



**Report of the
Canadian Parliamentary Delegation of the
Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas, (FIPA)
Canadian Section**

to the

**Fifth Plenary Meeting of the
Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas
Bogotá, Colombia
November 19-21, 2006**

A delegation of seven parliamentarians represented Canada at the Fifth Plenary Meeting of the Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas (FIPA) in Bogotá, Colombia.

Report

INTRODUCTION

A delegation of seven parliamentarians represented Canada at the Fifth Plenary Meeting of the Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas (FIPA) in Bogotá, Colombia. The delegation was led by Mr. James Bezan, MP. Also attending from the House of Commons were Mr. Larry Miller; Mr. Mario Silva; and Mr. Lui Temelkovski. The Senate of Canada was represented by the Hon. Céline Hervieux-Payette, PC, outgoing President of FIPA; Senator Nancy Ruth, OC; and Senator Marcel Prud'homme, PC. The delegation was assisted by Ms. Kerrie Rodier, secretary to the delegation, and Mr. Michael Holden, analyst to the delegation. Also present was Ms. Anouk St.-Arnaud from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT).

Before the Plenary Assembly got under way, a meeting of the FIPA Executive Committee was held on 18 November. Senator Hervieux-Payette presided over the meeting. Mr. Bezan also participated in his capacity as Canada's representative on the Executive Committee.

The Plenary Meeting itself took place during 19-21 November 2006, hosted by the Congress of Colombia. It was attended by over 80 parliamentarians from 19 countries. Each of the four FIPA sub-regions was represented: North America; Central America; the Caribbean; and South America. For the fifth consecutive year, the United States was not represented at the meeting.

This report provides an overview of the Plenary Assembly and working group sessions. The official Plenary Assembly report, as well as the complete reports and recommendations of each working group, will be posted on the FIPA Web site at a later date.

BACKGROUND: FIPA AND CANADIAN INVOLVEMENT

FIPA is an independent network of the national legislatures of the member governments of the Organization of American States (OAS). Its goal is to promote parliamentary participation in the inter-American system and to develop inter-parliamentary dialogue on issues of importance to the citizens of the hemisphere. In providing a forum for parliamentarians of the Americas to engage with each other on issues of hemispheric interest and allowing participating parliamentarians to bring broadly considered recommendations on these issues back to their home legislatures, FIPA works to improve inter-American cooperation and democratic development.

Canada has been strongly involved in FIPA since its inaugural meeting, hosted by the Parliament of Canada in Ottawa, in March 2001. Senator Hervieux-Payette was the first FIPA President, acclaimed to that position in 2002. In 2006, she completed her second term as President. Senator Hervieux-Payette will continue to be active on FIPA's Executive Committee, sitting in the newly created position of Immediate Past-President of FIPA.

Furthermore, the absence of the United States from FIPA's ongoing activities virtually guarantees Canada one of the two North American positions on the FIPA Executive Committee, the other going to Mexico. Mr. Bezan, as head of the Canadian section of FIPA, is currently Canada's representative on the Executive Committee.

In addition, the FIPA Technical Secretariat is incorporated in Canada and based in Ottawa, and Canada is instrumental in maintaining the FIPA Web site. This site also hosts the Virtual Parliament of the Americas, which allows FIPA's working groups to continue their discussions, as is done in a parliamentary chamber or committee room – but using electronic communication and support services to overcome physical separation.

OPENING SESSION OF THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY

Following welcoming remarks, the first session of the Plenary Assembly began with a speech by the Honourable Senator Nancy Patricia Gutiérrez of Colombia. The senator spoke of the importance of hemispheric cooperation, and of the importance to democracy of forums like FIPA which allow for open debate on issues of mutual concern. She then discussed specific issues related to each of the Assembly's four working groups: trade and integration; poverty reduction; drug trafficking; and women parliamentarians. She also drew attention to the late date of the Plenary Assembly, explaining that the delay was due to elections held in Colombia earlier in the year. Finally, Senator Gutiérrez thanked Senator Hervieux-Payette for her hard work and dedication to FIPA over the years, and also thanked Canada for its generous support of the forum.

