in Canada.

Asked if there are any irritants in the relationship, Minister Adadja expressed disappointment that Benin had been removed from CIDA's list of countries of focus and hoped that it would be restored at the next possible occasion. He pointed out that Benin, which has been democratic for only 20 years, is learning by doing, but would like Canada to accompany it as it builds its democracy. He said Canada could help reinforce the relationship by selecting Benin as a country of focus and by hosting an official visit by the President of Benin. He also noted the issue of needing to travel to Ghana to obtain visas.

The meeting concluded with a discussion of elections. Minister Adadja pointed out that with each election, the Independent National Electoral Commission, the Commission électorale nationale autonome (CENA), is chosen anew and that electoral laws must be passed for each election. As a result, elections are costly. He noted that in Canada, there is a permanent independent body that conducts elections – Elections Canada. The Minister said he would welcome assistance from Elections Canada.

6. Meeting with the Minister of Justice, Legislation, and Human Rights

The delegation met with the Minister of Justice, Legislation, and Human Rights, Grégoire Akofodji and members of his staff. He gave an overview of the work of his department, and noted the challenges posed by the lack of resources. Among these, it was not able to prepare Benin's second report to the Office of the United Nations High Commission on Human Rights on the implementation of rights under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. With regard to Benin's human rights commission, the Commission béninoise des Droits de l'Homme, the delegation was told that it needs revitalizing in order to bring it up to international standards.

The delegation was also given an overview of conditions in prisons, where there is overcrowding and the spread of disease. It also heard about alternatives to incarceration, such as re-education centres for young offenders. It also heard that between 1999 and 2001, there had been cooperation with the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC). There were exchanges of visits at that time, but there are currently no projects between CSC and Benin.¹² Minister Akofodji said he would like to re-launch cooperation with CSC.

In discussion with the delegation, Minister Akofodji talked about early release from prison, legal aid, education for prisoners, all of which are limited as a result of the lack of

¹² Correctional Service of Canada, "Technical Assistance Projects: Benin," <http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/intforum/tap/benin-eng.shtml>. (Accessed 24 September 2010.)

resources. They also discussed the department's reports, which are publicly available and have a reputation for being of high quality.

7. Reception Attended by the Minister of Foreign Affairs

The delegation hosted a reception at the Fondation Zinsou, an art gallery in Cotonou. The reception was attended by a number of ministers, parliamentarians, and members of civil society. During the reception, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, African Integration, La Francophonie, and Beninese Abroad, Jean-Marie Ehouzou, remarked on a number of issues in the Benin-Canada bilateral relationship. These included the status of Canada's development aid to Benin, the need to travel to Ghana to obtain visas, and the reduction in the number of scholarships for Beninese students. He also referred to Canada's promises in the area of maternal and child health and said that he hoped these promises would be fulfilled.

8. Meeting with the Minister of Health

The Minister of Health, Dr. Issifou Takpara, began by noting that he had studied medicine in Montreal. He went on to discuss ways in which Canada and Benin are cooperating in the area of health. For instance, there are contacts with L'Alliance de santé communautaire Canada-Afrique (ASCCA), a humanitarian organization based at the University of Ottawa which works to improve care and education targeting HIV/AIDS in isolated African communities.¹³

Minister Takpara discussed the challenges Benin faces, including the shortage of pharmaceuticals and the fact that many Beninese physicians work abroad. In response to questions, he elaborated on the plan to develop the health network based on health centres at the local level and hospitals at the zone and regional level.

Minister Takpara said that Canada's initiative to improve the health of women and children in the world's poorest regions at this year's G8 summit was a positive sign and suggested ways in which Benin could benefit from Canada's experience in providing health care. He went on to talk about Benin's program to reduce maternal and child mortality, which includes the follow-up of women who have had caesarean sections and the treatment of haemorrhages and infection.

In the discussion that followed, Minister Takpara and the delegation talked further about Canada's role in championing the maternal and child health initiative among its G8 partners. They also discussed the establishment of community health networks, the role of public and private health care, and the minister's relationship with the Assemblée nationale.

9. Meeting with the Minister of State in Charge of Economic Forecasting and Development

The delegation met the Minister of State in Charge of Economic Forecasting and Development (Ministre d'État, Chargé de la Prospective, du Développement et de l'Évaluation de l'Action Publique), Pascal Koupaki. He gave an overview of the strategic

¹³ L'Alliance de santé communautaire Canada-Afrique, « Le Coeur de L'ASCCA, » <http://ascca.ca/lecoeur>. (Accessed 24 September 2010.)

framework for Benin's development, which addresses two main challenges: improving global competitiveness and eradication of poverty.

Minister Koupaki talked about the context in Benin. While the political climate is stable, the social context is difficult, with high population growth, a young population, and increasing life expectancy. The economic context needs improving. Benin is vulnerable to external shocks in the areas of energy, food, and finances. Internally, there is resistance to reform.

Minister Koupaki identified a number of successes, including universal access to primary education, a reduction in child mortality rates, women's increased independence, and health services for children. He also identified health problems – such as malaria, respiratory infections, and sexually transmitted infections – and the ways Benin is addressing them. In the area of security, he said that information theft, illicit drugs, and money laundering were areas of concern. On the subject of reform, Minister Koupaki talked about the challenges of managing the relationship between the executive and the legislative, particularly during a pre-electoral period.

In response to questions, Minister Koupaki elaborated on Benin's strategy to leverage its access to the sea and to develop nodes based on crafts, logistics, or agro-food. He also talked about improving the transportation infrastructure towards Niger and Burkina Faso. Without development, he warned, Benin risks a social explosion because of the high percentage of young people.

The delegation and the Minister also discussed the role of the Assemblée nationale in economic development, through the examination of the budget and through committees. They also discussed the roles of political parties in establishing the institutional stability needed to encourage development.

10. Meeting with Journalists

The delegation held a round-table discussion with four journalists. These were Mr. Vincent Foly, editor in chief of *La Nouvelle Tribune*; Fr. André Quenum, editor in chief of *La Croix*; Mr. Jérôme Carlos, director of CAPP FM radio; and Mr. André Dossa, director of Canal 3 Benin television.

The journalists described the work they do. *La Croix* is a Catholic weekly that acts as an independent watchdog. CAPP (Centre Africain de la pensée positif) is a private commercial radio station. *La Nouvelle Tribune* is an independent newspaper. Canal 3 Benin is part of the Fraternité group, which includes a daily newspaper and a radio station and which is owned by Issa Salifou, leader of the political party known as l'Union pour la relève (UPR).¹⁴

All four journalists said they reported the truth, rather than taking political stances. Both Mr. Carlos and Mr. Foly had received journalism training in Canada through CIDA. Mr. Dossa said that despite being owned by a leader of a political party, Canal 3 Benin sometimes criticizes that party.

