



**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
to the Meeting of the Steering Committee of the Network of
Women Parliamentarians of the *Assemblée parlementaire de
la Francophonie* (APF)**

**Canadian Branch of the *Assemblée parlementaire
de la Francophonie* (APF)**

**Phnom Penh, Cambodia
February 12-15, 2009**

Report

The parliamentary delegation of the Canadian Branch of the *Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie* (APF), which attended the meeting of the Steering Committee of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the *Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie* held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, on February 12–15, 2009, is honoured to present its report. Composed of the Honourable Rose-Marie Losier-Cool, Senator and Chair of the Network, the delegation was accompanied by Ms. Julie Pelletier, Acting Executive Secretary to the Branch.

The following branches were represented: Belgium/French community of Wallonia-Brussels, Benin, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, France, Gabon, Ontario and Quebec.

Thursday, February 12, 2009

The Steering Committee of the Network of Women Parliamentarians began its meetings on Thursday, February 12, with Senator Losier-Cool presiding.

Communication from the Chair of the Network

After thanking the Cambodia Branch, particularly the meeting organizer, Senator Ty Borasy, for inviting and welcoming her, Senator Losier-Cool, Chair of the Network, summarized the activities of the Network since July 2008, including last year's three most important activities.

She spoke first about the Network's annual meeting in Quebec City on July 7, 2008. The women parliamentarians attended a presentation by Jacqueline Oxman-Martinez of the Université de Montréal Interdisciplinary Research Centre on Family Violence and Violence against Women. The Network also adopted three reports on the following subjects: children and war, human trafficking and women refugees. Finally, the Network adopted a declaration praising the release of Ingrid Betancourt.

Second, Senator Losier-Cool recounted the Network's participation in the international meeting of the *Organisation internationale de la Francophonie* (OIF) on equality between Francophone women and men [Du dire au faire : égalité entre les femmes et les hommes dans l'espace francophone]. The Senator attended the meeting as a Canadian parliamentarian and Chair of the Network. She spoke to participants during the session on the cost of legislation establishing women's rights, expressing concern about the human and financial resources allocated by the OIF to gender equality, and presented the requests to be made to the heads of state at the Quebec City summit. She also presented the Network's follow-up on the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW) and the Network's related seminars.

Lastly, Senator Losier-Cool summarized the meeting of the APF Bureau in New York, at the United Nations, in which she participated. The purpose of the meeting was to reiterate the importance of La Francophonie, its language—the working language at the UN—cultural diversity and respect for cultures and multilingualism.

The Senator ended by presenting the Network's July report and the proposed seminar in Kinshasa in March 2009.

Report on activities and discussion of the upcoming cooperation program

Senator Losier-Cool reported on the Network's cooperation activities.

Since 2004, with financial and logistical support from the OIF, and with additional financial support from the Parliamentary Centre of Canada, the Network has held seminars in various APF regions to discuss CEDAW. The seminars are aimed at raising awareness of the Convention among men and women parliamentarians in order to facilitate its implementation in their respective countries.

The first seminar, in Bamako, was for women parliamentarians from West Africa; the second, in Madagascar, was for women from the Indian Ocean; the third, in Libreville, was for women from Central Africa; the fourth, in Tunis, was for women from North Africa and the Near East; the fifth, in Port-au-Prince, was for Haitian women; and the very last one was, in Mauritania, was for Mauritanian women.

The last two seminars addressed the Network's desire to keep focusing on the CEDAW at these meetings, while breaking the theme down into sub-themes of relevance to the country hosting the seminar. In this way, CEDAW experts are always invited, as are parliamentary colleagues with expertise in the sub-themes.

The 2009 seminar to be held in the Democratic Republic of Congo on March 30-31, 2009 was presented. It will be for 52 women parliamentarians from the country and an equal number of men parliamentarians. Parliamentary colleagues from bordering countries (Rwanda, Burundi and Congo Brazzaville) will also be invited. The chosen sub-theme is "The role of women parliamentarians in conflict resolution in the Francophonie." Leading international figures and experts are expected to attend the seminar.

The following themes were then discussed by the Steering Committee:

Follow-up on children's rights: children and war

Ms. Geneviève Colot (France) presented a follow-up report on the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, and specifically on children in war. She noted that the issue of children in war involves more than the iconic child soldiers, and identified five other categories of crime against children in war: killing or maiming of children; rape and other serious sexual offences against children; abduction of children; attacks on schools or hospitals; and denial of humanitarian access for children.

