

Canadian Group
Inter-Parliamentary Union



Groupe canadien
Union interparlementaire

**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
respecting its participation at the
133rd IPU Assembly and Related Meetings**

Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

**Geneva, Switzerland
October 17 to 21, 2015**

Report

Overview

A delegation from the Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) attended the 133rd IPU Assembly and Related Meetings from 17 to 21 October 2015 in Geneva, Switzerland. The Canadian delegation was composed of the following members:

- the Hon. Leo Housakos, Senator, Speaker of the Senate and head of the delegation;
- the Hon. Dennis Dawson, Senator;
- the Hon. Joan Fraser, Senator.

The IPU assemblies are an important forum for Canadian parliamentary diplomacy. Multilateral work takes place through the meetings of various committees and other bodies that are held during an IPU assembly, and bilateral work occurs through the important side meetings that take place during an IPU assembly.

Throughout the 133rd Assembly, Canadian delegates participated in discussions with their counterparts and in various debates in an effort to further the principles of representative democracy, rule of law, human rights and gender equality. Delegates also addressed matters pertinent to Canada's foreign policy, including migration, anti-terrorist activities, and the role of the International Court of Justice in settling international disputes.

The IPU: Background

Established in 1889, the IPU is the international organization of parliaments of sovereign states. The IPU:

- fosters contacts, co-ordination, and the exchange of experiences among parliamentarians of all member parliaments;
- considers questions of international interest and concern, and expresses its views on relevant issues in order to bring about action by parliaments and parliamentarians;
- contributes to the defence and promotion of human rights, which are essential aspects of parliamentary democracy and development;
- contributes to better knowledge of the working of representative institutions, and to the strengthening and development of their means of action.

At present, the IPU is pursuing its activities in accordance with its *Strategy 2012–2017: Better parliaments, stronger democracies*.¹

¹ IPU, *Strategy 2012-2017: Better parliaments, stronger democracies*.

Agenda of the 133rd Assembly²

The IPU Assembly is the principal statutory body that expresses the views of the IPU on political issues.

The agenda for the 133rd IPU Assembly included the following items:

- Election of the President and Vice-Presidents of the 133rd Assembly.
- Consideration of requests for the inclusion of an emergency item in the Assembly agenda.
- General debate on the theme “The moral and economic imperative for fairer, smarter and more humane migration.”
- Democracy in the digital era and the threat to privacy and individual freedoms (Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights).
- Reports of the standing committees on Peace and International Security; Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade; and United Nations Affairs.
- Approval of the subject item for the Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights at the 135th IPU Assembly and appointment of the Rapporteurs.
- The role of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, parliaments, parliamentarians, and international and regional organizations in providing necessary protection and urgent support to those who have become refugees through war, internal conflict and social circumstances, according to the principles of international humanitarian law and international conventions.

Overall, delegations from 134 member parliaments participated in the activities of the 133rd Assembly. Of the 1,399 delegates in attendance, 647 were members of national parliaments and included 41 presiding officers and 50 deputy presiding officers.

At the close of the 133rd Assembly, 167 national parliaments were members of the IPU—Fiji having become a member—and 10 regional parliamentary assemblies were associate members.

Canada’s participation

The general debate

At the 133rd Assembly, a general debate was held on the topic of “The moral and economic imperative for fairer, smarter and more humane migration.” During the three-day debate, “representatives of 95 Member Parliaments, two regional parliamentary

² Detailed reports and other information on the 133rd Assembly and related meetings are available on the IPU website at <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/133agnd.htm>.

organizations and three other Permanent Observers spoke on the theme.”³ **Speaker Housakos, Senator Dawson and Senator Fraser** attended the sittings.

As Speaker of the Senate and head of the delegation, **Senator Housakos** gave the following speech during the general debate:

*Mr. Saber Chowdhury,
Mr. Martin Chungong,
Esteemed parliamentarians:*

I am pleased to participate in the general debate on the moral and economic imperative for fairer, smarter and more humane migration.

This debate is both crucial and timely. The refugee population is growing at an alarming rate and placing significant pressure on Jordan and Turkey, to say nothing of the urgent situation in European countries like Greece and Italy, which are being overwhelmed by thousands of refugees and migrants crossing their borders every day.

I am moved by the images of people, children included, escaping on rickety boats, paying smugglers vast sums for uncertain outcomes; smugglers who all too often have complete disregard for human life. Deaths – in trucks, at sea – add a moral urgency for us to act with dispatch.

On a national level, signatory states to the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, including my own country Canada, have certain obligations – chief among them is to offer asylum seekers the opportunity to have their case heard in a fair process, and not to return people to situations of persecution.

Asylum claims in industrialized countries were already near record highs in 2014, even before the mass migrations of this summer. Canada also saw an increase in asylum claims in 2014, from 10,400 to 13,500 applications, an increase of roughly 30%.