¹⁴ "Issa Salifou un modèle sûr," *La Choix*, 26 June 2009, http://www.journallechoix.info/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=62:issa-salifou-un-modele-sur&catid=2:societe&Itemid=4.

The journalists talked about the evolution of press freedom, and discussed the difficulties associated with conducting critical journalism. Mr. Carlos pointed out that he spent 22 years in exile for practicing journalism, but that Benin now enjoys freedom of the press. He noted that when Radio France Internationale (RFI) was suspended recently because of its coverage of a financial scandal, it was back on the air in a few hours.¹⁵ The journalists also said the quality of journalists is improving. Better training and higher salaries are leading to a more professional journalism.

11. Meeting with the Secrétariat Administratif Permanent de la Commission Électorale Nationale Autonome

The delegation met Laurent Okiki Idossou, an assistant manager at the permanent administrative secretariat (Secrétariat administratif Permanent) of the Commission électorale nationale autonome (CENA), along with other members of the staff.

The permanent administrative secretariat provides the administrative support between elections. The staff gave an overview of how elections are managed. A new CENA is designated by the Assemblée nationale before each election, and four technicians make up the permanent staff. Problems with this process include the competence of the members of the CENA and the lack of a computerized voters list. Indeed, half of the cost of elections is attributable to the updating of the voters list. The Liste électorale permanente informatisée (LEPI), which has been the subject of much debate, would result in economies of scale, but the administrators didn't know whether it would be ready for the next elections. The administrators also talked about the problems surrounding voter identity cards, given that roughly 70% of peasants do not have identity papers.

Although the laws regarding the next election had not yet been passed, the administrators were making preparations. They said that their job would be made easier if there were a permanent electoral law, as well as a permanent CENA. Finally, the administrators said that they would like international partners to help them to buy office equipment and to rent better offices. As it stands, their offices are too small to hold full meetings, and they often have to meet outside. In addition, the delegation noted a certain amount of confusion regarding the delegation's visit.

12. Meeting with Assistant Coordinator of the United Nations

The delegation met with Agbodji Jacques Houensou, the governance team leader with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). He gave an overview of the UNDP's role in managing the development of a permanent voters list. Saying that the situation has improved in Benin since the restoration of democracy, he said he hoped the next elections would produce a credible result.

The UNDP leads the process for establishing the LEPI. Although the UNDP is neutral in the debate over the LEPI, Mr. Houensou said that the establishment of a credible voters list on the basis of consensus is essential to providing conditions for peaceful elections.

¹⁵ "RFI off the air in Benin, correspondent interrogated," *Radio France Internationale*, 3 August 2010, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201008031073.html>.

Regarding identification, Mr. Houensou said that although not all births are registered, a census had been carried out to identify all the children in the country. Once all the voters have been registered with photo identification, the voters list will be established. He said that the work was proceeding on schedule and the list should be ready by December.

Mr. Houensou reiterated that the LEPI is a long-term project, and that parties from both the majority and the opposition are involved in the consultations. He also discussed the contributions international partners are making to its financing. In conclusion, he said that threats of violence are a threat to democracy. The UNDP is trying to avoid violence, but there are also risks in not doing anything.

BURKINA FASO

A. Background

Burkina Faso is a landlocked country located in West Africa. It is bordered by Mali, Niger, Benin, Togo, Ghana, and Côte d'Ivoire. The population is 16 million. Originally dominated by the Mossi tribe, in 1919 it became the French colony of Upper Volta. After gaining independence in 1960, the country was ruled by a series of military dictatorships. In 1983 a Marxist-Leninist government under Thomas Sankara came to power, and the name of the country was changed to Burkina Faso, which means "the country of honourable people."

In 1987, Capt. Blaise Compaoré took power and set about reversing the government's policies. In 1991, a democratic constitution was approved. Compaoré won the 1991 presidential election unopposed, but in the legislative elections the following year, 10 parties won seats. In 1998, an independent electoral commission, the Commission électorale nationale indépendante (CENI) was established, and later that year, Compaoré was re-elected to a second seven-year term as president.

In 2000, a system of proportional representation was introduced and the presidential term was reduced from seven years to five, renewable once. However, these term limits were not to take effect until the next election, meaning that President Compaoré would be able to contest the 2005 and 2010 presidential elections. He won the 2005 election with over 80% of the vote. During 2009, members of the Congrès pour la Démocratie et le Progrès (CDP) – the presidential party and the largest party in the Assemblée nationale – began calling for amendments to limit of two terms for the presidency. If the limits, which are provided in Article 37 of the constitution, were lifted, President Compaoré would be able to stand for re-election again in 2015. The delegation noted that in the daily newspapers, opposition to lifting the limits was openly expressed.

The economy of Burkina Faso is highly dependent on cotton exports. It is vulnerable to external shocks, such as fluctuations in the price of cotton and climate change. From 1998 to 2006, the economic growth rate averaged over 5% a year, but in 2009, this fell to around 3% as a result of climate change, the energy crisis, fluctuating commodity prices, and the global financial crisis. A number of areas have been identified as offering potential for diversifying exports. These include livestock, fruit and vegetables, and

mining. Indeed, in 2009 gold production surpassed cotton as the main provider of export revenue.¹⁶

Burkina Faso has a very high level of poverty, and the UNDP estimates that during the 2002-2007 period, 81.2% of the population lived on less than \$2 a day.¹⁷ Thanks to efforts made in the area of child and maternal health, there have been significant improvements, with infant mortality dropping from 107 deaths for every 1,000 births in 1995 to 81 in 2008.¹⁸ The birth rate is very high and the population is growing rapidly.

Since the early 2000s, Burkina Faso has gained a reputation as a regional mediator. The crisis in neighbouring Cote d'Ivoire has preoccupied Burkina Faso, as up to three million Burkinabe nationals reside there. In 2007 President Compaoré was instrumental in brokering a peace agreement between the government and the rebels. Burkina Faso has also mediated conflict in Liberia, Togo, and Guinea. He has also been involved in hostage negotiations with the regional terrorist group known as al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, including those involving Canadian diplomats Robert Fowler and Louis Guay in 2009.

In the international arena, France, the former colonial power, remains Burkina Faso's chief ally, aid provider and trading partner. Burkina Faso has excellent relations with European aid donors, as well as Libya and Taiwan. France and the European Union provide significant aid. Relations with the United States are also excellent and military ties between the two countries are strengthening. Relations with the People's Republic of China are limited due to Burkina Faso's ties with Taiwan.

