

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
December 6-7, 2012**

Report

1. Overview

From 6-7 December 2012, 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 the **Honourable Salma Atallahjan**, Senator and President of the Canadian IPU Group, and included the **Honourable Dennis Dawson**, Senator, **Mr. Scott Armstrong**, Member of Parliament, and **Dr. Djaouida Sellah**, Member of Parliament. The delegation was accompanied by Allison Goody, advisor, from the Library of Parliament.

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. On 7 December, the Canadian delegates also received a detailed briefing from Canada's Permanent Mission to the United Nations. This briefing apprised the Canadian parliamentarians of developments related to key issues on the UN agenda and Canadian foreign policy, while also allowing a discussion of the agenda items of the IPU hearing.

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."¹ The IPU "supports the efforts of and works in close co-operation with the United Nations, whose objectives it shares."²

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."³

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

¹ IPU, "Overview.". See <http://www.ipu.org/english/whatipu.htm>.

² Ibid.

³ IPU, "Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations," New York, UN Headquarters, 6-7 December 2012. See <http://www.ipu.org/splz-e/unga12.htm>.

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

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

The parliamentary hearing was attended by some 180 parliamentarians, and staff, from 58 countries as well as several regional parliaments.⁶

3. Programme of the Parliamentary Hearing

The main theme of the hearing that took place in New York from 6-7 December 2012 was: *A road less travelled: parliamentary approaches to conflict prevention, reconciliation and peace building*. The key questions that were explored during the event included:

- What are the optimal conditions and institutional requirements for parliaments to effectively play a role in conflict prevention and reconciliation?
 - How can the UN and the IPU support such conditions, where needed?
- How can parliaments (and the IPU) support the UN, its missions in the field and its Peace-Building Commission and Human Rights Council?
- How can parliamentarians help mediate conflicts alone or in cooperation with the United Nations?
- How are parliaments to relate to transitional justice mechanisms and truth and reconciliation mechanisms?
- What do parliamentarians think of key reforms needed to ensure more democratic decision-making for conflict resolution at the UN?⁷

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.⁸

⁴ 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..>

⁵ IPU, “Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations,” New York, UN Headquarters, 6-7 December 2012.

⁶ Note: a final and complete list of participants will be provided in the summary document of the IPU-UN hearing that is prepared by the IPU and posted on <http://www.ipu.org/splz-e/unga12.htm>. That summary document was not yet available at the time of writing.

⁷ IPU, “Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations,” New York, UN Headquarters, 6-7 December 2012.

⁸ IPU, “Provisional Programme,” 7 December 2012.

4. Summary of Event and Canadian Participation

The overall objective of the parliamentary hearing at the UN was articulated by the IPU in advance of the meeting:

Citizens and decision-makers around the world are generally aware of how the United Nations can help countries resolve their internal differences through such means as mediation, peace-keeping missions, high-level negotiations between warring parties, and even, when all else fails, the application of sanctions. Lost in the picture, however, is the less noticeable but indispensable role that parliaments should play, and often do play, to bring all sides of a conflict to the negotiating table, diffuse internal strife through political dialogue, or help support a peace agreement in one way or another. Also less known or appreciated is how parliaments can work in coordination with the international community to accomplish these objectives.⁹

The event was therefore an exploration of these issues and the contributions that can be made by parliamentarians in preventing armed conflict and helping societies rebuild from conflict.

Using an interactive format for discussion with expert moderators and discussants, the session began with an overview of the key challenges posed by conflict prevention, reconciliation and peacebuilding initiatives. The discussion focused on how these three types of initiatives should be defined and how they relate to one another, and the factors that can determine their success or failure. Participants also examined the degree to which the UN system is currently equipped institutionally and operationally to respond effectively to such challenges. Other issues addressed in this opening session included the role that women can and should play in conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts, and the role and potential of national actors, in particular parliaments and parliamentarians, in fostering peace and reconciliation.

Over the two-day session, three detailed case studies were also presented in order to facilitate debate around the role that parliamentarians can play in preventing conflict from emerging, helping to end conflict, and establishing stable peace through reconciliation. The cases of societies in Kenya, Timor Leste and Sierra Leone which have grappled with armed conflict and political violence and their aftermath, shed light on the successes that parliaments have achieved, the challenges and setbacks that have been encountered at the same time, and the lessons that can be learned from these experiences by national parliaments and the wider international community.