First, the various legal instruments that protect children and their various enforcement mechanisms were described. It was noted that the normative instruments were sufficiently broad and precise, providing clear criteria for assessing and reporting violations against children in situations of armed conflict. It was pointed out, however, that the nature of the conflicts is increasingly changing, making it more difficult to protect children.

This change is primarily due to the following three factors:

- The fight against terrorism and counter-terrorism that target public places frequented by children and lead to treating children as if they were adults;

- Wars fought to acquire a country's resources, which are often closely tied to lucrative and sometimes illegal trade activities;
- The various motives of the parties in an armed conflict. The last United Nations report on children and armed conflicts cites the existence of 58 different parties: government forces, armed opposition forces, rebel groups, liberation movements, local militia, paramilitaries, etc.

Second, Ms. Colot discussed the implementation of current legal standards, highlighting three recent initiatives. First, children's issues are increasingly addressed by the parties in conflict and are included in peace agreements. For example, parties to conflicts are asked to refrain from recruiting or using child soldiers, release children within their ranks and respect declared ceasefires for humanitarian reasons in order to facilitate the vaccination, feeding and protection of displaced populations. However, this is still not practiced systematically, which is detrimental to children. Compromises made during such talks can lead to amnesties that conflict with the need to serve justice and fight against impunity, and to overlooking gross violations of children's rights.

Then, Ms. Colot described the "Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration" (DDR) programs, saying that they served a dual purpose: getting children out of armed groups and taking care of them, and helping children reintegrate into civilian life. Unfortunately, these programs are inadequate 1) with respect to number—there are still too many children who are not looked after; 2) with respect to quality—too often, only disarmament is really taken into account; and 3) with respect to "gender."

Lastly, the fight against impunity for crimes against children was addressed. While child victims need help, they also need justice, a prerequisite for healing the trauma suffered. Moreover, this fight is considered a means of deterrence. There has been criticism of the international community's involvement in this area, namely, that national legal processes are inadequate in number and in results, and that their focus on child soldiers too often leads to overlooking other crimes, including sexual abuse. In addition, "accountability" processes do not usually consider the responsibility of child soldiers.

In conclusion, Ms. Colot highlighted that the standards and principles guiding children's protection and welfare are now well established. However, there is still a real disconnect between the legal protection of children and the actual application of these standards in war zones. Violations of international commitments by member states are quite common, partly because of the still too frequent lack of immediate sanctions and insufficient international community response.

She proposed two areas of action to women parliamentarians, the first one tied to their roles as legislators. They must:

- ensure that their state is party to the Convention and its Optional Protocol, if it already is not; and
- ensure that child protection measures are included in their laws and practices, by voting on the necessary instruments or allocating corresponding funding.

The second area of action calls upon women parliamentarians to serve as representatives and spokespersons for the “voiceless” child victims of armed conflicts. As such, they could:

- raise awareness among the public, child welfare organizations and agencies, and publicize information, comments and demands from these groups regarding children in armed conflicts; and
- contribute on three levels: participate in national and international awareness networks to identify and disseminate "best practices"; position themselves as an important source of new information, ideas and suggestions with national players responsible for child protection; and participate in the follow-up and monitoring of operational programs to ensure that they better meet the needs of children in distress.

In conclusion, Ms. Colot reiterated her suggestion that the members of the Network of Women Parliamentarians should automatically be members of their state's delegation reporting to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which monitors the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Human trafficking: draft follow-up report

Ms. Francine Charbonneau (Quebec) presented the report on human trafficking. She began by noting that parliamentarians can and must fight this growing global problem, which violates many of women's and children's fundamental rights.

Ms. Charbonneau then discussed how difficult it was to gather accurate data on human trafficking, but still presented figures from the International Labour Organization showing that of 2.4 million victims worldwide, 270,000 are in North America and Europe.

She went on to provide figures for a few aspects of human trafficking, which includes domestic servitude, forced child labour, child soldiers, commercial exploitation and sex tourism. In Canada, it is estimated that over 800 people are victims of trafficking for purposes of domestic, factory and farm work. Furthermore, several European and North American countries are destination or transit countries for victims who will be forced to become sex trade workers. In this regard, the RCMP estimates that 600 women and children are trafficked into Canada each year for the sex trade, and that another 1,500 to 2,200 are moved through Canada to the US.