Canada and Burkina Faso established diplomatic relations in 1962, and the bilateral relations are based to a large extent on development cooperation and membership in La Francophonie.¹⁹ In 2009, two-way trade amounted to roughly \$54 million, and several Canadian mining companies have major operations in Burkina Faso. Canada's cooperation program with Burkina Faso began in 1965. Today, the program focuses on basic education and local economic development. In 2008-2009 disbursements for projects and initiatives amounted to \$28.83 million.²⁰

¹⁶ World Bank, "Burkina Faso: Country Brief," <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/AFRICAEXT/BURKINAFASOEXTN/0,,menuPK:343886~pagePK:141132~piPK:141107~theSitePK:343876,00.html> (accessed 27 September 2010).

¹⁷ United Nations Development Programme, "Population living below \$2 a day (%)," *Human Development Report 2009*, <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/indicators/103.html> (accessed 22 September 2010).

¹⁸ World Bank, "Burkina Faso: Country Brief," *op. cit.*

¹⁹ Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, "Canada-Burkina Faso Relations," July 2009, http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/burkinafaso/bilateral_relations_bilaterales/index.aspx?menu_id=7&menu=L (accessed 27 September 2010).

²⁰ Canadian International Development Agency, "Burkina Faso," <http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/burkinafaso-e> (accessed 27 September 2010).

B. Meetings and visits

1. Meeting with the Speaker of the Assemblée nationale

Speaker Roch Marc Christian Kaboré began by talking about the evolution of the Assemblée nationale. He explained the system of parties and coalitions, and, in an exchange with the delegation, elaborated on the process for a deputy to change parties. Discussion then focused on the extent to which democratic culture has taken hold in Burkina Faso. Speaker Kaboré said that democratic debate takes place among the élite, but that much of the population is preoccupied with basic necessities. In his view, the level of education must rise before most of the population can take part in democratic debates.

Speaker Kaboré stressed that Burkina Faso had chosen the path of freedom, and that freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and human rights were being respected. Regarding elections, he said that voting must be transparent, meaning that identity cards would be required to vote.

On the economic front, he talked about reducing poverty through the strategy of accelerated growth, and said that this is an area in which Canada could become involved. In discussion with the delegation, the Speaker commented on the issues of health, education, human development, and climate change. He also said the country is making efforts to ensure that the rule of law ensures a stable business environment for foreign investors.

2. Meeting with the President of Burkina Faso

The delegation met with President Blaise Compaoré. It offered its condolences for the death of an employee of the Embassy of Burkina Faso in Ottawa. It also remarked on the effectiveness of Burkina Faso's Ambassador to Canada, H.E. Juliette Bonkougou, and thanked the President for his efforts in conflict negotiation in West Africa and particularly for his help in negotiating the release of the two Canadian diplomats.

President Compaoré thanked the delegation for its visit and said that Burkina Faso and Canada have a fruitful relationship and are finding ways of working together. He noted Canada's involvement in Burkina Faso, and said the two countries should learn more about each other.

President Compaoré pointed out that Burkina Faso was one of the last countries in Africa to be colonized, and that it had only 50 years of colonial history. He noted that the population is largely rural, and that, given the lack of petroleum resources, Burkina Faso must rely on developing its human resources. Consequently, it is investing in health, food, and education. He stressed the importance of freedom, good citizenship, and decentralization as keys to modernizing the country.

President Compaoré also talked about the importance of regional stability. He noted that the region was integrated before colonialism and there had always been a mixing of populations. Regarding ECOWAS, he said it was working to become more effective. He noted that people are free to move from country to country. He also said that mechanisms are being established to sanction countries that do not live up to governance standards. It also has two peacekeeping brigades. He noted that although

a number of ECOWAS countries use the same currency, it has not been accepted by all countries.

In discussion with the delegation, President Compaoré talked about Burkina Faso's efforts to improve education, which is being hampered by the shortage for teachers. He noted that a large number of Burkinabè have been educated in Canada and that a large number of Canadians live in Burkina Faso.

On the question of the rule of law and the business environment, President Compaoré noted that the *Doing Business* project had identified Burkina Faso as a country that had undertaken a large number of reforms.²¹ He said that the Canadian company IAMGOLD, which had made a \$450-million investment, had found the conditions suitable. He also said that procedures had been cleaned up and that a framework to encourage investment had been put in place.

Regarding Burkina Faso's development strategy, President Compaoré said that dealing with illiteracy and low levels of education was the first priority. Improving agricultural productivity was also important. Once citizens have a higher level of education, they will be able to participate in local decision making, and there will be greater decentralization. He also talked about the need for investment and for increasing exports. He recognized the need to be sensitive to the impressions many people in the industrial world have of Africa, and said he hoped the delegation would help spread the word about the efforts being made.

After leaving the meeting, the delegation answered questions from the news media.

3. Meeting with the Commission Électorale Nationale Indépendante

The delegation met with the President of the Commission électorale nationale indépendante (CENI), Mr. Moussa Michel Tapsoba, along with Mr. Idrissou Kouanda, one of the two vice-presidents, rapporteurs Mr. Saidou Ouedraogo and Mr. Mousbila Sankara, and staffers. Mr. Tapsoba gave an overview of the structure of the CENI. Its 15 members are chosen by civil society – religious communities, traditional societies, and human rights organizations – and appointed by presidential decree. There are two women members.

In discussion with the delegation, Mr. Tapsoba talked about voter identity cards, the permanent voters list, the updating of this list for the next elections, the financing of the CENI, and the role of the rapporteurs. The delegation also heard from a rapporteur who identified problems such as the lack of a pre-determined budget, the reduction in financing between elections, and the shortage of vehicles.

On the issue of voter education, Mr. Tapsoba said that the CENI relies on the news media to convey its messages in the local languages. He also described the CENI's role in developing a list of international election observers, but said that it did not provide support for these observers.

The discussion then turned to the subject of party financing. There is no law governing private financing of political parties. There are provisions for public financing, which is

²¹ See *Doing Business*, <http://www.doingbusiness.org/>.

available to parties that receive 3% of the vote. There is no limit on spending during election campaigns. Mr. Tapsoba pointed out that democracy in Burkina Faso is still at a very early stage, and that as problems arise, they will be dealt with.

The discussion also addressed the participation of women. There is a quota that requires that a minimum of 30% of candidates must be from one sex or the other. However, the law does not deal with the order of these candidates in the lists that are used by Burkina Faso's proportional representation system. It is up to the parties to decide who goes where on the list.

The delegation appreciated the frank exchange of views during the meeting. Afterwards, the delegation answered questions from the news media.

4. Meeting with the Conseil Supérieur de la Communication

The delegation met with Ms. Béatrice Damiba, the President of the Conseil supérieur de la communication (CSC), along with members of her staff. She gave an overview of the CSC, the organization responsible for regulating electronic communications and promoting freedom of the press through responsible professional practices.²²

Ms. Damiba gave an overview of the CSC and its role in monitoring the professional ethics of journalists with a view to ensuring respect for the rights of citizens. It also works to prevent journalists from offending people, especially the authorities. To these ends, the CSC monitors radio and television broadcasts. Ms. Damiba also described the special rules that apply during election periods, the aim of which is to ensure that all candidates and parties are treated equally.

