

Canadian Group  
Inter-Parliamentary Union



Groupe canadien  
Union interparlementaire

**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation  
respecting its participation at the 57<sup>th</sup> Session of the United  
Nations Commission on the Status of Women**

**Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)**

**New York, New York, United States of America  
March 5, 2013**

# Report

## 1. Introduction

A Canadian delegation participated in the Inter-Parliamentary Union's (IPU's) parliamentary event, organized with UN Women and held during the 57<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) on 5 March 2013 at the UN Headquarters in New York City. The IPU's theme was *Parliamentary strategies for tackling violence against women and girls*, which complemented the UNCSW's priority theme for the 57<sup>th</sup> Session, that being *Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls*. The IPU's parliamentary event was attended by over 140 parliamentarians, from 45 national and regional parliaments, as well as government officials and representatives of international organizations.

## 2. Agenda<sup>1</sup>

In parallel with the priority theme for the UNCSW, the theme of the IPU event was *Parliamentary strategies for tackling violence against women and girls*, which focused on strategies to prevent, protect against and prosecute all forms of violence against women and girls. In particular, the event examined four key areas: (1) Behind a strong political will – parliamentarians' motivation and responsibilities; (2) When parliaments commit to ending violence against women and girls: legislative approaches; (3) Violence against women in the political arena; and (4) *What next? Future strategies for parliaments to end violence against women*. The event provided Canadian parliamentarians with the opportunity to expand their knowledge of developments in other countries and at the UNCSW in these key areas.

## 3. The Canadian delegation

The Canadian delegation included the following parliamentarians:

- The Honourable Fortin-Duplessis, Senator
- Ms. Joyce Bateman, M.P.
- Ms. Jean Crowder, M.P.
- The Honourable Judy Sgro, M.P.

The delegation was accompanied by Ms. Laura Munn-Rivard, Analyst, Legal and Social Affairs Division, Library of Parliament.

## 4. Summary of Event and Canadian Participation

### a. Opening

The President of the IPU, Mr. Abdelwahed Radi, and the Executive Director of UN Women, Ms. Michelle Bachelet, gave the opening remarks. They welcomed delegates and highlighted recent initiatives by countries to combat violence against women. In particular, they spoke of the serious damage done to the legitimacy of democracies

---

<sup>1</sup> Agenda and other documents related to the event are available at the IPU's parliamentary event website, *Parliamentary Strategies for Tackling Violence against Women and Girls*.

when women cannot participate in politics because of a risk of violence. Women need to be able to vote, to run for office and to work as politicians without fear.

**b. Introduction: Behind a strong political will – parliamentarians’ motivation and responsibilities**

An introductory session, entitled *Behind a strong political will – parliamentarians’ motivation and responsibilities*, was dedicated to hearing from “parliamentarians from different regions of the world who champion the cause of ending violence against women.”<sup>2</sup>

The moderator, Ms. Gayle Tzemach Lemmon is a journalist and Deputy Director of the Council on Foreign Relations’ Women and Foreign Policy Program.

**Mr. Aliou Aya** is a Member of the National Assembly of Mali and Member of the Committee on Education and of the Committee on Finance, as well as President of the Parliamentary Network on Violence against Women and Children. He spoke of one of the greatest forms of violence against women in his country, that being female genital mutilation (FGM), which happens in every region of the country at rates as high as 98%.

In Mali, the Department for the Promotion of Women, Children and Family, and the National Program to end FGM, as well as civil society, including community groups, non-governmental organizations and schools have been working towards reducing rates of FGM. Mr. Aya explained that conversations about the dangers of FGM are no longer taboo; communities are starting to have the discussion. While the National Program, established in the 1990s, has had some success, the greatest challenge is fighting established religious and traditional beliefs. Mr. Aya said that challenges in ending FGM have led to the development of a proposed law to end FGM. Mr. Aya informed delegates that the conflict in Mali in early 2012 has unfortunately stalled progress in the fight against FGM and has slowed the development of anti-FGM legislation.

As well, Mr. Aya explained that the media plays an essential role in the fight to end violence against women. The media can communicate that violence against women is not acceptable, and help to break the normalization of such violence. He also highlighted the importance of traditional communication methods in many countries, like Mali, where it has a personal value.