As President of FIPA, Senator Hervieux-Payette was the next to speak. She began by welcoming the delegates and thanked the Congress of Colombia for hosting the event. She provided an overview of FIPA's recent activities and how its work has borne fruit over the years, specifically in areas like anti-terrorism and democracy, as well as in involving parliamentarians in economic and trade development within the region. Senator Hervieux-Payette also drew attention to what she saw as the priorities facing FIPA in the days ahead: increasing focus on learning and education in the Americas; the need to increase institutional linkages with other hemispheric organizations like the OAS and the Summit of the Americas; and the need to respect diversity. On the latter point, Senator Hervieux-Payette called on all delegates to support a recommendation that FIPA member countries ratify the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

The guest speaker at the opening session of the Plenary Assembly was Mr. Victor Rico, representing the Secretary General of the OAS. Mr. Rico shared with the assembly his ideas on issues related to the development of democracy in the hemisphere, particularly the value and success of the Inter-American Democratic Charter (IADC). He also highlighted the important role played by FIPA in supporting democracy, notably in its assistance of the government in Nicaragua in 2005.

Mr. Rico called attention to four issues facing the hemisphere, discussing each in turn. The first was democracy. He began by pointing to a positive sign; there were 14

elections in the Americas in 2006. At the same time, however, he cautioned that democracy is more than just elections; elections alone have not produced benefits for many of the poorest in the region. Mr. Rico's second point was related to the first: he observed that many Latin American countries have democratic freedoms, but high levels of inequality between the rich and the poor. Noting that this combination can lead to instability, he called on those present to help find a solution to the issues of inequality and poverty in the region.

The third and fourth topics of Victor Rico's presentation were regional integration and security. On the former, he observed that integration was a broader concept than just trade; it also meant cooperation in areas like infrastructure and energy, as well as the need for countries to work together to overcome the issues that may divide them. On the topic of security, Mr. Rico stressed the importance of security to all countries in the hemisphere and discussed how a lack of safety can be a destabilizing force in the region. He highlighted drug trafficking – one of FIPA's working group topics – as an example of a security-related concern in many countries in the Americas.

Senator Hervieux-Payette followed Mr. Rico's speech by presenting the Plenary Assembly's program for approval, briefly outlining the meeting's rules, and by nominating Colombian Senator Nancy Patricia Gutiérrez as the President of the Plenary Meeting. She also provided an overview of recent progress in administration and funding, and of a series of proposed amendments to the FIPA regulations.

In addition, Senator Hervieux-Payette presented FIPA's annual report, which included an update on several of FIPA's ongoing projects. These projects included a trip by the Group of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas to Haiti in September 2005, aimed at supporting women parliamentarians in that country, as well as a mentorship program designed to allow new women parliamentarians to benefit from the insight of their more experienced counterparts in the region.

She also provided an overview of the two most recent meetings of the FIPA Executive Committee in Guatemala and Washington, D.C. At those meetings, it was reaffirmed that FIPA has an important role to play in building the capacity of legislators to address hemispheric issues. To that end, Senator Hervieux-Payette reported that FIPA International, in conjunction with Carleton University's Centre for Trade Policy and Law and DFAIT, would be offering a two-day seminar entitled *Trade Knowledge Networks for Parliamentarians* in February 2007. This seminar would be open to 25-30 parliamentarians from across the hemisphere. Its goal is to advance parliamentarians' knowledge of trade issues and promote informed dialogue on matters of international trade and investment.

Finally, those present were given an overview of the Plenary Assembly's working groups, their chairs and speakers. The three concurrent working groups were on trade, integration and development policies in the Americas; strategies to reduce poverty and inequality; and the fight against drug trafficking. In addition, there would be two meetings of the Group of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas.