In discussion with the delegation, Ms. Damiba described the structure of Burkina Faso's broadcasting system. With regard to regulating the internet, she said that the media should self-regulate and should avoid abuses by people posting comments on their sites. As far as the written press is concerned, she said that certain types of advertising – such as advertising for alcohol or pharmaceuticals – are banned.

5. Meeting with Deputies from the Majority Coalition

The delegation held two meetings with deputies – one with members of the majority coalition and one with members of the opposition.

The meeting with the majority deputies was attended by Mr. Tiémoko Konate, Mr. Mahma Sawadogo, and Mr. Dieudonné Maurice Bonanet (Congrès pour la Démocratie et le Progrès or CDP); Mr. Lallo Hamado Bamogo, Mr. Yakouba Savadogo, and Mr. Boureima Ouedraogo (Alliance pour la Démocratie et la Fédération/Rassemblement démocratique africain or ADF/RDA); and Mr. Amadou Diemdiouda Dicko and Mr. Issa Sanogo (Convention des forces républicaines or CFR).

The deputies explained the party system in Burkina Faso. The majority coalition is an alliance of several political parties that supports the presidential program. Although the parties tend to vote together on major items, they do not always vote the same way. The CDP is the leader of the coalition.

²² See Conseil Supérieur de la Communication, « Présentation, » <http://www.csi.bf/conseil/presentation.htm> (accessed 29 September 2010).

Asked why there are so many parties, the deputies responded that there is no limit on the number of parties, and that so long as they receive 3% of the vote, they are eligible for public financing. However, they said that as the system evolves, the number of parties should drop.

During the discussion, the delegation explained how a minority parliament works in Canada, where votes are on an issue-by-issue basis and the government may receive support from one party on one issue and another party on another issue. In Burkina Faso, on the other hand, if parties vote with the government, they are no longer part of the opposition. The status of parties is spelled out in law.

6. Meeting with Opposition Deputies

The meeting with opposition deputies was attended by three members of the Alternance Démocratique Justice (ADJ), a coalition of seven parties that has 12 of the 111 members of the Assemblée nationale. These members were Mr. Batio Nestor Bassiere, Mr. Salfou Théodore Ouedraogo, and Mr. Ibrahima Koné.

The deputies talked about the obstacles to those who oppose the government. They said the risks include arrest, imprisonment, or losing one's job if employed in the public service. They said that people were not used to the idea of going against the régime in power. They explained how the seven parties in their coalition came together to make up the minimum 10 deputies needed to be recognized as a parliamentary group.

In response to questions, the deputies said that there was no transparency in the private financing of political parties. They said that given the obstacles, there was little hope for alternating power.

Asked about freedom of the press, they said that there are certain limits. For example, government ministries do not subscribe to certain papers. They also said there are limits to the expression of ideas. Opposition parties often have to pay media outlets for coverage, while government announcements receive blanket coverage. As a result, the deputies said they work in obscurity.

With regard to the remuneration of deputies, the deputies noted that they have social obligations, but that those supporting the government have the resources of the state at hand. They also said they no longer receive financial support from foreign political parties.

7. Meetings with Ministers

The delegation received presentations from five government ministers:

- the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Regional Cooperation;
- the Minister of Economy and Finance;
- the Minister of Mines, Quarries, and Energy;
- the Minister of Health; and
- the Minister of Promotion of Women.

The delegation was honoured that so many ministers took time from their busy days to meet with the delegation.

A. The Minister of Foreign Affairs and Regional Cooperation, His Excellency Mr. Bédouma Alain Yoda

Minister Yoda described Burkina Faso's participation in the African Union, ECOWAS, and WAEMU, all of which are important for the country. In particular, he noted the role of ECOWAS in addressing crises in the region, its promotion of good governance, and its contribution to peace and stability. For instance, it has prohibited member states from making major changes to their election laws within six months before an election.

With regard to bilateral relations with Canada, Minister Yoda said they were excellent, but that Canada could increase its help to Burkina Faso. He said Canada could help develop human capital. He also asked that Burkina Faso be reintegrated into CIDA's list of countries of focus. Noting that Burkina Faso is a stable country with freedom of the press and a multiparty political system, he said he could not understand why it had been taken off the list. Minister Yoda also asked for increased economic development aid.

In response to questions from the delegation, Minister Yoda elaborated on Burkina Faso election law (which he said could not be changed in the middle of a campaign), the suspension of Niger from ECOWAS because it dissolved its Assemblée nationale, and the release of the Canadian diplomats. On the subject of education and bursaries, he said that Burkina Faso used to look to France for higher education, but that Canada had the advantage of offering training in both French and English. He hoped that educational exchanges would bring the two countries closer.

B. The Minister of Economy and Finance, His Excellency Mr. Lucien Marie Noël Bembamba

Minister Bembamba gave an overview of Burkina Faso's economic and development strategy. After reviewing the country's economic history since independence, he set out the main goals of the current strategy – growth that is based on equality, guaranteed access to social services, the creation of jobs, and the promotion of good governance. He gave examples of successes, such as the increase in school attendance from 45% in 2001 to 72% today and the increase in percentage of the population that has access to healthcare professionals from 45% in 2000 to 70% in 2009.

Minister Bembamba also identified constraints, including the rate of monetary poverty, which remains at 40% of the population, and the economy's vulnerability to external shocks. He identified the country's major challenges as the high rate of population growth, the shortage of schools, the question of gender equality, and climate change. To address these issues, Minister Bembamba said that Burkina Faso would focus on identifying areas for growth, develop its infrastructure, invest in social services, and promote sustainable development. To these ends, it is taking a participatory approach involving consultations with elected officials, civil society, and private companies.

In response to questions, Minister Bembamba said with a population growth of roughly 3% per year, Burkina Faso needs at least the same rate of economic growth. Regarding the economic crisis, he said the country had been hit by secondary impacts, such as the lowering of demand for cotton. It is addressing these impacts by providing assistance to the agricultural sector, helping companies that are in trouble avoid

bankruptcy, and developing infrastructure. He also noted that Burkina Faso is cooperating with neighbouring countries to become integrated in the global economy, to develop a common monetary policy, and to enforce budgetary discipline.

C. The Minister of Mines, Quarries, and Energy, His Excellency Mr. Abdoulaye Abdoul Kader Cisse

Minister Cisse said that the mineral sector had been liberalized in 2003, and that it is now the most important economic sector. The country has gone from issuing 12 mining permits in 2000 to 430 permits today. Canadian companies lead with 15 permits and seven mines in production.