However, all states have the obligation to respect refugees’ human dignity and to provide for their basic needs. States like Canada must (and do) provide financial assistance to help front-line states fulfil their responsibilities during periods of crisis. Fully funding the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and its partners can render more viable protection solutions close to refugees’ countries of origin.

Another widespread problem that urgently requires our attention is human smuggling, which endangers people’s lives. Migrant smuggling is a highly profitable business that demands a multilateral response. As a nation, we are committed to working with our allies and partners responsible for law enforcement and border security initiatives. The IPU has also examined organized crime, migrant smuggling and human trafficking, and it is an important forum for concerted international action.

³ Ibid., p. 7.

This debate for fairer, intelligent and humane migration also requires that we take a long-term perspective. This should include safe and legal alternatives for so-called “boat people” – be they refugees or economic migrants.

Resettling refugee families is one alternative. The UNHCR estimates that more than one million people are now in need of resettlement, the largest figure in over 30 years. The UNHCR has appealed for states to accommodate one million Syrian refugees alone over the next five years.

Canada has a well-established refugee resettlement program, generally accepting around 12,000 refugees as permanent residents each year. Our goal is to welcome between 8% and 12% of the global total. In keeping with this tradition, in 2014, the Canadian government made a commitment to resettle 10,000 Syrian refugees over three years, a commitment that has recently been accelerated by 15 months. As needs have continued to increase, Canada continues to evaluate how we can do more.

Canada’s resettlement commitments are supported in large part by civil society groups that administer private refugee sponsorship programs. Through these programs, community groups or individuals provide social and financial support — ranging from an initial amount of \$12,000 for an individual to more than \$30,000 for a family of six — to help resettle a refugee family. A variety of groups have stepped forward to sponsor refugees and they are ready to do more. Canada’s Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program significantly enhances our overall capacity to resettle refugees.

However, resettlement alone is not a sufficient solution for the world’s refugees. The UNHCR is advocating for states to consider complementary alternatives including student scholarships, expanded opportunities for family reunification, temporary protection schemes, and even labour mobility. A lot more can be done through these alternative measures.

This debate is about more than refugee protection, just as the boats on the Mediterranean are populated with more than just asylum seekers. A human conscious is to seek better futures for our families.

By including a migration target in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the international community has acknowledged the linkage between migration and development. As part of this agenda, all countries have made a commitment to, and I quote, “facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies.”⁴

Our experience in Canada with managed migration, and in particular with the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program, is that temporary migration opportunities can deliver a triple win – for destination countries, origin countries, and for migrants themselves. Of course, we must be diligent to ensure that migrant workers enjoy the same rights and protections available to the domestic workforce and that they return to their country of origin at the end of their authorized stay or have legal options to gain full citizenship.

⁴ United Nations Sustainable Development Summit 2015, “[Goal 10 targets](#),” Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries.

I would like to conclude by reminding my fellow parliamentarians that there are vulnerable groups within the refugee and economic migrant populations. People who have employed human smugglers to facilitate their voyage, for instance, are vulnerable to violence and to continuing exploitation even after arrival. Children, especially those travelling alone, also need special assistance.

By virtue of our geography, Canada has limited experience with mass arrivals of refugees and migrants and a more positive experience with migration that is planned and administered according to government policy objectives.

That said, we actively support alternatives for fairer, intelligent, and humane migration. This is accomplished with financial assistance, our resettlement programs, labour mobility, and our regular immigration program, which is set to receive up to 285,000 newcomers this year. I look forward to your interventions in this debate and to how we can advance our work in common in this area.

Thank you.

An outcome document of the Assembly's general debate was prepared and, on 21 October 2015, the Assembly adopted the Declaration from the General Debate on *The imperative for fairer, smarter and more humane migration*.⁵

IPU standing committees

Each IPU assembly is assisted in its work by standing committees. Each delegation is represented on the standing committees by one member and one substitute member.⁶ At the 129th Assembly in October 2013, the Governing Council adopted significant amendments to the rules of the standing committees: in addition to the topic of a draft resolution, a committee's work plan can now include other activities, such as hearings, reports and missions.

During the 133rd Assembly, only the Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights debated a draft resolution.

- Senator **Housakos** attended the sittings of the **Standing Committee on Peace and International Security** on the subject "Terrorism: The need to enhance global cooperation against the threat to democracy and individual rights."
- Since the 130th Assembly held in March 2014, **Senator Dawson** has been a member of the **Bureau of the Standing Committee on UN Affairs**.⁷

⁵ IPU, *Results of the 133rd Assembly and related meetings*, 2015, p.32. <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/133/results.pdf>

⁶ IPU, article 13, *Statutes of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and Rules of the Standing Committees*.