**Mr. J. Mendes Bota** is Member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (Portugal), and First Vice-Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination. Mr. Bota told delegates that he is militant in the fight to end violence against women. Such violence hurts 50% of the population, and is affecting billions of people. He indicated that a great number of guest speakers and delegates at the IPU event are women, but that more men should be involved. The reality is that women are the minority in so many decision-making positions. Therefore men in such positions must be allies with women, and should use their power to influence other men. He noted that while the majority of men have good consciences, they are not involved enough to understand the complexities of gender-based violence; they may not be the ones committing the violence, but they tend to ignore it.

---

<sup>2</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Parliamentary strategies for tackling violence against women and girls: Agenda*, 2013.

Mr. Bota said that during times of economic crisis, countries should prioritize violence against women. Money is spent every step of the way for women who experience violence: on hospital stays, on legal assistance, on police enforcement, and on the judicial process. As well, the number of women who experience violence tends to increase during an economic crisis, as there is financial desperation and economic dependence. Therefore, reducing violence against women makes economic sense; such violence hurts the economy and will only worsen during an economic crisis.

Finally, Mr. Bota said that the media has a role in changing society's view of women and challenging patriarchal mentalities. The media should educate the public of the value and importance of women, and send the message that violence is unacceptable.

**Ms. Sarah Sayifwanda** is a Member of Parliament for Zambia and Member of the Committee on Agriculture, of the Committee on Education, Science and Technology and of the Committee on National Security and Foreign Affairs. She issued a challenge for every parliamentarian present to do all they can to end violence against women. According to Ms. Sayifwanda, Zambia has decided to battle gender-based violence in the country. National efforts to address violence against women include the enactment of an anti-gender-based violence act in 2011, which provides protection for victims of such violence. A central component of this act is the guarantee of funding for victims of gender-based violence; established funding is thus critical to ensuring that the legislation achieves its goals in the long term.

Ms Sayifwanda also spoke of the importance of the media; without the media, all the work accomplished at the IPU event will never be publicized and reach the general public. In Zambia, the media has been partnering with politicians in the fight to end violence against women.

### **c. Theme 1: When parliaments commit to ending violence against women and girls**

The theme for the morning session was *When parliaments commit to ending violence against women and girls*, and focused on “parliamentary strategies for a strong legislative framework and an effective implementation of laws and policies to end violence against women and girls.”<sup>3</sup>

The Chair was Ms. Margaret Mensah-Williams, Vice-Chairperson of the National Council (Namibia) and Member of the Committee on Standing Rules and Orders and of the Women's Caucus.

**Ms. Gisèle Guigma** is a Member of the National Assembly of Burkina Faso and Rapporteur of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Assemblée parlementaire de la francophonie (APF). Her work focuses on women's participation in politics and on legislative approaches to end violence against women. She spoke of the development of laws to combat domestic violence and violence in the workplace in Burkina Faso.

Ms. Guigma also highlighted the work that the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the APF has been doing to strengthen legislative frameworks to end violence against women in francophone countries.

---

<sup>3</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Parliamentary strategies for tackling violence against women and girls: Agenda*, 2013.

**Ms. Lucero Saldaña** is a Mexican Senator and President of the Committee on External Relations and Non-Governmental Organizations, Secretary of the Ad Hoc Committee on Child and Youth Rights, as well as Member of the Committee on Gender Equality.

Ms. Saldaña spoke of the importance of implementing strong legislative frameworks to end impunity when violence is committed against women and girls. She indicated that such legislation must be accompanied by prevention and protection services. Ms. Saldaña stated that the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women should serve as an inspiration in the development of legislation.

Following these presentations, delegates participated in an open debate of the issues.

**The Honourable Suzanne Fortin-Duplessis, Senator**, intervened during the debate to highlight the steps taken by the Government of Canada to ensure the safety of girls and women. She spoke of strengthening the criminal law responses to and penalties for violent crime and of enhancing legislative measures to provide police, Crown prosecutors and courts with more effective means to manage individuals at high risk to reoffend sexually and violently. Also, she indicated that the age of sexual consent had recently been raised from 14 to 16 years which protects young people, especially girls, from sexual exploitation by adult predators. In particular, Mme. Fortin-Duplessis highlighted the steps taken by Canada to prevent and address trafficking in persons, which predominantly affects women and girls. She spoke of community-based projects, supported by the Government of Canada, that respond to emerging issues such as violence committed in the name of “honour” and the engagement of men and boys in violence prevention. In addition, she addressed the particular violence that Aboriginal women and girls face in Canada and said that a Government of Canada priority is to address the issue, in part through improving law enforcement and justice system responses.

