

Canadian Group
Inter-Parliamentary Union



Groupe canadien
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**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
to the Sixteenth Session of the Steering Committee of the
Parliamentary Conference on the World Trade Organization**

Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

**Geneva, Switzerland
3 October 2007**

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Organized jointly by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the European Parliament

1. Background

The Parliamentary Conference on the WTO is a joint undertaking of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the European Parliament. Its primary objective is to enhance the external transparency of the WTO and to make it accountable to legislators as elected representatives of the people. The sessions of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO are held once a year and on the occasion of WTO Ministerial Conferences.

The Steering Committee of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO is responsible for all matters relating to the organisation of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO.

2. Agenda

The Steering Committee of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO met on 3 October 2007 at IPU Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. The session included the following agenda items:

- Hearing with chief WTO negotiators of the four major trading powers
- Special hearing with Ambassador Crawford (New Zealand)
- Consideration of revised draft guidelines for relations between governments and parliaments in international trade issues
- Definition of geographical regions for the purposes of the Steering Committee
- Composition of the Steering Committee
- Activities of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO in 2007 and beyond

3. The Canadian Delegation

Forty-six participants from national parliaments representing 20 countries and regional parliamentary assemblies took part in the meeting of the Steering Committee, including the Honourable Donald H. Oliver, Senator, P.C., and Mr. Ted Menzies, M.P., (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation and the Minister of International Trade), from Canada.

4. The Meeting

The IPU's report on the 16th Session of the Conference Steering Committee, which includes a summary of decisions taken by the Committee, may be found in Appendix 1.

At the close of the Meeting the Steering Committee adopted the following Statement:

Intensive discussions held in September have yielded some tangible progress in the Doha Round. Agreements on modalities on agriculture and non-agricultural market

access (NAMA) remain crucial for the Round to conclude within a reasonable time frame and to deliver on its development commitment.

The information on the ongoing talks, shared with us by the negotiators of the four major trading powers and the chairman of the Agriculture negotiating group, stand proof of the fact that convergence is still possible, albeit very challenging.

In the last months, some political actors have raised the possibility of a minimalist "Doha-lite" package, calibrating ambitions against sensitivities of countries and trade blocks, as a realistic way forward in saving the Round. The case for a realizable Doha package could be even stronger in view of the looming systemic implications of a failure.

As members of parliament with a mandate to oversee and encourage government action in the field of international trade, we reiterate our call for an ambitious package: a compromise lies on the path of mutual, balanced and fair concessions, taking into account the overall world economic landscape and the enormous risks involved in a continued stalemate. Therefore, we urge our governments to spare no efforts in ensuring an equitable and development-oriented outcome of the Doha Round. As parliamentarians we restate our commitment to provide our firm backing to this process.

Respectfully submitted,

The Honourable Donald H. Oliver, Q.C., Senator
President, Canadian Group IPU

Appendix 1

SUMMARY OF DECISIONS (Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union)

