



**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation to the
Seminar of the APF Network of Women Parliamentarians on
the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of
Discrimination Against Women**

Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF)

**Port-au-Prince, Haiti
May 3 and 4, 2007**

Report

The Parliamentary Delegation of the Canadian Branch which attended the Seminar of the APF Network of Women Parliamentarians on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), held in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on May 3 and 4, 2007, has the honour to present its report. Comprising the Honourable Rose-Marie Losier-Cool, Senator and Vice-President of the Network of Women Parliamentarians, the delegation was accompanied by Jean Michel Roy, Executive Secretary to the Branch.

Eight Haitian women parliamentarians took part in the seminar: four representatives from the Senate, including the Vice-President, Edmonde Supplice Beauzille; the Chair of the Women's Rights Committee, Céméphise Gilles; the First Secretary, Evelyne Cheron; and four members of the House of Deputies.

Thursday, May 3, 2007

Opening of proceedings

Senator Rose-Marie Losier-Cool, Vice-President of the Network, presided over the opening of proceedings. In her opening address, the senator recalled that at the request of the Haitian Parliament, the APF held a seminar in Port-au-Prince in March 2007, with parliamentarians from Benin, Burkina Faso, France, Quebec and Switzerland as speakers. They addressed the legislative duties and control of parliament, mechanisms for government stability and political groupings in parliament.

As to the Network, the Senator noted that its objective is to encourage greater participation of women in their country's political, economic, social and cultural life and in the Francophonie as a whole. More specifically, by creating the Network, women parliamentarians have sought to strengthen the role of women in the APF and member parliaments by promoting the sharing of experiences and solidarity among Francophone women parliamentarians.

The senator added that the Network serves a dual purpose. As a political body, it discusses all matters of common interest to its members and allows senators and deputies to offer a woman's perspective on matters debated by the APF. It meets at the APF Annual Session, and contributes through debate and proposals. The Network also plays a role with respect to cooperation, by organizing seminars on CEDAW and devoting a great deal of its energy to raising awareness of this Convention, which was adopted in 1979 and ratified by 184 countries, including Haiti in 1981. Seventy-six of these countries are also signatory to the optional protocol to CEDAW adopted in 1999. Since 2004, the APF has held four seminars on CEDAW, in Mali, Madagascar, Gabon

and Tunisia. The seminar in Port-au-Prince is the fifth and the first held in the Americas Region.

In closing, the senator described the Convention as an international accord on women's rights that calls upon member states to take the necessary measures to allow women to fully enjoy their rights. CEDAW is thus the primary international legal instrument for the promotion of women's rights.

Yet nearly 30 years after CEDAW was adopted, a number of its provisions are still not respected. Many national laws contain provisions that violate women's rights. CEDAW itself is weakened by too many conditions, many of which contradict its objectives. Moreover, too few countries have ratified the optional protocol of 1999 to date, which is nevertheless important.

While progress towards true equality between the sexes is hampered by entrenched attitudes, the slow progress is often due to the lack of political will among our member states. As representatives of the people, parliamentarians have an important role to play in this regard. Specifically, they must ensure that legislation is consistent with the principles and provisions of CEDAW.

Presentation by the OIF representative

His Excellency Amado Pitroipa, Ambassador of the *Organisation internationale de la Francophonie* (OIF), and coordinator of OIF programs for Caribbean states, recalled that the seminar is consistent with the objective of consolidating democracy in Haiti and invited members of the press present to support women parliamentarians in their efforts to become part of political life.

Presentation by the Parliamentary Centre of Canada representative

François Desruisseaux, coordinator of the Project Supporting the Haitian Parliament at the Parliamentary Centre of Canada, gave an overview of the project as follows.

Created in December 2006 with funding from the Canadian International Development Agency, the objective of the Project Supporting the Haitian Parliament of the Parliamentary Centre is to contribute to the strengthening of political governance and the promotion of national dialogue. The primary objective of this project is to enhance the effectiveness of the Haitian legislature through structuring the participation of parliamentarians, both men and women, in the country's good governance.

The project has four components:

- 1) Developing the skills of parliamentarians (members and senators) and of parliamentary staff (men and women);
- 2) Improving relations between the executive and the legislative branches by promoting dialogue between the two branches;
- 3) Opening Parliament to members of the public; and
- 4) More effective management and functioning of the legislative and administrative services of both houses of Parliament.