In discussion with the delegation, Minister Cisse said that exploration permits are generally issued for 3 years. He expounded on the country's *Mining Act* and discussed the standard mining agreement that companies make with the government. Typically, the government has a 10% equity position. In addition, under the royalty and tax structure, roughly half of the profits go to the Government of Burkina Faso.

D. The Minister of Health, His Excellency Mr. Seydou Bouda

Minister Bouda gave an overview of Burkina Faso's health challenges, which include HIV/AIDS, malaria, and maternal health. He outlined some successes in addressing these challenges, including the raising of awareness of HIV/AIDS, the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, and the establishment of screening centres.

Minister Bouda identified malaria as the major cause of illness and death, with some 4.5 million cases in 2009 and 7,982 deaths. Fighting the disease requires early detection and treatment, the prevention of mosquito bites, and the elimination of mosquitoes. The strategy to fight malaria includes changing people's behaviour, providing access to drugs, and distributing bed nets.

In the area of maternal health, the number of maternal death went from 484 per 100,000 in 1998 to 307 per 100,000 in 2006, while infant deaths before the age of five went from 184 per 1000 in 2003 to 141.9 per 1000 in 2006.

In conclusion, Minister Bouda said that Burkina Faso has a good organization in the fight against HIV/AIDS, the fight against malaria is progressing, but that maternal and child deaths remain a preoccupation. In response to questions, he talked about the difficulty of retaining physicians and elaborated on methods of fighting malaria, against which there is currently no vaccine.

E. The Minister of Promotion of Women, Her Excellency Mme Céline Yoda

Minister Yoda began by noting that no development strategy can be successful without the development of women. She gave an overview of the ministry, which she said has a monitoring role, and its action plans. She said that while there has been progress in basic social services, such as health and education, many challenges remain. These include the persistence of inequality and the need to reinforce gains.

Minister Yoda talked about the goal of eliminating female genital mutilation by 2015 and the fight to reduce violence against women. She also discussed other challenges, such as having women make up 30% of political candidates, promoting the use of micro-

credit, and increasing the number of women in the army, the police, and the professions.

In conclusion, Minister Yoda said that actions taken by the government have permitted women to become aware of their role in the development of Burkina Faso. The government aims to change attitudes so that women can play their full role in the country's development. In discussion with the delegation, she elaborated on the education of girls and the challenges of eliminating female genital mutilation.

8. Information session on the Assemblée nationale

The delegation attended an information session on the Assemblée nationale presented by Mr. Kanidoua Naboho, MP, 1st vice-president of the Assemblée nationale. He described its evolution and its present structure. He identified challenges as the relative youth of the institution, the high level of turnover, and the limits to its resources. Regarding the latter, deputies do not have assistants or offices. In addition, the outdated infrastructure does not allow committee meetings to be held in public, as there is not enough room. He said the Assemblée nationale would like to establish radio broadcasts of proceedings.

9. Information session on the role of the Assemblée nationale in regional organizations

The delegation attended an information session on the participation of the Assemblée nationale in the following inter-parliamentary organisations:

- The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU);
- The Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF);
- The Joint Parliamentary Assembly Africa-Caribbean-Pacific-European Union (ACP-EU);
- The African Parliamentary Union (APU);
- The ECOWAS Parliament;
- The Comité Interparlementaire de l'UEMOA (CIP-UEMOA); and
- Parliamentary Union of the Organization of the Islamic Conference Member States (PUOICM).

For each of these organizations, a participating deputy gave an overview of the organization and talked about the participation of deputies from Burkina Faso.

It was pointed out that for regional integration to be successful, people need to be on board. Through participation in these organizations, West African parliamentarians are getting to know each other and are creating a shared vision for the region's development. In discussion with the delegation, the deputies elaborated on the methods of selecting participants in each organization.

10. Meeting with Journalists

The delegation met with a dozen journalists from the Presse de l'Assemblée nationale, Radio Télévision du Burkina, *Le Pays*, *Sidwaya*, and *L'Observateur Paalga*.

The delegation gave an overview of the news media in Canada. In the discussion that followed, they talked about press freedom in Burkina Faso. A journalist from the independent newspaper *Le Pays* said that it is open to all political views. He said that the press is relatively free, while acknowledging that economic power has influence. He also said that while it publishes information from all sources, the situation is different during election periods, when the opposition is favoured.

The discussion touched on the issue of public and private ownership, and the delegation was told that the private press receives a subsidy. In addition, taxes were lifted on computer equipment for private publications. Asked about the impact of high illiteracy rates, the journalists said that their reports were read on radio stations in the various local languages.

In response to a question about the ability to criticize the government, it was acknowledged that there is a certain amount of self-censorship. Despite this, they said that press freedom is alive. The situation in Burkina Faso was compared with the situation in Chad, where journalists' offices have been sacked.

In closing, the delegation talked about the role of journalists in assisting the Commission électorale nationale indépendante (CENI) in educating voters, and urged them to encourage citizens to exercise their right to vote.

11. Meeting with Representatives of Civil Society

The delegation met with nine representatives of civil society organizations, including the Association des Femmes Juristes du Burkina Faso, Coalition Fimba pour le genre, the Conseil national de la jeunesse, Association Inter-états des Jeunes du Liptako-Gourma / Réseau international des acteurs et partenaires de développement (AILG/RIAD), the Ligue des consommateurs du Burkina, Réseau national de lutte contre la corruption (REN-LAC), Réseau Afrique jeunesse, and Secrétariat Permanent des ONG (SPONG) – a coalition of 88 NGOs.

The discussion began on the topic of encouraging women to become involved in politics. While the French laws that Burkina Faso inherited provide for equality, the civil society organizations said they need to work on making women aware of their right to participate. Illiteracy is an obstacle, and they are working to translate laws into local languages. They also work to educate people about the need for gender quotas for candidates. The main challenge is to make the existing provisions work.

The civil society organizations discussed their financing. Although they do not receive state subsidies, they do benefit from indirect subsidies, such as not paying taxes. Some receive foreign support. However, some organizations, such as the Ligue des consommateurs, said they do not have enough resources.

On the subject of the fight against corruption, the representatives from the Réseau national de lutte contre la corruption said that it is a serious problem, particularly with officials at the lower levels, such as customs agents and the police.

The discussion then turned to the question of corporate social responsibility and the organizations said that it is necessary to ensure there is transparency in the extractive industries. The representatives also talked about the problems facing youth employment.

In closing, there was general agreement that things are progressing and that the government has developed a more positive attitude towards civil society groups and their proposals.

12. Visit to the IAMGOLD Essakane Mine

The delegation travelled some 330 kilometres by road to visit the Essakane gold mine in the northeastern part of the country. In Dori, the delegation was greeted by the Governor of the Sahel Region before travelling on to the mine. The mine is 90% owned by IAMGOLD, a Canadian mining company, and 10% owned by the Government of Burkina Faso. The Sahel region borders the Sahara Desert to the north. The people of the region have low levels of literacy and education.