WORKING GROUPS

A. Working Group on Trade, Integration and Development Policies in the Americas

The Working Group on Trade, Integration and Development Policies in the Americas was chaired by Canadian Member of Parliament James Bezan. It began with a presentation by Mr. Paulo Giordano, Trade Economist with the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB). Mr. Giordano summarized a discussion paper entitled *The Pressure of Globalization on Trade and Integration Policies: Challenges and Opportunities for Latin America and the Caribbean*. His paper touched on five key points: the impact of emerging market powers like China and India on Latin America and the Caribbean; the perception of diminishing marginal returns to integration; the importance of appropriate supporting domestic policies to ensure that countries realize the potential benefits of trade and integration; the growing consensus regarding the relationship between development and integration – emphasized in the Aid-for-Trade initiative in the context of World Trade Organization (WTO) talks; and the role of international institutions in delivering aid for trade.

Following Mr. Giordano's warmly received presentation a respectful discussion ensued, touching on a number of subjects related to trade and integration. There was widespread agreement among participants as to the importance of hemispheric trade and integration, as well as on the issues facing the region. A number of those present shared with the group the trade and integration initiatives in their countries, as well as the domestic challenges they face. Poverty reduction, in particular, emerged as a major theme of this working group. Many participants stressed that trade growth is a means to an end (improving living standards), not an end unto itself. They maintained that complementary domestic policies are critical to ensuring that gains from trade are translated into meaningful economic and social progress.

In addition to those major themes, parliamentarians raised a number of issues, concerns and observations, including the following:

- There was a need for those present to convince their respective countries – as well as others in the Americas – of the benefits of regional integration. At the same time, parliamentarians noted that integration is more than just free trade – cooperation is needed in a wide range of social, political and cultural milieus.
- The emergence of China and its growing demand for natural resources has had a significant effect on the region and on resource industries in particular. Rising prices provide a short-term boom for companies but also encourage consolidation in the mining sector, which can have an adverse impact on communities.
- In the spirit of regional integration, concern was expressed with regard to the wall that the United States is planning to build along its southern border.
- While not completely applicable to the Americas, the integration experience in the European Union (EU) may provide some valuable lessons that could be tailored to the unique needs in, and situation of, the Americas.

Participants also debated the desirability of linking trade and trade agreements with other related policy concerns. Some felt that trade sanctions should be considered against countries that refuse to comply with environmental and labour standards, because those countries are essentially trading at an unfair advantage (from a cost-of-production perspective). Others disagreed, however, cautioning that such measures constitute non-tariff barriers to trade. These participants suggested that rich countries were not concerned with such standards when they were developing, but now wish to hold poorer countries to higher standards than they themselves met.

Based on these and other discussions at its three sessions, the Working Group made the following recommendations:

- It is important to pursue the Integration Agenda for the Americas; FIPA members were urged to reach a hemispheric agreement in which all bilateral agreements converge.
- WTO members are urged to resume multilateral trade negotiations to conclude the Doha Development Round, particularly with respect to opening up agricultural markets.
- All barriers to international trade must be eliminated, including tariffs and trade-distorting subsidies. At the same time, it is necessary to preserve the capacity of countries to support their most sensitive sectors.
- Hemispheric integration requires FIPA member countries to dismantle all barriers to the free movement of people and all barriers that violate human rights.
- Complementary domestic policies intended to maximize the opportunities presented by integration should be encouraged, particularly policies related to: infrastructure; education; state modernization; rural, agricultural and fishery development; and science and technology.
- Policies that support energy integration should be created. These should take into account the challenges related to non-renewable resources and the opportunities offered by renewable energy sources such as biofuels and wind energy.
- Steps should be taken to protect intellectual property and free competition, as well as to eliminate piracy in these areas.
- Work is needed on sustainable development programs, as well as programs to alleviate poverty and improve living standards.
- The potential impact of China and India on the region requires FIPA member countries to design and implement policies, without delay, to deal with global competition. In that context, FIPA is requested to organize a dialogue with those countries.