1. The Steering Committee of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO met on 3 October 2007 at IPU Headquarters in Geneva and was attended by 46 persons. The session was co-chaired by Mr. G. Versnick, representing the IPU, and by Mr. H. Markov and Mr. R. Sturdy (for the last part of the day), representing the European Parliament.
2. During the morning sitting, the Committee held a hearing with chief WTO negotiators of the four major trading powers: Ambassador Clodoaldo Hugueneu Filho (Brazil), Ambassador Ujal Singh Bhatia (India), Ambassador Eckart Guth (European Union) and Mr. David Shark, Deputy Permanent Representative of the United States of America. In their introductory presentations, the Ambassadors expressed guarded optimism with regard to the chances of the ongoing negotiations on modalities for agriculture and on non-agricultural market access to conclude within a reasonable time frame. They emphasized that the achievement of a balanced result in agriculture and NAMA talks was a pre-condition for an eventual success of the Doha Round.
3. The Ambassadors responded to a number of direct questions dealing with such diverse subjects as the prospects for a prolongation of the Trade Promotion Authority by the US Congress; the negotiation of Economic Partnership Agreements between the European Union and the ACP countries; the ACP-EU Sugar Protocol; parliamentary presence at WTO Ministerial Conferences, etc.
4. At the afternoon sitting, the Committee held a hearing with Ambassador Crawford Falconer (New Zealand), current Chairperson of the Special Session of the WTO Committee on Agriculture. In his words, an overall agreement is difficult but not impossible. The text of the Draft Modalities for Agriculture has been well accepted by the delegations.
5. An in-depth exchange of views took place among the Steering Committee members with regard to the need to provide continued political support to the negotiations for as long as the negotiators themselves were hopeful of a successful outcome. As an expression of its determination to encourage proactive government action in the field of international trade, the Committee adopted a statement, the text of which may be found in Annex 2. The statement was subsequently transmitted to the press corps in Geneva and forwarded to the WTO Secretariat.
6. The Committee considered a revised draft of the "Guidelines (minimum standards) for relations between governments and parliaments on international trade issues", prepared by the Secretariat of the European Parliament on the basis of two comparative studies, which had been undertaken by the European Parliament and the French Senate respectively. The revised draft was drawn up in conformity with the suggestions made by the members at the Committee's fifteenth session in June 2007. The Committee approved the revised draft which would be submitted to the entire membership of the Conference for adoption at the next plenary session.

7. The Committee also considered a revised paper concerning the definition of geographical regions for the purpose of rotation of Steering Committee members from among national parliaments. The Committee approved the proposed listing of geographical regions according to which, in the future, one seat would have to be reassigned from the region of Europe and North America to Latin America and the Caribbean. The Committee also approved a list of relevant draft amendments to the Rules of the Parliamentary Conference on WTO, which would now be submitted for endorsement by the entire Conference at its next plenary session.

8. According to the text approved, the new set of rules could not be applied retroactively to the national parliaments serving on the Steering Committee at present and their term would therefore expire in 2012 only. Moreover, the rotation of Steering Committee members from among national parliaments would be carried out in such a way that no more than half of the parliaments representing a given geographical region would be replaced at any one time, while the principal trade negotiators and major economies would be always represented. All future changes in the composition of the Steering Committee would be proposed jointly by the IPU and the European Parliament as the Conference co-organizers and approved by the Steering Committee as a whole.

9. Having considered an application for membership in the Steering Committee by the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, the Committee felt that it would need more time to study this question in detail, bearing in mind its potential implications for the issue of the overall representation of inter-parliamentary structures and assemblies at the Steering Committee, and decided to postpone the decision on the application until after the new composition of the Steering Committee was adopted.

10. Despite a high degree of uncertainty regarding the conclusion of the negotiations of the Doha Round and the possible timing of the next WTO Ministerial Conference, the Committee felt that there was no point in postponing indefinitely the holding of the next plenary session of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO and that the session should take place in 2008 no matter what. The Steering Committee decided therefore, that if the WTO was to hold a Ministerial Conference in 2008, the Annual Session of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO should take place in parallel with this inter-governmental meeting, as was the case in Cancun and Hong Kong. In the eventuality that there was no progress in WTO negotiations and no Ministerial Conference in 2008, then the Annual Session of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO should take place before summer 2008, in Geneva or Brussels. Should the Conference be held in Geneva, at least one session of the Steering Committee would be held in Brussels.

11. The IPU and the European Parliament were entrusted with carrying out the necessary consultations as to the possible dates and venue of the next session of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO. A formal decision concerning the session's agenda, dates and venue would be taken by the Steering Committee at its next meeting, to be held tentatively in the first quarter of 2008, at the IPU Headquarters in Geneva or in the EP premises in Brussels.

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
ACTIVITY	Sixteenth Session of the Steering Committee of the Parliamentary Conference on the World Trade Organization
DESTINATION	Geneva, Switzerland
DATES	October 3, 2007
DELEGATION	
SENATE	The Hon. Donald H. Oliver, Q.C.
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Mr. Ted Menzies
STAFF	
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 47.60
ACCOMMODATION	\$457.73
HOSPITALITY	
PER DIEMS	\$201.78
OFFICIAL GIFTS	
MISCELLANEOUS	
TOTAL	\$707.11