⁷ The full list of Bureau members is available on the IPU website at <http://www.ipu.org/strct-e/comtees.htm>

The Bureau meets during each assembly and is tasked with preparing and reviewing the implementation of the Standing Committee's work plans, and with considering proposals for subject items to be discussed at future assemblies.⁸ The Bureau met on 19 October 2015. Members were updated on activities at the UN. They also discussed possible subject items for sittings of the Standing Committee to be held during the 134th Assembly in March 2016. **Senator Dawson** attended all sittings of the **Standing Committee on UN Affairs**, which reviewed the work of the UN Peacebuilding Commission and the role of the International Court of Justice in the settlement of international disputes.

Governing Council⁹

The Governing Council is the plenary policy-making body of the IPU.¹⁰ Several committees fall under the Governing Council's responsibility and report to it on their work.¹¹ The Council is composed of three representatives from each IPU member parliament, provided that its representation includes both men and women parliamentarians.¹²

Meetings of the 197th Session of the Governing Council were held on 18 and 21 October. **All the Canadian delegates** attended these meetings.

The Governing Council had a number of items on its agenda, including the following:¹³

- Questions relating to IPU membership;
- Requests for affiliation and reaffiliation to the IPU
 - Situation of certain Members
 - Observer status;
- Report of the President
 - On his activities since the 196th Session of the Governing Council
 - On the activities of the Executive Committee;

⁸ IPU, *Rules of the Standing Committees*, adopted in 1971 and extensively revised in October 1983, April 2003 and October 2013.

⁹ This section provides highlights from the 197th Session of the IPU Governing Council. For further details, see *Results of the 133rd Assembly and Related Meetings, 2015*.

¹⁰ Article 21 of the Statutes stipulates the functions of the Governing Council.

¹¹ The committees are as follows: the Meeting of Women Parliamentarians, the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians; the Committee on Middle East Questions; the Group of Facilitators for Cyprus; the Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law; the Gender Partnership Group of the Executive Committee; the Advisory Group on HIV/AIDS and Maternal, Newborn and Child Health; and the Forum of Young Parliamentarians of the IPU.

¹² IPU, *Rules of the Governing Council*, adopted in 1971 and extensively revised in October 1983 and April 2003.

¹³ IPU, Convocation of the 197th Session of the Governing Council of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Geneva, Switzerland, CL/197/c.1, 15 June 2015.

- Interim report by the Secretary General on the activities of the IPU since the 196th Session of the Governing Council;
- Oral report of the Secretary General;
- Financial situation of the IPU;
- Draft program and budget for 2016;
- Implementation of the IPU Strategy 2012–2017;
- Cooperation with the United Nations System;
- Reports on recent IPU specialized meetings;
- Activities of committees and other bodies;
- 134th IPU Assembly (Lusaka, Zambia, 19–23 March 2016);
- Future inter-parliamentary meetings (statutory and specialized);
- Appointment of two internal auditors for 2016;
- Elections to the Executive Committee.

Meetings of the geopolitical groups

Article 27 of the IPU Statutes permits IPU members to form geopolitical groups; there are six such groups formally recognized by the IPU. The groups play an important role in the functioning and activities of the IPU. Each group determines its own working methods, and informs the IPU Secretariat of its composition, officers and rules of procedure.

Canada belongs to two geopolitical groups:¹⁴

- the 47-member Twelve Plus Group, which includes nations from Europe, as well as Australia, New Zealand and Israel; and
- the 31-member Asia-Pacific Group.

While Canada participates in the activities of both groups, it submits candidates for vacant positions within the IPU through the Twelve Plus Group.

A meeting of the Asia-Pacific Group was held on 17 October 2015, attended by **all Canadian delegates**.

Meetings of the Twelve Plus Group were held on 17, 19 and 21 October 2015. **All Canadian delegates** participated in these meetings.

Side events

Senator Fraser attended the **Meeting of Women Parliamentarians**, held on 17 and 20 October.

¹⁴ IPU, Geopolitical Groups.

Senator Housakos and **Senator Fraser** attended a **panel discussion organized by the IPU and the ASGP** entitled, “Powerful parliaments: building capacity for effective parliamentary oversight.”

Respectfully submitted,

Hon. Salma Ataullahjan, Senator
President, Canadian Group of the
Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
ACTIVITY	133 rd Assembly of the IPU and Related Meetings
DESTINATION	Geneva, Switzerland
DATES	October 17 to 21, 2015
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Dennis Dawson, Senator Hon. Joan Fraser, Senator
HOUSE OF COMMONS	
STAFF	Line Gravel, Association Secretary
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 16,566.06
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 6,964.25
HOSPITALITY	\$ 0
PER DIEMS	\$ 4,494.82
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 55.62
MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES	\$ 0
TOTAL	\$ 28,080.75