Presentation by the Minister for the Status of Women and Women's Rights

Marie Laurence Jocelyn Lassègue, Minister for the Status of Women and Women's Rights, gave a presentation on CEDAW's application in Haiti. The Minister recalled that the Convention was ratified by the Haitian Parliament on July 20, 1981, and that right after its ratification, an order was issued on the legal age for women to marry. Spouses are now considered equal before the law.

Another giant step for Haiti was the order issued in July 2005, decriminalizing adultery and at the same time eliminating the discrimination that persisted in such cases. Killing a wife caught in the act of adultery is no longer a legal defence. Adultery is now only considered as grounds for divorce. This issue also strengthens the criminal nature of rape, changing it from a crime against honour to a crime against a person.

Presentation by a CEDAW expert

Ahoua Ouadréogo, a CEDAW expert from 1992 to 2000, gave a presentation on the basic provisions of CEDAW and the optional protocol to the Convention, which strengthens the protection and promotion of women's rights by offering women an international right of recourse when all national avenues of recourse have been exhausted. Ms. Ahaoua Ouadréogo also spoke about the CEDAW Committee, whose mandate is to follow up on progress in the application of the Convention. Finally, Ms. Ahoua Ouadréogo reported on CEDAW's application in Burkina Faso.

Presentation by the Canadian representative

Senator Losier-Cool gave a presentation on CEDAW's application in Canada, referring to Canada's regular reports to the United Nations regarding CEDAW.

Canada has submitted five regular reports to the United Nations since it ratified CEDAW in December 1981: the first in June 1983, the second in January 1988, the third in September 1992, the fourth in September 1995 and the fifth in April 2002. This last

report, which covered the situation in Canada up to March 1998 only, was updated with an addendum in December 2002, covering the situation in Canada up to that date. This addendum confirms Canada's ratification in October 2002 of the optional protocol to the Convention.

In addition to outlining the measures adopted by the provinces and territories, the most recent report also explains Canada's *Federal Plan for Gender Equality* of 1995, for which over 20 federal departments share responsibility, under the coordination of the Status of Women Canada. This plan, originally for five-years, was extended for another five years and was renamed the *Agenda for Gender Equality*.

The eight objectives of the Canadian plan are: the establishment of gender-based analysis of all federal activities; enhancing the financial autonomy and well-being of women; enhancing the physical and psychological well-being of women; reducing violence against women and girls in society; promoting gender equality in Canadian cultural life; promoting gender equality in the federal public service; including women's perspectives in public affairs; and promoting gender equality internationally.

Moreover, in its review in January 2003 of Canada's Fifth Report, the CEDAW Committee noted legislative disparities among the provinces and territories of Canada and stressed the importance of CEDAW's consistent application in all parts of Canada.

Noting the economic recovery in Canada, which has recently overcome its deficit, the Committee also recommended that Canada do more to fight poverty among women, to counter violence against women and socio-economic discrimination against Aboriginal and immigrant women. Finally, the Committee encouraged Canada to increase the number of women in decision-making positions at all levels.

Presentation by a CEDEF Committee expert

Huguette Bokpe Gnacadja gave a presentation on the procedure for CEDAW member states to submit reports to the United Nations Secretary General on legislative, judicial, administrative or other measures that have been adopted to following through on the Convention and on progress in its regard. This report is examined by the CEDAW Committee. The presentation also provided a follow-up on the implementation of the Convention and the role of parliamentarians.

Presentation by the representative of the Communauté française de Belgique

Brigitte Defalque, deputy, burgomaster, gave a presentation on equality between men and women in Belgium.

Friday, May 4, 2007

Presentation by a United Nations expert

Madame Nadine Puechguirbal gave a presentation on gender and equality in Haiti, the related challenges and parliamentarians' responsibility.

In closing, Ms. Puechguirbal invited Haitian women parliamentarians to talk about their political experience. They in turn described the various obstacles they face in the electoral process and spoke about the role of Haitian women in politics.

Respectfully submitted,
Rose-Marie Losier-Cool, Senator
Member of the Canadian Branch of the APF

Travel Cost

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Branch of the <i>Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF)</i>
ACTIVITY	Seminar of the APF Network of Women Parliamentarians on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
DESTINATION	Port-au-Prince, Haiti
DATES	May 3 and 4, 2007
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Rose-Marie Losier-Cool, senator
HOUSE OF COMMONS	
STAFF	Mr. Jean Michel Roy
TRANSPORTATION	\$3,304.11
ACCOMMODATION	\$528.17
HOSPITALITY	\$0.00
PER DIEMS	\$138.23
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$0.00
MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES	\$0.00
TOTAL	\$3,970.51