

Canadian Group  
Inter-Parliamentary Union



Groupe canadien  
Union interparlementaire

**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation respecting  
its participation at the Annual Parliamentary  
Hearing at the United Nations**

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

**New York, New York, United States of America  
February 8-9, 2016**

# Report

## 1. Overview

On February 8 and 9 2016, a delegation from the Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) travelled to New York to attend the IPU's annual parliamentary hearing at the headquarters of the United Nations (UN). The delegation was led by **Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith**, President of the Canadian IPU Group, and included the **Honourable Dennis Dawson**, Senator. The delegation was accompanied by Ms. Line Gravel, Executive Secretary of the Group.

The delegation participated in the various panel sessions and events. Among other things, the hearing provided an important opportunity for parliamentarians to engage in dialogue and exchange views and experiences with one another, and to hear from the UN management team. This report provides an overview of the IPU-UN parliamentary hearing.

## 2. Background

The IPU is the international organization of parliaments of sovereign states. It was established in 1889, is “the focal point for world-wide parliamentary dialogue,” and “works for peace and co-operation among peoples and for the firm establishment of representative democracy.”<sup>1</sup> The IPU “supports the efforts of and works in close co-operation with the United Nations, whose objectives it shares.”<sup>2</sup>

The IPU's annual parliamentary hearing brings parliamentarians to the UN headquarters in New York “for an interactive discussion with high-ranking UN officials, representatives of [UN] Member States and experts drawn from think tanks and civil society organizations.”<sup>3</sup>

As a joint event of the IPU and UN, the hearing reflects a commitment by the UN to hear the views of parliamentarians with regards to urgent issues facing policy-makers and legislators around the world and on the key issues on the UN agenda. The importance of the annual hearing to the ongoing work of the IPU and its engagement with the UN system and activities was underlined in the resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly in June 2012, which:

- Recalled its 2010 resolution deciding “to pursue a more systematic engagement with the Inter-Parliamentary Union in organizing and integrating a parliamentary component of and contribution to major United Nations deliberative processes and the review of international commitments”; and
- Called for “the annual parliamentary hearing at the United Nations to be more closely linked to major United Nations processes, including the

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<sup>1</sup> IPU, “Overview.” <http://www.ipu.org/english/whatipu.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> IPU, “Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations,” New York, UN Headquarters, 8-9 February 2016. See. <http://www.ipu.org/strct-e/splzconf.htm>

preparation of global conferences, so as to help to inform such deliberations from a parliamentary perspective.”<sup>4</sup>

The conclusions of the hearing are circulated to the wider UN community as well as to all national parliaments.<sup>5</sup>

The parliamentary hearing was attended by some 217 parliamentarians, and staff, from 54 countries as well as several regional parliaments.

### **3. Programme of the Parliamentary Hearing**

The main theme of the hearing that took place in New York from 8-9 February 2016 was: *The World drug problem: Taking stock and strengthening the global response*. The key questions that were explored during the event included:

1. What are the challenges faced by the international community in the area of drugs control? How can new challenges be addressed in a comprehensive manner, on the basis of the principle of common and shared responsibility? Are countries taking advantage of the flexibility within the conventions to pursue their own solutions?
2. How can the prime concern of the international drug control conventions, the health and welfare of mankind, best be advanced? Based on the evidence, which approaches to demand and supply reduction have proven most effective?
3. How can efforts be strengthened to prevent drug-related crime and violence? How are drug trafficking, organized crime (including money laundering) and corruption connected? How can international cooperation be advanced?
4. The Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a new people centered framework for development predicated on the affirmation of fundamental human rights. What are the links between drug policy and the SDGs? How do the SDGs enhance the discourse?

The full programme, which includes details on the themes and case studies explored during the hearing, and the complete list of panellists, may be found online.<sup>6</sup>

### **4. Summary of Event and Canadian Participation**

The world drug problem has been a growing concern for the international community for over the last fifty years. Three United Nations conventions on drugs (beginning in 1961) and two conventions on corruption and transnational organized crime provide binding obligations on states to take action to control both the demand and supply sides of drug use. They also call on states to address prevention and treatment efforts to reduce drug consumption.