#### **d. Theme 2: Violence against women in the political arena**

The theme in the afternoon session was *Violence against women in the political arena*, and it examined “different manifestations of this form of violence and propose effective measures that can be put in place to eliminate it.”<sup>4</sup>

**Ms. Gabriela Montaña** is President of the Senate of Bolivia. She stated that since 2010, Bolivia had adopted 12 laws related to women’s rights and ending gender-based violence. A key piece of legislation is the law aimed at ending harassment and violence against women in politics or in key decision-making positions. There was a need for this law, particularly at the local level, where women faced greater violence and were often compelled to resign or make decisions against their will. Ms. Montaña said the law had been in effect for a year, but that it was still too soon to measure the effect of the law.

In addition, Bolivia has adopted a comprehensive law whose goal is to ensure a violence-free life for women, and which makes all types of violence against women punishable and eliminates impunity.

---

<sup>4</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Parliamentary strategies for tackling violence against women and girls: Agenda*, 2013.

**Ms. Gabrielle Bardall**, an Elections and Gender Consultant, spoke of electoral violence that is gender-based in nature and the many types of violence that women face in politics. She stated that first, parliamentarians need to broaden their understanding of violence, as it can be physical, sexual and psychological, and it can occur in the private and public spheres.

Psychological violence can be particularly damaging to both a woman's mental health and her reputation in public. Psychological violence in the public sphere can include accusations of being a prostitute (for example, in Nigeria) or accusations of being an infidel (for example, in Afghanistan). In the private sphere, psychological violence can include a husband threatening to divorce a wife if she does not vote as he says or if she runs for office. Physical violence also prevents women from participating in the political arena, and can occur in the public sphere (for example, targeted shootings) or in the private sphere (for example, sexual assault).

According to Ms. Bardall, violence is seen by some individuals as an effective means to stop unwanted behaviour, especially when that behaviour challenges traditional roles and nor Ms. Bardall said that the central question to examine is who is committing this gender-based political violence. She explained that it is often committed by people who are close to the victim, like close partners, extended family, village leaders, poll leaders or fellow parliamentarians, and can be committed by both men and women.

She argues that preventing and mitigating gender-based electoral violence requires a comprehensive approach and a better understanding of the phenomenon, with greater documentation. As well, this must be accompanied by gender-sensitive security and law enforcement changes that support women's access to the political arena. Ms. Bardall strongly suggests developing informal and formal networks of elected women, to share stories and to support one another, with the goal of breaking the isolation and the shame that some women feel when they are faced with violence.

**Ms. Roberta Blackman-Woods** is a Member of the House of Commons of the United Kingdom, Member of the APPG on Universities and Member of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and Member of the APPG on Afghanistan. Her presentation examined the impact of the media on women in politics, and how this shapes violence against these women. She stated that often the media is more interested in what women politicians are wearing or how they react in certain situations, rather than the substance of their work. The media can feminize the reactions of women, in a way that is not done for male colleagues, whereby female politicians may be portrayed as being "feisty," "tearful," "exploding with rage," and "emotional". Another approach the media may take is to portray female politicians as being completely unfeminine, and to highlight when they act in a way that is seen as atypical of their gender.

According to Ms. Blackman-Woods, when the media portrays female politicians in such negative ways, it serves to degrade, berate, belittle, and insult them. In some countries, this treatment is equivalent to constant "psychological warfare" that serves to discourage women from running for office.

Ms. Blackman-Woods explained that the media can dehumanize women, which serves to make them a greater target for violence. In countries where there are direct threats

to women's safety, the consequences for women in politics can be devastating, as can be seen, for example, in Afghanistan.

Possible solutions, as described by Ms. Blackman-Woods, include: (1) The political arena and the media should undergo a culture change; (2) Governments should implement regulation that forces the media to act responsibly; and (3) Parliamentarians should employ the full force of the law to protect female politicians from violence and other threatening behaviour, such as stalking.