- A fund with sufficient resources should be established to help the countries of the Americas and the Caribbean with the transition to a freer system of trade and with further hemispheric integration. The fund should place particular emphasis on: facilitating connectivity in the region; developing infrastructure (land, air and marine transport); and promoting small- and medium-sized businesses, in line with the “Aid-for-Trade” initiative of the WTO.
- FIPA members should engage the United States at every opportunity to encourage that country’s participation in FIPA.
- The members of FIPA should submit these recommendations to their respective parliaments and executive branches; they should work together with their own FIPA national executive representatives to ensure specific progress towards implementing the recommendations; and the chairpersons of each FIPA National Executive Committee should report on the progress achieved by their countries at the next FIPA Plenary Meeting.

B. Working Group on Strategies to Reduce Poverty and Inequality

Chilean Congressman Iván Alejandro Moreira Barros presided over the Working Group on Strategies to Reduce Poverty and Inequality. The Working Group began its deliberations with two presentations. On the first day, it heard from Ana Lucia Muñoz Mejía, Social Development Specialist at the Colombia Country Office of the Inter-American Development Bank, who presented a paper entitled *Poverty and Inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean*. On the second day, Amelita Armit, Program Vice President at the Parliamentary Centre in Ottawa, gave a presentation entitled *Strengthening Parliamentary Involvement in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Process*.

In her presentation, Dr. Muñoz outlined the challenges facing Latin America with regard to poverty and inequality: the region has the highest levels of inequality in the world; the number of poor is rising; and inequality of opportunity in areas like secondary education and access to health care is perpetuating poverty. For her part, Ms. Armit discussed the important role parliamentarians play in establishing poverty-reduction policies. She also provided an overview of the Parliamentary Centre’s programs and activities, using some recent initiatives in Africa as examples.

In the discussions that followed each of the presentations, parliamentarians reflected on the issue of poverty and inequality in their own countries. Several shared information on the specific problems and challenges they face at home, as well as the strategies employed by their countries to address those challenges.

It was pointed out in the discussions that poverty is especially common in certain social and demographic groups, notably in aboriginal communities, among single mothers, and with seasonal workers. This, to some, spoke of the importance of continuing to link inequality with poverty; until all citizens have equal access to education and health care, and until the sexes are treated equally, the root causes of poverty cannot be addressed.

Participants also noted that one of the major challenges facing poverty reduction is in translating economic growth into meaningful results for the poor. In spite of strong

performances in many of the region's economies, progress in alleviating poverty has been modest. Some parliamentarians suggested that a key policy tool to address this issue is the tax system. Given the wide gap between the rich and the poor in most Latin American countries, it was argued that the system of taxation in many countries needs to be improved so that more taxes are levied from those capable of paying.

The Working Group made the following recommendations:

- Countries in the region must consolidate their growth strategies.
- Social spending needs to be more effective and prioritized.
- International cooperation is needed in the fight against poverty reduction.
- Work on a political component to reduce poverty is needed. Part of the solution requires an economic element whereby the tax burden rises with wealth. As well, a social component to government poverty reduction strategies is needed.
- Universal education and the elimination of illiteracy are key components of poverty reduction. Also critical are: lowering infant mortality; creating a healthy work environment; providing on-the-job training; investing in science and technology; and reducing migration.
- Countries should exchange best practices in poverty reduction.
- As lawmakers, parliamentarians must find a way to implement the resolutions and initiatives introduced in the working groups and to make those recommendations binding.
- As an ethical imperative for the region, government resources must be effectively targeted and spent, thus fighting corruption. Parliamentarians are encouraged to propose transparency laws in their countries.
- A working group should be created that is dedicated exclusively to studies on how the tax burden affects socio-economic development in the economies of FIPA member countries. The group's mission would be to develop a study that establishes principles and proposes alternatives that will enable countries to achieve a fair and impartial tax scheme that ensures social development and helps to create jobs by increasing the production and wealth of each member state.

C. Working Group on Drug Trafficking

The Working Group on Drug Trafficking was chaired by Senator Sandra Husbands of Barbados. The group's sessions began with a presentation by Dr. Sandro Calvani, Representative of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in Colombia. Dr. Calvani spoke about recent developments with regard to the fight against illegal drugs in the Americas. These developments included an overview of trends in drug

crop production and manufacturing, as well as the steps being taken in some countries to control traffic in these drugs.