The Essakane mine is the largest mine in Burkina Faso, and the \$450-million investment is the most significant ever undertaken in the country. Artisanal miners (orpailleurs) discovered gold in the area in 1985. A number of companies conducted studies in the area and IAMGOLD acquired the project in 2009. The mine facilities were constructed in 18 months and began commercial production in July 2010.²³

The delegation was taken on a tour of the installation by the mine's Operations Manager, Mr. Langis St. Pierre. The mine is expected to produce 12 tons of gold annually over its minimum 10-year lifespan. The delegation heard that the mine meets Canadian standards. Environmental protection is a priority, and the company recycles water and contains the mine tailings. It also has an occupational health and safety program and aims to have zero workplace accidents. In addition, a plan is already in place for closing the mine when it ceases operations. With respect to the sharing of profits from the mine, under the *Mining Act*, half of the profits go to the government through various royalties and taxes.

IAMGOLD's approach to sustainable development includes social aspects as well. The mine employs some 1,800 contract workers, and priority is given to local hires. Over 1,000 young people have been trained in areas such as construction, carpentry, welding, and plumbing. Mr. St. Pierre pointed out that, as a result of the demand for skilled workers in the mining industry, salaries are higher than the national average. Whereas the average salary in Burkina Faso is \$1,200, workers at the mine are paid between \$4,000 and \$30,000, depending on the trade. In addition, the company offers the local residents literacy programs and awareness programs on HIV/AIDS and malaria. It assists them with community gardens and stocks the local rivers with fish.

The delegation visited the new village located near the mine. It was built when several small villages were relocated to make way for the mine. The local people were consulted during the construction process to ensure that the new village would be suitable. The village houses some 12,000 people and includes 1,666 dwellings, 165 shops, two churches and a mosque, and two schools. The water system in particular is a significant improvement. Instead of the one public water hydrant the village had previously, there are now 14, as well as seven pipes serving public buildings.

²³ IAMGOLD, "Essakane Project, Burkina Faso: Overview," <http://www.iamgold.com/English/Operations/Operating-Mines/Essakane/Overview/default.aspx> (accessed 1 October 2010).

13. Visit to an Agricultural Development Project

The delegation visited a CIDA-supported dairy farm on the outskirts of Ouagadougou. The Ferme Kiswendsida & Frères has been in operation since 1980 and today has 38 cows. The farmer studied in Saint-Hyacinthe, Québec to learn about modern techniques. Thanks to crossbreeding local breeds with North American breeds and providing the cows with improved diet, the farmer has increased average daily milk production from roughly 1.5 litres per cow to 16 to 20 litres per cow. This is 25% higher than other commercial operators in Burkina Faso. The delegation saw corn stalks being mechanically shredded to create silage, which will be used as fodder for the cows.

The delegation was impressed by the relatively modern farming practices being employed on the dairy farm and was encouraged to see that the transfer of basic technology can be used to significantly increase production. This know-how can also be shared.

14. Meeting with the Réseau des Caisses Populaires du Burkina and the Confédération des Réseaux de Caisses Populaires

The delegation met the Director General of the Réseau des Caisses Populaires du Burkina (RCPB), Mr. Daouda Sawadogo and the Director General of the Confédération des Institutions Financières de l'Afrique de l'Ouest, Mr. Alpha Ouédraogo. The RCPB was described as a shining example of cooperation. Begun in 1972, the RCPB received assistance from CIDA while becoming established, and now operates independently. However, CIDA continues to provide assistance to help with specific problems.

The RCPB is a leader in micro-credit in Burkina Faso, with some 158 outlets, coverage in 43 of the 45 provinces, and 673,000 members. Mr. Sawadogo described the RCPB's mission of providing credit to people who do not have access to conventional financial services. These people include farmers, craftspeople, and entrepreneurs. The RCPB provides services specifically intended for women. The challenges the RCPB is addressing include improving the professional capacities of its clients, developing of new products and services, and ensuring sound financial management.

In discussion with the delegation, Mr. Sawadogo provided information on interest rates (which are between 8.75% and 9.75% for loans), dividends (which are returned to the community rather than to individual members), and the need for increased capitalization. Regarding CIDA's assistance, he praised its help in creating self-supporting institutions. He noted, however, that Canadians tend to be shy about taking credit for their successes.

In a discussion about the possibility of offering mortgages, Mr. Sawadogo pointed out that because deposits in the Caisses Populaires are on a short-term basis, it would be risky to offer longer-term loans such as mortgages. He said that in order to do so, they would need stable funding from the state. This was noted by the parliamentarians from Burkina Faso in attendance, who said they would need to take time to study the issue. The parliamentarians subsequently raised the issue with the Speaker of the Assemblée nationale.

15. Working lunch with Canadian Businesses

The delegation held a working lunch with representatives of the Canadian businesses: GENIVAR, IAMGOLD, SEMAFO, Canadian Bank Note Company, and AECOM Tecslut Inc. The business representatives described their involvement in Burkina Faso, as well as some of the challenges of doing business there. Among the latter, it was pointed out that some ministries do not have the capacity to fulfil their mandates properly, and that training bureaucrats would help remedy the situation. They also discussed the lack of an income tax convention to address double-taxation and the lack of a Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (FIPA). The representatives also expressed satisfaction that Burkina Faso had revised its labour code.

The representatives said that, generally speaking, Burkina Faso was a good place to do business, there is little corruption, and the private sector can conduct its operations there in relative stability.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The delegation attended briefing sessions presented by Canadian officials in both Cotonou and Ouagadougou.

At the beginning of the visit to Burkina Faso, the delegation attended a meeting with the Burkina Faso-Canada Parliamentary Friendship Group. They were welcomed by the President of the Group, Mr. Tiémoko Konate, MP, who gave an overview of the Assemblée nationale and the structure of political parties. At the end of the visit, the delegation attended a meeting with the Speaker of the Assemblée nationale to provide him with feedback. The delegation and the Burkina Faso-Canada Parliamentary Friendship Group also released a joint communiqué (see Appendix).

The delegation also attended a lunch hosted by the Assemblée nationale of Benin, a dinner hosted by the Speaker of the Assemblée nationale of Burkina Faso, and a dinner hosted by the Canadian Ambassador to Burkina Faso.

CONCLUSION

Although Benin and Burkina Faso are different geographically – the first is located on the coast next to a regional power and the latter is a landlocked country with several unstable neighbours – both have similar development challenges. With low levels of development, poor infrastructure, and undiversified economies that are vulnerable to external shocks, they face daunting challenges as they try to become integrated in the global economy. Fortunately, although they only made the transition to democracy in 1991, both Benin and Burkina Faso are relatively well-governed stable democracies. The delegation felt that maintaining this stability will be crucial if their development strategies are to succeed.