#### **e. Conclusion: What next? Future strategies for parliaments to end violence against women**

A concluding session, entitled *What next? Future strategies for parliaments to end violence against women*, was aimed at "identifying priorities for parliaments to support progress."<sup>5</sup>

**Ms. Margaret Mensah-Williams**, Vice-Chairperson of the National Council (Namibia) and Member of the Committee on Standing Rules and Orders and of the Women's Caucus, gave the final presentation. She stated that parliamentarians, in developing a strategy to end violence against women, must focus on three elements: (1) Building a strong legal framework; (2) Effectively implementing legislation; (3) Reinforcing awareness, sensitization and understanding of violence against women.

She asked parliamentarians to take away several important lessons from the day's event:

- Empowered parliaments and parliamentarians are essential in the fight to end violence against women;
- A supportive parliamentary environment reinforces actions taken to end violence against women;
- Legislation is at the heart of parliamentary action;
- Enforcement of legislation remains the main challenge; and
- No country can address violence against women without addressing gender inequality.

Following Ms. Mensah-Williams' presentation, parliamentarians were invited to participate in an open debate.

**Ms. Jean Crowder, M.P.**, intervened during this debate to remind delegates of the work completed during the IPU's 127<sup>th</sup> Assembly in Quebec City in October 2012. Ms. Crowder spoke of the IPU's *Plan of Action for Gender-Sensitive Parliaments*, which was unanimously adopted by the 127<sup>th</sup> Assembly. She indicated that a first step to addressing issues of gender inequality should be for parliamentarians to lead by example. Therefore, parliaments should undertake an analysis to determine how they perform with respect to gender-sensitive indicators. Ms. Crowder concluded that countries must gain a better understanding of the gender-sensitive nature of their parliaments, and that this will be essential for increasing women's representation in parliaments.

---

<sup>5</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Parliamentary strategies for tackling violence against women and girls: Agenda*, 2013.

## 5. Other Meetings

The delegation attended a meeting at the **Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations**, with Guillermo E. Rishchynski, Canada's Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations, Gilles Rivard, Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative, and other officials. The members of the delegation received a briefing on the work of the Permanent Mission of Canada and the successes and challenges that the Mission experiences on a weekly basis.

An informal meeting was organized between the members of the Canadian delegation and Mr. J. Mendes Bota, in his capacity as **First Vice-Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination**. The meeting allowed Canadian delegates to discuss the work being done by the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, of the Parliamentary Network "Women Free from Violence," which is part of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. In particular, the discussion focused on the *Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence* (the Istanbul Convention), the first legally binding instrument in Europe whose goal is establish zero tolerance for domestic violence and violence against women. The members of the Canadian delegation offered their congratulations to Mr. Bota on the work he had accomplished in his role with the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination.

## 6. Conclusion

On 11 March 2013, the Honourable M. Mensah-Williams, Deputy Speaker of the National Council of Namibia and Member of the Committee on Standing Rules and Orders and of the Women's Caucus, delivered a statement to the plenary of the UNCSW on behalf of the delegates who had participated in the one-day session.<sup>6</sup>

Respectfully submitted,

The Honourable Salma Atallahjan, Senator  
President, Canadian Group of the IPU

---

<sup>6</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, *57<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, United Nations, Statement by the Hon. M. Mensah-Williams, Deputy Speaker of the National Council of Namibia*, 11 March 2013.



## Travel Costs

<b>ASSOCIATION</b>	Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
<b>ACTIVITY</b>	57th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women
<b>DESTINATION</b>	New York, New York, United States of America
<b>DATES</b>	March 5, 2013
<b>DELEGATION</b>	
<b>SENATE</b>	Hon. Suzanne Fortin-Duplessis
<b>HOUSE OF COMMONS</b>	Ms. Joyce Bateman Ms. Jean Crowder Hon. Judy Sgro
<b>STAFF</b>	Ms. Laura Munn-Rivard, Advisor
<b>TRANSPORTATION</b>	<b>\$ 5,911.66</b>
<b>ACCOMMODATION</b>	<b>\$ 2,423.43</b>
<b>HOSPITALITY</b>	
<b>PER DIEMS</b>	<b>\$ 652.18</b>
<b>OFFICIAL GIFTS</b>	
<b>MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES</b>	<b>\$ 27.52</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 9,014.79</b>