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<sup>4</sup>United Nations General Assembly, “Interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and the Inter-Parliamentary Union,” A/RES/66/261, 7 June 2012, paragraph 7, other relevant documents and resolutions that provide the framework for the IPU’s cooperation with the UN may be accessed at <http://www.ipu.org/un-e/un-docs.htm#resolutions>.

<sup>5</sup> IPU, “Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations,” New York, UN Headquarters, 8-9 February 2016.

<sup>6</sup> IPU, “Provisional Programme,” 8-9 February 2016.

These treaties have placed psychotropic and narcotic substances under international control, regulating the unauthorized production and distribution of those substances. In particular, the production, distribution and consumption of cannabis plants, coca bush and opium poppy as well as synthetic substances and precursor chemicals used in manufacturing drugs have all come under the purview of these international instruments.

Recognizing that the world drug problem remains a common and shared responsibility that requires effective and increased international cooperation and demands an integrated, multidisciplinary, mutually reinforcing and balanced approach to supply and demand reduction strategies, Member States adopted the 2009 *Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem*.

Resolution 67/193 of the General Assembly (GA) decided to convene a special session on the world drug problem in 2016 and mandated this special session to “*review the progress in the implementation of the Political Declaration and Plan of Action ... including an assessment of the achievements and challenges in countering the world drug problem, within the framework of the three international drug control conventions and other relevant United Nations instruments.*” Resolutions 69/200 and 69/201 requested the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), as the central policymaking body within the United Nations system dealing with drug-related matters, to lead the preparations for UNGASS, which will be an important milestone in achieving the goals set in the 2009 *Political Declaration and Plan of Action* by 2019.

It is under this background that the joint event UN-IPU was constructed. The programme consisted of four sessions with interactive panels featuring members of parliament, civil society representatives, representatives of Member States and the United Nations.

**Mr Nathaniel Erskine-Smith** intervened in the discussion in Session II in asking the members of the panel if it would not be essential to differentiate between the types of drugs. He mentioned that maybe talking about marijuana in the same light as opium or cocaine would be a mistake. He concluded by asking the panel, base on science, what was their opinion of the effect of prohibition on the drug market.

During Session IV **Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith** participated in a debate on a non-binding motion. The motion read as follows: “*States should seek alternatives to incarceration when addressing possession of drugs for personal use.*”

This segment of the session was assisted by a moderator. Two debaters, one of whom was **Mr. Erskine-Smith**, argued for the motion and two debaters argued against it. During the debate, **Senator Dennis Dawson** intervened to ask the debaters if a distinction should not be made as to the type of drugs used and if marijuana, that is considered even less addictive than alcohol or tobacco, should not be treated differently.

The final report of the Hearing, highlighting key conclusions and recommendations, will be made available to the Commission on Narcotic Drugs as a contribution from the parliamentary community to the United Nations General Assembly Special Session 2016 preparations.

Respectfully submitted,

Nathaniel Erskine-Smith, M.P.  
President  
Canadian Group of the  
Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

## Travel Costs

<b>ASSOCIATION</b>	Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
<b>ACTIVITY</b>	Annual Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations
<b>DESTINATION</b>	New York, New York, United States of America
<b>DATES</b>	February 8-9, 2016
<b>DELEGATION</b>	
SENATE	Hon. Dennis Dawson
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith
STAFF	Ms. Line Gravel, Executive Secretary
<b>TRANSPORTATION</b>	<b>\$2,435.65</b>
<b>ACCOMMODATION</b>	<b>\$2,980.80</b>
<b>HOSPITALITY</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>
<b>PER DIEMS</b>	<b>\$1,077.76</b>
<b>OFFICIAL GIFTS</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>
<b>MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$6,494.21</b>