Thirdly, Ms. Charbonneau presented a few recent initiatives, such as the inclusion of the February 2008 Vienna Forum's conclusions in the Inter-Parliamentary Union's *Handbook for Parliamentarians on Combating Trafficking in Persons*. These conclusions were discussed in the July 2008 report of the APF's Quebec Branch. The guide, intended for parliamentarians from all continents, is of particular interest to the Network because it presents the current international legal framework and concrete measures that parliamentarians could take to fight human trafficking.

Finally, Ms. Charbonneau addressed the status of the signatures, ratifications and implementation of the *United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime* and its *Protocol against the Trafficking of Persons* in countries of La Francophonie. She said that within the APF, 55 member, associate and observer

branches are from United Nations member states. Of this group, 44 are party states to the Convention and 38 are party states to the Protocol (see Appendix III). In 2008, a new member state of La Francophonie ratified the *Protocol against the Trafficking of Persons*: Togo.

In conclusion, Ms. Charbonneau made four suggestions to the Network:

- That it continue monitoring the status of signatures, ratifications and implementation of the Convention and its Protocol by the states of APF member, associate and observer branches;
- That it re-invite an expert on the subject to talk to the Network in Europe at the Paris meeting in July;
- That it subsequently take a position on the matter and that this position be adopted by the Plenary Assembly through a resolution;
- That the Quebec Branch prepares a questionnaire to be sent to all APF branches in order to gather information on the day-to-day realities and the various measures taken to fight human trafficking in our respective regions.

Follow-up on the implementation of the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)*

Ms. Charbonneau (Quebec) noted that CEDAW was adopted by the United Nations on December 18, 1979 and came into force on September 3, 1981. Its Optional Protocol came into force on December 22, 2000. Currently, 185 states—representing over 90% of the United Nations members and 100% of La Francophonie countries—are party to the Convention. Moreover, 90 states are party to the Optional Protocol to the CEDAW, including 24 from La Francophonie.

However, while presenting the table of signatures and ratifications by countries of La Francophonie, Ms. Charbonneau said that nothing had changed since last July, except that Morocco announced it intended to remove its reservations. On this last point, Ms. Charbonneau reiterated that CEDAW is one of the international human rights treaties that is subject to the greatest number of reservations, which most often run counter to the rights outlined in it. While some reservations are procedural, many pertain to obligations, the very essence of the Convention, and crucial areas such as family law, legal capacity and citizenship. Fourteen member states of La Francophonie expressed such reservations.

It was also pointed out that CEDAW is overseen by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, which monitors the implementation of the Convention among state parties. The party states must submit a follow-up report no later than one year after joining the Convention, then every four years or at the Committee's request. These regular reports must include all measures taken to implement the Convention's provisions in the party state. As the table of the latest reports submitted under the Convention was distributed, it was pointed out that since the July 2008 meeting, only Lithuania had submitted a report and that Canada would be subject to review in 2009.

The Quebec Branch said that the next follow-up on the Convention would be made at the July 2009 meeting of the Steering Committee, in Paris.

Friday February 13, 2009

Women refugees

Ms. Marie-Rose Nguini-Effa (Cameroon) presented her report, listing the legal instruments that apply to the issue of women refugees. The international authorities are the *Declaration of Human Rights, 1948*, the *Geneva Convention Relating to Status of Refugees (1951)*, and its 1967 Protocol. By region, *Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa (1969)*, a convention of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), applies to African refugees, and the *Cartagena Declaration on Refugees (1984)* applies to refugees from Latin America.

An estimated 75% to 85% of the world's refugees are women and children. On average, women account for 40% of the refugee population. Developing countries are the source of 90% of this population, and they also welcome 70%. These figures, while huge, are underestimated, in part because of the many conflicts taking place in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

Ms. Effa's speech also highlighted various problems and their consequences, for example: the inability to establish a demographic profile of the refugee population; women refugees rejecting their identities; and the fact that sexual assault does not grant political refugee status.

It was concluded that the issue be studied further, that the report continue to be supplemented and that a European expert be invited to the meeting in Paris to speak on the subject.

Discussion about amending the APF's bylaws

Senator Rose-Marie Losier-Cool said that the APF's Political Committee would review the bylaws of the APF for the first time since July 2002, focusing on four areas:

- Making the bylaws consistent with the new OIF texts. The main goal is to review all of the APF's methods of operation to ensure that the vocabulary is consistent with the new *Charte de la Francophonie* (passed in 2005), the ten-year (2005–2014) strategic framework (passed in 2004), and the recent texts adopted during Summits.
- Amending the bylaws so that statements by APF entities can be adopted.
- Studying the statutes of the APF branches and membership requirements, that is, the possibility that the APF will use the membership procedures, and especially the methods for creating files, used by the Francophone world. The OIF requires prospective members to present a very complete file, as it does for members that would like to change their status.
- Suspension mechanism: the Committee will add a section describing the procedure for placing a member under observation which, for now, comes into effect by a simple decision by the Bureau.