In general, the discussions focused on the necessity of strengthening and increasing efforts to eradicate the production and consumption of narcotics, and of reducing the violence, corruption and crime that result. Participants supported the development and introduction of alternative crop programs that would ensure better access to markets.

The Canadian parliamentarians played an active part in the discussions. The recommendations reflect the concerns they raised about the importance of prevention and education among young people, and the involvement and role of the media in the war on narcotics trafficking.

Following its deliberations, the Working Group presented the following recommendations to the Plenary Assembly:

- Parliamentarians are urged to work actively in their own countries and on the international stage in the interest of multilateral trade agreements that seek a change in the economic order.
- Countries must work internally to obtain the necessary funding and resources to establish crop substitution and job promotion programs. These will make it possible to reduce the social inequalities in these countries.
- To increase the likelihood that crop substitution programs will be successful, they should include components related to training, food security, transportation and access to markets, so as to avoid recidivism.
- Considering that demand is a powerful force that fuels production, as is recognized in the hemispheric strategy in the war on drugs, education programs should be developed at the school, family and community levels, in addition to gender-, child- and ethnic-oriented programs, to impart new values that deter drug consumption.
- The mass media should be careful about using images that create false icons and encourage violence and narcotic drug consumption. The media should be encouraged to take responsibility and become actively involved in the fight against drug trafficking, and in the creation of conditions that do not lead to violence and hallucinogenic substance abuse.
- An international forum should be convened to address the role of the mass media in imparting values that facilitate the war on drugs.
- Parliamentarians should try to reform the education system in an effort to strengthen the teaching of values and habits that prevent substance abuse.
- Parliamentarians should participate more actively in the discussion on social values and be more effective in promoting the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Drug Trafficking.

- Parliamentarians should encourage countries to update their laws on crime, seeking an alignment of norms, similar to the attempt made by Latin America in the 1990s. In this uniform legislation, activities such as illicit drug trafficking, asset laundering, corruption and the transshipment of illicit drugs should be regarded as crimes. For consumption cases, punishments should be gradual.
- Parliamentarians should promote and attempt to convene a meeting in connection with the OAS and the UN to discuss the creation of an inter-American or international court against drugs, as well as an agency with responsibility for interdiction.
- Efforts should be made to reinforce and increase international support for countries that are forced to wage war on drugs and to contend with asset laundering, corruption and the transshipment of these substances.
- FIPA parliamentarians should promote the United Nations Hemispheric Plan for the War on Drugs in their countries.

D. Group of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas

The Group of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas was chaired by Senator Céline Hervieux-Payette on the first day of its deliberations and by Senator Cecilia Matilde Lopez Montaño of Colombia, who was appointed President of the Group of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas, on the second day. Senator Hervieux-Payette began the proceedings on the first day by acknowledging the work of the previous chair of the Group, Congresswoman Margarita Stolbizer, who did not stand for re-election in Argentina and was thus no longer participating in the Group.

The main purpose of the Women's Group is to work toward the creation of conditions of gender equality in support of democratic governance, including greater female participation in the democratic process, the fight against poverty, education issues, action against domestic violence, and support for the relevant international conventions. During its meetings in Bogotá, the Group considered four potential projects that could be carried out as part of its Action Plan for 2006-2007.

These projects draw on work done in previous years and, it was stressed, were not considered to be mutually exclusive. The projects are:

- **Experience and Advice Sharing through the On-line Work Group.** This project would see women parliamentarians submit one-page papers on topics that could be used to inspire, encourage and assist women to become involved in politics. These submissions would be consolidated by the FIPA Secretariat, posted on the FIPA Web site and Virtual Parliament, or distributed by other means.
- **International Women's Week Outreach Project.** The FIPA Secretariat proposed to work with women parliamentarians across the Americas to participate in education and outreach projects associated with International Women's Week – the first week in March. These projects would see women

parliamentarians share their experiences and encourage other women to enter politics – either through visits to schools, women’s organizations, etc., or by inviting a small number of women leaders to join them in their offices for a day to observe the life of a parliamentarian and to provide political exposure and make personal connections.