In Benin, the delegation was impressed by the vibrancy of Cotonou and by the vast number of small shops and businesses. At the same time, it took note of the dilapidated infrastructure. It also heard that the global economic crisis had had an impact on Benin. The delegation appreciated learning about the Government of Benin's strategy for addressing its development challenges.

The delegation was encouraged by the openness of the Beninese and their willingness to discuss the economic, social, and political situation. The delegation was impressed by the commitment that representatives of civil society groups have to their causes and by their plans to hold the government accountable by measuring the difference between planned spending and actual spending. It appreciated the frank discussion it held with them.

The delegation was also pleased to hear from journalists who are using their outlets to question government policies. Although press freedom is still evolving in Benin, the delegation was encouraged that the journalists it met are doing their best to practice journalism in the way one would expect in a democratic society. The delegation said it would continue to follow the issue of press freedom in the country.

The delegation was struck by Benin's lively political scene, which includes a multitude of parties competing in the lead-up to the presidential and legislative elections in March 2011. At the same time, it was concerned with the administration of elections. The delegation heard that election laws must be passed for each election and that the Commission électorale nationale autonome (CENA) must be re-established as well. The delegation also remarked on the lack of resources available to the permanent administrative secretariat of the CENA. Finally, the delegation noted the concerns raised by the UNPD official, who said the UNDP is working to establish a permanent voters list and doing what it can to ensure a credible election result in order to avoid violence. The delegation felt that Benin would benefit from assistance in the area of developing permanent election laws and in building capacity to administer elections.

Regarding the bilateral relationship with Canada, the delegation was told that it was good, but that there is room for improvement. Attitudes towards Canada are positive, and it is appreciated for its welcoming approach and for its education system. The Beninese who had travelled to Canada said that it has the advantage of offering the North American experience in French.

During discussions with Beninese officials, a few irritants in the bilateral relationship were raised, along with hopes for enhanced cooperation in a number of areas.

The irritant that was raised most often was that of the need to travel to Ghana in order to obtain a Canadian visa. The 680-kilometre round-trip involves crossing two frontiers and Ghana is an English-speaking country, which causes problems for French-speaking Beninese. The delegation felt that improving this situation would go a long way to improving relations between the two countries, and resolved to write to the appropriate Canadian officials.

The second major irritant was Benin's omission from the CIDA list of countries of focus. Ministers expressed disappointment, given that Benin needs assistance to develop its democracy. They were unsure where that left Benin. They hoped that Benin would be included in the list the next time it is revised. They also hoped that Canada would host a visit from the President of Benin in the near future.

In terms of enhanced cooperation, Benin would like assistance from Elections Canada in improving the administration of its elections. Benin also said it would like to re-launch the cooperation with the Correctional Service of Canada that had taken place between

1999 and 2001. Finally, Benin said it would welcome assistance in the area of child and maternal health. In each case, the delegation said it would relay these requests for assistance.

In Burkina Faso, the delegation felt that despite the obvious challenges, the country is on the right track. It heard repeatedly about the people's willingness to work hard and their eagerness to learn. It was also encouraged by the country's stability and its efforts to develop laws and regulations that provide a predictable environment for investment. The delegation heard that Canadian companies operating there face relatively few obstacles to doing business.

The delegation was very impressed by IAMGOLD's Essakane Mine, both by the installation itself and by the efforts the company has put into safeguarding the environment and in accommodating local residents. The latter includes the employment of local people, the construction of a new village for relocated people, and the establishment of programmes to improve health, education, and farming practices.

The delegation felt that Burkina Faso's development strategy takes an honest view of the challenges facing the country. It noted that much of work must be done at the most basic levels – providing adequate education, health, and food for the population. It was particularly struck by the extent to which malaria is a serious health problem and by the high percentage of children who die before the age of five.

Regarding the state of democracy, the delegation appreciated that Burkina Faso is a very young democracy and that much of the population will require more education before being able to participate fully. At the same time, the delegation was concerned about the shortage of resources available to the Commission électorale nationale indépendante (CENI), which prevents it from fulfilling its mandate of educating the population about their voting rights. It also took note of the concerns raised by opposition deputies, who described obstacles to participating in opposition parties.

With regard to freedom of the press, the delegation observed that the Conseil supérieur de la communication plays an active role in regulating what can be said on broadcast media. Although the journalists the delegation met described a relatively free press, with publications that openly comment on government policies, it was also clear there is a certain amount of self-censorship, particularly among the publicly owned media.

The delegation was encouraged to hear from civil society groups that their situation is improving and that the government has developed a more positive attitude towards them. The groups appear to be able to perform their work freely.

Regarding Burkina Faso's role in the region, the delegation learned with interest how it promotes regional stability, which Burkina Faso regards as necessary for the region's development. The delegation also heard that although ECOWAS is becoming more effective, more work needs to be done. It has had some successes in promoting the free movement of people, in standardizing rules regarding the modification of election laws, and in sanctioning member countries that do not respect governance standards. On the other hand, it was noted that while some member countries use the same currency, not all member countries do.

Bilateral relations with Canada were described as fruitful and the hope was expressed that the two countries will find additional ways of working together. Canada's higher education system was praised, and it was noted that it offered training in both French and English. The delegation was also pleased to learn about successful development programmes in the areas of agriculture and the establishment of caisses populaires.

Government ministers expressed the hope that Canada would provide additional help in the areas of developing human capital and the reduction of poverty. As in Benin, Ministers expressed disappointment at not being included in CIDA's list of countries of focus.

In both Benin and Burkina Faso, the delegation found it remarkable that so many of the high-level officials it met had some kind of connection to Canada. They had either studied there, have children studying there, or have relatives living there.

Attitudes toward Canada are positive and both countries would appreciate an enhanced relationship with Canada. Both countries expressed disappointment at being left off the list of CIDA's countries of focus. The delegation wondered whether the list accurately reflects the state of Canada's commitment to the countries and felt that the list itself may have become a distraction in the relationships.

In both countries, the delegation was encouraged by the presence of media outlets that comment on government policy. At the same time, it felt that press freedom is still at an embryonic stage and it expressed its hope that it will continue to develop. Likewise, the delegation was impressed by the efforts civil society groups are making to promote human rights and good governance.

In both Benin and Burkina Faso, the delegation remarked on the shortage of resources for the Assemblée nationale and for deputies. It was particularly concerned by the lack of resources for the electoral commissions.

With regard to regional integration, both Benin and Burkina Faso are active players in the region. They look to organizations such as ECOWAS to safeguard regional stability through the development of common approaches to governance issues.

Parliamentarians are playing a role in regional integration through their participation in regional economic communities.