Examining amendments to the Network's statutes

The question was raised whether the Committee should study the resolutions that the Network of Women Parliamentarians adopted unanimously, but it was decided that no amendments were necessary.

Members of the Executive Committee also touched on the draft opinions that the Network can present, reports on the texts presented at the Plenary Assembly by the permanent committees. It was again decided that no amendments were needed either to the statutes or to the bylaws, given that the Network took up matters it was interested in rather than those on the permanent committees' agendas.

Examining the *Recueil des bonnes pratiques de la démocratie parlementaire dans l'espace francophone*

Since late October 2008, the APF has been collaborating with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to create a document laying out best practices for parliamentary democracy in the Francophone world. The document states a number of universal values and aims to define indicators to help evaluate and improve the workings of parliaments. This initiative includes a number of challenges: each state has its own social, political and historical context that influences the characteristics and practices of its parliament. The APF would like to ratify the text during the Paris meeting in July.

The draft includes the particularities of the Francophone world, including those laid out in the declarations adopted by the Francophonie in Bamako and Saint-Boniface, as well as those of the Francophone parliamentary world. The document also takes into account the comments and contributions of a number of APF branches that sent the Network a report on the democratization of parliaments.

Furthermore, the Network will organize two seminars with the UNDP on the practices of parliamentary democracy, to be held before the March 22, 2009, meeting of the Parliamentary Affairs Committee, in Fribourg, and before the April 8 meeting of the Political Committee, in Luang Prabang.

The Network of Women Parliamentarians agreed to propose the following five amendments to the *Recueil*:

In the section on organizing the work of parliament:

“The parliament must take significant steps aiming to establish and maintain an equal proportion of men and women in the various roles at all levels of responsibility.”

“The parliament must take family needs into account in organizing its work.”

In the section on creating committees:

“Committee membership must reflect the composition of Parliament as accurately as possible, and must take gender into consideration.”

In the section on international relations:

“Delegations must include both men and women.”

And in the section on support staff:

“Women must be represented at all levels of the parliamentary administration hierarchy.”

Follow-up on the work of the four permanent committees

The Chair began her presentation by inviting the members of the Network to give an update on the work of the committees their branch participates in in order to inform the whole group, especially the women participating in the general APF meetings.

She then spoke about the new collaboration between the Cooperation and Development Committee and the International Cooperation Ethics Advisory Agency (ACECI). Fighting against poverty, this NGO is headquartered in Quebec and has a parliamentary vision for developing a model law to reduce poverty in order to reach the Millennium Development Goals set in 2000. The Committee Chair already offered to test the model law in his own country.

The ACECI is of the opinion that women are essential in the fight against poverty, and it suggested that women parliamentarians encourage their parliaments to adapt this model law to their state and then adopt it.

It was decided that the Network members will play a role in the proposed model bill alongside the Committee, and that the terms of this cooperation will be clarified after the Committee’s meeting of April 28–30 in Cotonou. Ms. Amissetou Affo Djobo Oloude (Benin) will attend this meeting, and has agreed to summarize the ACECI’s presentation.

Preparing for the Network of Women Parliamentarians meeting during the APF’s 35th Annual Meeting in Paris

The next meeting of the Steering Committee and of the Network of Women Parliamentarians will take place July 3, 2009, during the APF’s 35th Annual Meeting in Paris.

It was decided that the three reports studied in Cambodia will be presented; that monitoring of the CEDAW will continue; that the work of the committees be encouraged once again; that Mr. Abdou Diouf be asked a question; that Ms. Colot (France) propose a draft resolution on children and war; and that a French expert on female refugees or poverty be heard.

Respectfully submitted,

Rose-Marie Losier-Cool, Senator
Member of the Canadian Branch of the
Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF)

Travel Cost

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Branch of the <i>Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie</i> (APF)
ACTIVITY	Steering Committee of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the APF
DESTINATION	Phnom Penh, Cambodia
DATES	February 12–15, 2009
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Rose-Marie Losier-Cool
HOUSE OF COMMONS	
STAFF	Julie Pelletier
TRANSPORTATION	\$14,258.42
ACCOMMODATION	\$1,874.55
PER DIEMS	\$611.36
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$109.50
MISCELLANEOUS	\$219.33
TOTAL	\$17,073.16