- **Mentorship Program.** The FIPA Secretariat proposed to develop a list of experienced women parliamentarians willing to act as mentors for women newly elected to parliament or interested in entering politics. The list would be advertised on the FIPA Web site and widely distributed. Interested women would be invited to contact the Secretariat in order to be matched with a mentor.
- **Workshop on the Implementation of the Convention Against all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).** The FIPA Secretariat would collaborate with institutions like the World Bank Institute, the Parliamentary Centre, the IADB, the OAS and others to organize regional workshops to build the knowledge base of parliamentarians regarding CEDAW, and to enhance the ability of parliamentarians to implement CEDAW in their respective countries.

Following a review of these project proposals, the floor was opened for comments. In general, the parliamentarians present were supportive of these projects. In particular, many spoke out in favour of the mentorship program. Some parliamentarians suggested that the Group could improve its work in that area by consulting, and building linkages with, female leaders in the business world. Representatives from the Dominican Republic suggested that “democratic parity” – the desire to see female representation in the hemisphere’s parliaments increase – be added to the list.

In addition to the project proposals, the Group discussed the issues and challenges facing women in public life. Some spoke of the confrontational nature of politics; others discussed the need for women parliamentarians to go beyond focussing on issues of poverty and violence, and to share their valuable insight on wider economic issues as well. Still others expressed concern that women were not as supportive of one another in the political world as might be desirable.

On the second day of deliberations, the Women’s Group encouraged participants to volunteer their time and effort on one of the four projects listed above. Senator Nancy Ruth volunteered to work on the project regarding the implementation of CEDAW. She also expressed her interest in expanding the mandate of the project to include other international conventions such as United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Women’s Group also considered the idea of sending a delegation to Bolivia to discuss the issue of increasing the number of women in national parliaments. That country has made considerable progress in recent years in increasing the number of women parliamentarians. It was felt that the Women’s Group could learn from the Bolivian experience.

Following its two sessions, the Group of Women Parliamentarians approved and recommended the implementation of the 2006-2007 Work Plan.

SPECIAL SESSION OF THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY

On Monday, 20 November, a special session of the Plenary Assembly was held to hear an address by the President of the Republic of Colombia, His Excellency Álvaro Uribe Vélez. President Uribe was originally scheduled to address the assembly the previous day, but because of a previous commitment, he asked to postpone his address.

President Uribe spoke at length about a wide range of economic and social challenges facing Colombia, and South America more generally. His speech covered the subjects of the three major working group sessions.

On the issue of trade and integration, he drew attention to Colombia's recent efforts to liberalize markets and to open the country to trade and investment. He spoke about the country's free trade agreement with the United States, and about progress between Central America and the Andean Community; and he called on Venezuela to work with Colombia on the issue of regional energy supply. He also discussed his preference for multilateral trade negotiations at the WTO, rather than regional and bilateral trade agreements, stressing that Colombia's recent bilateral and regional initiatives were in part a response to the lack of progress at the WTO.

On the subject of poverty and inequality, President Uribe spoke of the relationship between economic integration and social opportunity. He also discussed the progress Colombia has made in reducing poverty and the various initiatives that the country has put in place to increase access to education, health care, clean drinking water and help for recent university graduates. In particular, he stressed the importance of microfinancing as a poverty-reduction tool. He invited those present to accompany him the following day to a poor region of the city where he would be present to see the first of these lines of credit being distributed.

President Uribe also spoke frankly about Colombia's ongoing war on drugs. He discussed current policies and activities such as the manual eradication program – the air spraying of drug crops – as well as an increased policy emphasis on biodiversity. Drug crops are a significant cause of deforestation of Colombia's jungles, leading the President to call drugs the “number one enemy of ecology.” Notwithstanding Colombia's anti-drug policies, President Uribe stressed that the best way to fight drugs (and the growing of drug crops) is economic growth – providing Colombians with an alternative. He called on “consumer countries” like the United States and European Union, which feed demand for these drugs, to increase their support.