In conclusion, Benin and Burkina Faso are stable countries with potential for growth, and their commitment to democratic government makes them attractive partners for Canada. Canada enjoys a good reputation, and many people in positions of influence have personal ties with Canada. Both Benin and Burkina Faso would welcome an enhanced relationship with Canada, which the Association supports.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For their help in making the visit to Benin a success, the delegation would like to thank Canadian Ambassador H.E. Mme Isabelle Massip; Canadian Honorary Consul Mr. Joseph-Louis Hounton; Speaker Mathurin Nago; Mr. Salah Bendaoud, Counsellor with the Embassy of Canada; Mr. Pierre Fortin, Director, Canadian Cooperation Support Unit; Mr. Serge Dansou, Assistant Director, Canadian Cooperation Support Unit; and Mr. Laurent Gauthier, Project Director, Oxfam Québec.

For their help in making the Burkina Faso leg of the visit a success, the delegation would like to thank Canadian Ambassador H.E. Jules Savaria; Speaker Roch Marc Christian Kaboré; Mr. Tiémoko Konate, MP; Mr. Lallo dit Hamado Bamogo, MP; Mr. Amadou Diemdioda Dicko, MP; Mr. Adama Soro, Trade Commissioner with the Canadian Embassy; Mr. Bernard Foucher, Director, Canadian Cooperation Support Unit; Mr. Richard Pelletier, Head of Canadian Cooperation; and Mr. Langis St-Pierre, Operations Manager, Essakane Mine.

Respectfully submitted,

The Honourable Mauril Bélanger,
P.C., M.P., Co-Chair
Canada-Africa Parliamentary
Association

The Honourable Raynell
Andreychuk, Senator, Co-Chair
Canada-Africa Parliamentary
Association

Travel Costs

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| ASSOCIATION | Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association |
| ACTIVITY | Bilateral Visits to Benin and Burkina Faso |
| DESTINATION | Cotonou, Benin and Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso |
| DATES | September 5 to 12, 2010 |
| DELEGATION | |
| SENATE | The Honourable Paul Massicotte |
| HOUSE OF COMMONS | The Honourable Mauril Bélanger Lois Brown Robert Carrier |
| STAFF | Maxime Ricard Michael Dewing |
| TRANSPORTATION | \$68,126.70 |
| ACCOMMODATION | \$5,496.32 |
| HOSPITALITY | \$2,931.48 |
| PER DIEMS | \$2,620.20 |
| OFFICIAL GIFTS | \$2,588.73 |
| MISCELLANEOUS | \$363.89 |
| TOTAL | \$82,127.32 |

Appendix

ASSEMBLÉE NATIONALE

BURKINA FASO

Unité-Progress-Justice

JOINT STATEMENT ON THE CANADA-AFRICA PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION DELEGATION'S BILATERAL VISIT TO BURKINA FASO

Ouagadougou, September 7 to 12, 2010

As part of a bilateral visit, a delegation from the Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association travelled to Burkina Faso from September 7 to 12, 2010.

The delegation was led by Mauril Bélanger, MP, Co-Chair of the Association. He was accompanied by Lois Brown, MP, Vice-Chair of the Association; Paul Massicote, Senator, Director of the Association; and Robert Carrier, MP, Director of the Association. The delegation was assisted by Maxime Ricard, Secretary of the Association, and Michael Dewing, Analyst for the Association.

The objectives of the visit were as follows:

- to strengthen bilateral ties and parliamentary cooperation;
- to engage parliamentarians on the issues of democracy, governance and the economy;
- to strengthen relations with regional organizations, particularly the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); and
- to inform the delegates about Canada's activities in the region through contacts with parliamentarians, government officials, civil society groups and businesses.

To meet these objectives, the delegation met with Burkinabe parliamentarians, government officials and representatives of political parties, representatives from Burkina Faso institutions and civil society organizations. In addition, the delegation

made site visits and saw some of the country's socioeconomic progress and also that made by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

During their stay, the delegation was granted an audience with **His Excellency Roch Marc Christian KABORÉ**, Speaker of the Assemblée nationale. The two parties exchanged information on life in their respective institutions, parliamentary cooperation and issues of mutual interest.

Mr. Bélanger and his delegation were also received by **His Excellency Blaise COMPAORÉ**, President of Burkina Faso and President of the Council of Ministers, together with the Speaker of the Assemblée and Burkinabe parliamentarians. The discussions with the President of Burkina Faso touched on peace in that region of Africa, democracy, the vision and the priorities for an emerging Burkina Faso, and bilateral relations with Canada.

The Canadian delegation also took part in working sessions with the Commission électorale nationale indépendante, the Conseil supérieur de la communication, parliamentarians from the majority and from the opposition, civil society groups, and the national media.

Several ministers, including the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Regional Cooperation, Economics and Finance, Mines, Quarries and Energy, Health, and Women's Equality made highly informative presentations to the Canadian delegation.

During an information session on Burkina Faso's Assemblée nationale, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, the African Parliamentary Union, the Africa-Caribbean-Pacific-European Union Joint Parliamentary Assembly, the ECOWAS Parliament, the UEMOA Inter-Parliamentary Committee, and the Parliamentary Union of the Organization of the Islamic Conference Member States, the Canadian parliamentarians and the Burkina Faso-Canada Parliamentary Friendship Group learned about each other's democratic experiences and the role of the Burkinabe parliament in regional and international bodies. They also had exchanges on international cooperation and parliamentary diplomacy, the latter with a focus on inter-parliamentary action for peace, inter-parliamentary cooperation and democracy.

At the end of their discussions, the parties congratulated each other for the emerging consensus on the matters discussed and on the warm and constructive working atmosphere throughout the sessions.

The Canadian delegation also travelled to locations where socio-economic progress is being made. They visited the Essakane gold mine in the Sahel region, the local CIDA offices, a dairy farm and the Fédération des caisses populaires du Burkina Faso. The delegation met with Canadian companies doing business in Burkina Faso, saw the Laongo granite sculpture park and visited Ouagadougou's handicrafts village.

At the end of their stay in Burkina Faso, the head of the delegation, Mr. Bélanger, thanked the Speaker of the Assemblée nationale and all the Burkinabe parliamentarians and officials for their warm welcome and for all their hospitality throughout the Canadians' visit. In particular, the Canadian delegation mentioned how helpful the Burkina Faso–Canada Parliamentary Friendship Group and its president, Dr. Tiémoko KONATE, had been. Mr. Bélanger promised to welcome them with the same enthusiasm when the Group decides to make a trip to Canada.

Mr. Bélanger also thanked **His Excellency Jules SAVARIA**, Canada's Ambassador to Burkina Faso, and his assistants for their valuable help in preparation for and during the visit.

Ouagadougou, September 12, 2010

**President of the Burkina Faso-Canada
Parliamentary Friendship Group**

**Co-Chair of the Canada-Africa
Parliamentary Association**

Deputy Tiémoko KONATE

Mauril BÉLANGER, MP