In the study of Kenya, participants examined the case of a parliament that has proactively played a role in national reconciliation and conflict prevention in connection with political and electoral processes and decision-making, including constitutional and institutional reforms.¹⁰ In the second case study of Sierra Leone, participants discussed the ways in which parliamentarians can further societal reconciliation, by enhancing cooperation between political parties and by working to strengthen communication and

⁹ IPU, "Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations," 1 October 2012.

¹⁰ See: IPU, "Kenya: conflict prevention through constitutional and institutional reforms."

cooperation between constituents and civil society actors.¹¹ In the third case study on Timor-Leste, participants discussed how parliaments can play a role in peacebuilding through national and international cooperation.¹²

During the second day of the hearing, parliamentarians worked in smaller discussion groups to focus more specifically on a number of components of the event's key themes. **Dr. Sellah, MP** participated in the group that examined the question of how post-conflict societies can achieve just and inclusive reconciliation. The group put forward the following comments with regards to the necessary preconditions for reconciliation and the measures through which such reconciliation can be advanced:

Preconditions

- Involvement of all actors and acceptance of each other;
- Mutual tolerance;
- Existence of neutral arbitration;
- Identification of real root causes.

Measures

- Strengthening institutional mechanisms, inter alia, through a representative and credible parliament, as well as an independent judiciary.
- Economic mechanisms that allow for the equitable redistribution of wealth, including among women, minorities, and youth;
- Provision of basic social needs (education, health, jobs, etc.);
- Greater involvement of women in national issues, particularly through access to education and more representation in decision-making bodies;
- Establishment of representative movements;
- Existence of plural and professional media which gives equitable access to all (media to be responsible);
- Share political power and processes;
- Build civil society in order to ensure more participation;
- Civic education;
- Rule of law must apply. Equality of all before the law;
- Truth and reconciliation commissions.¹³

The hearing concluded with a debate among participants on the rationale for and possible modalities of reform of the UN Security Council, which centered on the following question: would a more inclusive membership of the Security Council lead to greater global stability? Expert panelists debated these issues and the floor was then

¹¹ See: IPU, "Sierra Leone: Reconciliation through inclusive and accountable leadership."

¹² See: IPU, "Timor-Leste: peace building through national and international cooperation."

¹³ Note: This summary of the discussion group's conclusions was presented by the IPU to delegates on 7 December 2012; all of the summaries will be made available in the outcome document that will be prepared by the IPU and posted on <http://www.ipu.org/splz-e/unga12.htm>.

opened to questions and comments from all participants. They discussed the history behind various Security Council reform proposals, the advantages and disadvantages of each, and their recommendations for the types of reform that are needed to the Council's structure, methods and work.

Mr. Scott Armstrong, MP, intervened during this debate. While noting that most people agree on the general principle behind calls for Security Council reform, he stressed that the critical question that must be considered is how that reform should be done. He said that if the end objective is a Security Council that is more effective, legitimate and accountable to the membership of the UN, then the exact modalities of Security Council reform are critical. Indicating support for the creation of longer-term non-permanent seats on the Council, he at the same time noted his opposition to the addition of new permanent seats on the Security Council, which, he argued, would not be the best way of achieving a more accountable and representative Council. Mr. Armstrong noted that in the motion being debated by participants, the words "inclusive membership" were critical because they could be interpreted in different ways, depending on a nation's negotiating position. "Inclusive" could be interpreted as meaning the addition of new permanent and veto-wielding members. He argued that the international community has seen, from decades of experience, that such a reform would not help the Council's effectiveness, or result in a Council that would enhance the representation of the majority of member states. He concluded by noting that both the effectiveness and representativeness of the Council are important to its ability to enhance global stability.

A detailed summary report of the parliamentary hearing will be produced by the IPU and circulated to the UN General Assembly. It will be posted on-line at: <http://www.ipu.org/splz-e/unga12.htm>.

Respectfully submitted,

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

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
ACTIVITY	Annual Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations
DESTINATION	New York, New York, United States of America
DATES	December 6-7, 2012
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Salma Ataullahjan Hon. Dennis Dawson
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Mr. Scott Armstrong Dr. Djaouida Sellah
STAFF	Ms. Allison Goody, Advisor
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 2,852.78
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 3,069.44
HOSPITALITY	
PER DIEMS	\$ 984.92
OFFICIAL GIFTS	
MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES	
TOTAL	\$ 6,907.14