Finally, President Uribe talked about a theme of previous FIPA Plenary Assemblies – terrorism. Specifically, he underscored the importance of maintaining security without resorting to totalitarianism and violating human rights. He also discussed recent improvements in safety and security in Colombia because of that country's fight against terrorism.

Originally, about one hour was allotted for President Uribe's address to the Plenary Assembly. In spite of the fact that the day's sessions were running behind schedule, the President not only spoke for a full hour – and well beyond his original scheduled departure – but following his speech he opened the floor for questions. A remarkably

open and frank dialogue ensued as the President took all questions, not shying away from controversial subjects and, in some cases, spontaneously debating parliamentarians from other countries. The President entertained questions for nearly another full hour. Delegates were very impressed by his openness and his generosity in terms of the amount of time he was willing to give the FIPA Plenary Assembly. Parliamentarians left the session with a very favourable impression of President Uribe.

FINAL SESSION OF THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY

The final session of the Plenary Assembly began with the presentation of the working groups' reports. Compared to previous years, there was very little debate as participants were in general agreement with the content and intention of the recommendations presented to the Plenary Assembly. The recommendations from the Working Group on trade and integration were received and adopted without amendment. The chair of the group, James Bezan, MP, took the opportunity to inform those present of the *Trade Knowledge Network for Parliamentarians in the Americas* project to be held in Ottawa in February 2007, hosted by FIPA and DFAIT.

The recommendations presented by the other three working groups also passed without significant disagreement. Only in the case of the Working Group on Drug Trafficking were minor amendments proposed. After a short discussion, these were adopted.

The next order of business for the Plenary Assembly was consideration of a recommendation to support the UNESCO Convention on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. This proposal was widely supported and the recommendation passed without debate.

The assembly then moved to the consideration of proposed amendments to the FIPA regulations. Most of these amendments were issues of translation and concordance, arising from the fact that FIPA regulations must be translated into English, French, Spanish and Portuguese. In some cases, amendments brought FIPA's regulations up to date to better reflect the evolution of the organization. Perhaps the most notable change was the inclusion of the Immediate Past-President of FIPA as a member of the Executive Committee. The purpose of this amendment was to allow the incoming president to have access to the experience and institutional memory of the post's previous occupant.

Senator Hervieux-Payette then updated the assembly on a meeting that was held between the FIPA Executive Committee and representatives of the executive of the Parliamentary Confederation of the Americas (COPA) earlier in the day. Like FIPA, COPA is a permanent inter-parliamentary forum for the countries in the Americas and the Caribbean. While the scope of the two associations is similar, there are some significant differences in composition and structure. Most notably, FIPA is an association of national parliamentarians while COPA welcomes parliamentarians from national, sub-national, and supra-national governments.

The two executive committees met to explore the possibility of a merger, creating a single forum in which parliamentarians from across the hemisphere can meet, as well as allowing parliamentarians to speak with a single voice. At that meeting, it was

decided that a special joint committee of the two organizations would be struck to explore the issues and outstanding questions surrounding a possible merger.

The assembly then turned to a series of elections for the upcoming year. First, they elected new members from each sub-region to the Executive Committee for a two-year mandate: from the North America sub-region, Mexico proposed Canada; from Central America, the Dominican Republic was proposed; from the Caribbean, Barbados nominated Trinidad and Tobago; and from South America, Chile nominated Colombia. Those countries join Mexico (North America), Guatemala (Central America), Grenada (Caribbean), and Chile (South America) on the Executive.

Second was the election of a new president of FIPA, as Senator Hervieux-Payette had completed her second and final term in the position. Representative Luiz Carlos Jorge Haully of Brazil was acclaimed President of FIPA. Representative Haully becomes only the second president in the association's brief history. He has been actively involved in FIPA since its inception in 2001 and will serve a two-year term as president.

The final election was for the host country for the Sixth Plenary Meeting of FIPA, to be held in 2007. No countries had offered to host the event prior to the start of the Bogotá Plenary Meeting, but at the meeting, representatives from the Dominican Republic offered to host next year's session. This offer was accepted by those present.

Following the elections, there were a number of closing speeches. Senator Hervieux-Payette spoke for the last time in her capacity as President of FIPA. The President of the Plenary Meeting, Colombian Senator Nancy Patricia Gutiérrez, thanked the participants and Canada for its support of FIPA. The final speaker was Dilian Francisca Toro, President of the Senate of Colombia.

Before the plenary meeting concluded, a surprise presentation was made. In recognition of her work as the President of FIPA, Senator Hervieux-Payette was awarded the Congressional Order of the Great Gold Cross for her "intellectual and moral merits" and for her "work performed to the benefit of friendship and co-operation ties among peoples." This medal is the highest honour that Colombia awards to any foreign or national citizen. It was a touching moment for the senator and a great honour for Canada.

CONCLUSION

As in past years, the Canadian delegation found this successful FIPA Plenary Meeting to be a rewarding and productive experience. These assemblies provide an excellent opportunity for Canadian parliamentarians to make contacts with their counterparts from across the Americas, to exchange ideas and perspectives on current issues, and to discuss common problems and policy challenges. The members of the delegation firmly believe that the value of these types of meetings, and notably of the face-to-face contact with other parliamentarians that they offer, is easily underestimated. We wish to stress that these trips require considerable effort on the part of all who participate, but offer even greater benefits.

We would also like to note that the Members of Parliament who participated in the FIPA Plenary in Bogotá did so with a great deal of dedication. Those who had participated in

previous FIPA assemblies found that this year's delegates were especially committed and worked together closely and in a congenial manner; in short, they represented Canada well.

In our deliberations following the meetings in Bogotá, we discussed a number of issues surrounding the Plenary Assembly and the participation of Canadians at events such as these. We wish to note, first, that the Congress of Colombia was an outstanding and generous host. It left a positive impression on all who attended. On a related matter, our entire Canadian delegation shared the view that Canadian parliamentarians should treat foreign delegations of parliamentarians visiting Canada with the same respect and courtesy as Canadian parliamentarians would expect, and in fact receive, abroad. To that end, we believe that Canadian parliamentarians who wish to represent Canada abroad should be equally prepared to host incoming delegations to Canada. We suggest that all political parties keep records of the Members of Parliament who participate in hosting incoming delegations and that only those who do so should be considered for outgoing trips.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the support provided by DFAIT and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) in the form of an Ottawa briefing, as well as the assistance of Ms. Anouk St.-Arnaud who accompanied the delegation. We also wish to thank Ambassador Matthew Levin and officials from the Canadian Embassy in Bogotá for their technical support and for hosting a reception for all FIPA participants.

Respectfully submitted,

Mr. James Bezan, MP
Chair
Canadian Section
of the Inter-Parliamentary Forum
of the Americas (FIPA)

Hon. Céline Hervieux-Payette, P.C.,
Senator
Vice-Chair
Canadian Section
of the Inter-Parliamentary Forum
of the Americas (FIPA)

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Section of the Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas (FIPA)
ACTIVITY	Fifth Plenary Meeting
DESTINATION	Bogotá, Colombia
DATES	November 19-21, 2006
SENATORS	Hon. Céline Hervieux-Payette, Senator Hon. Marcel Prud'homme, PC, Senator Hon. Nancy Ruth, Senator
MEMBERS	Mr. James Bezan, MP Mr. Larry Miller, MP Mr. Mario Silva, MP Mr. Lui Temelkovski, MP
STAFF	Mr. Michael Holden, Analyst Ms. Kerrie Rodier, Secretary to the delegation
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 20,798.03
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 3,961.89
HOSPITALITY	\$ 99.50
PER DIEMS	\$ 1,761.26
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 255.75
MISCELLANEOUS/REGISTRATION FEES	MISCELLANEOUS \$ 17.75 ADVANCES \$ 450.00
TOTAL	\$ 27,344.18