



**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
to the Seminar of the Assemblée parlementaire de la
Francophonie (APF) Network of Women
Parliamentarians on the Role of Women
Parliamentarians in Conflict Resolution in the
Francophonie and the Convention on the Elimination of
All Forms of Discrimination Against Women**

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

**Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo
March 30-31, 2009**

Report

The Parliamentary Delegation of the Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF), which participated in the APF Network of Women Parliamentarians seminar on "The role of women parliamentarians in conflict resolution in the Francophonie," and on the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), held in Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) on March 30 and 31, 2009, has the honour of presenting its report.

The delegation consisted of the Honourable Rose-Marie Losier-Cool, Senator and President of the APF Network of Women Parliamentarians, accompanied by Christine Lafrance, Acting Executive Secretary to the Branch.

Since 2004, the APF Network of Women Parliamentarians has been operating an independent cooperation program in partnership with the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF), and organizing information and awareness seminars on CEDAW for women parliamentarians in Francophone nations.

To date, the Network has held six seminars on CEDAW in the following countries:

- Mali, for women parliamentarians from West Africa
- Madagascar, for women parliamentarians from areas bordering the Indian Ocean
- Gabon, for women parliamentarians from Central Africa
- Tunisia, for women parliamentarians from North Africa and the Near East
- Haiti
- Mauritania

The United Nations General Assembly adopted CEDAW in 1979. The purpose of the Convention is to establish equal rights for women around the world. It is the most important international legal instrument concerning women's rights developed thus far.

The timing was right for this seminar to be held in the DRC. On March 7, 2009, the International Federation of Human Rights Leagues launched a major two-year campaign to increase awareness of the Convention, which marks its 30th anniversary this year. In its news release, the Federation highlighted the importance of CEDAW, stating that although the document is not well known, it has tremendous implications for local populations, particularly on the continent. Every day, hundreds of organizations draw on CEDAW to condemn the legislative and social restrictions that shackle women.

The Federation plans to use all the tools at its disposal to promote CEDAW, including marches, demonstrations, news conferences, traveling displays, school presentations, workshops, petitions and legislative proposals introducing quotas for women in

legislative assemblies. The Federation states that some 40 African countries are preparing to step up mobilization efforts.

The Federation goes on to say that most African countries have ratified CEDAW in order to impress various international funding agencies, and that discrimination against women remains a tremendous problem. It also states that in addition to the intolerable physical attacks they must endure—from traditional practices such as genital mutilation to the more recent use of systematic rape as a weapon of warfare—millions of African women and young girls face inequities under the law.

In this regard, the “Déclaration de la femme congolaise contre les violences sexuelles comme arme de guerre” was adopted on March 8, in Kinshasa. The declaration serves as the basis for the “I Denounce” campaign, and describes itself as a distress call in response to sexually violent atrocities committed as weapons of war. While the delegation was in the DRC, we noted that the “I Denounce” campaign is a resounding success and is supported not only by Congolese women but by women in the foreign diplomatic corps posted to the DRC.

More than 120 people participated in the seminar that the Network organized in Kinshasa, including 52 women parliamentarians from the DRC, an equal number of male parliamentarians from that country, and women parliamentarians from bordering countries (Burundi and the Central African Republic). This high participation rate can be explained in part by the fact that the sexual abuse of women in the DRC and bordering countries has attracted a great deal of attention in the region and has been documented by many international organizations, including the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC).

Parliamentarians from Africa, America and Europe, and a Swiss parliamentarian representing the Council of Europe addressed participants. Other speakers included international experts from the European Union, African Union, the Francophonie, the CEDAW committee and MONUC.

The formal opening session was chaired by Vital Kamerhe, President of the National Assembly. Speakers included Mr. Kamerhe; Brigitte Kalaba, parliamentarian and Deputy Quaestor in the National Assembly; Senator Rose-Marie Losier-Cool; and Louis Michel, European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid. Valentin Loemba-Bayonne read a message on behalf of Abdou Diouf, Secretary General of the Francophonie.

Activities on the first day focused on the theme "The role of women parliamentarians in conflict resolution in the Francophonie." Participants heard from the following representatives: Ambassador Émile Ognimba, Director of Political Affairs, Commission of the African Union, spoke on behalf of the African Union; Valentin Loemba-Bayonne, Cooperative Projects Officer, Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, delivered the perspective of the Francophonie; Teresa Polara, representative of the European Commission Delegation, spoke on behalf of the European Union; Elsie Effange-Mbelle, senior advisor on gender, represented MONUC; and Francine John-Calame, Member of the National Council of Switzerland and the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, spoke on behalf of the Council of Europe.

Both male and female parliamentarians from the DRC led discussions following these five presentations, and international experts answered questions.

On March 31, the seminar focused on CEDAW. Huguette Bokpe Gnacadja (Benin), a former expert advisor on the United Nations CEDAW Committee, made a presentation on the Convention and its Optional Protocol, the procedure for submitting reports, follow-up measures and the role of parliamentarians in implementing CEDAW.

The first roundtable examined the implementation of CEDAW in Chad and Italy. Elise Loum Ndoadoumngue Neloumseï, Vice-President, Chad National Assembly and the Pan-African Parliament, presented the situation in Chad. Patrizia Morelli, a parliamentarian from the Aosta Valley, spoke on behalf of Italy.

At the second roundtable, participants discussed the situation in the DRC and proposals to address it. The parliamentary perspective was presented by Adèle Kayinda Mahina, Chair of the Gender and Equality Parliamentary Network, and Senator Bernadette Nkoy Mafuta, Vice-Chair of this Network. A representative of the Minister of Gender, Family Affairs and Children, spoke on behalf of the government, and Rose Mutombo Kiese, National President of the Cadre permanent de concertation de la femme congolaise, represented the public's views.

At the end of these valuable and productive discussions, the Hon. Octavie Mulaya (DRC) read a Declaration, and Burundi parliamentarian Gloriose Be harino read motions of thanks which were adopted by the Assembly.

The meeting ended with a formal ceremony. Statements were made by Senator Rose-Marie Losier-Cool, and by Eve Bazaïba Masudi, DRC Senator and Committee Chair, speaking on behalf of the Senate President.

The text of the Declaration is as follows:

We, the men and women parliamentarians of the DRC, Burundi, Canada, the Central African Republic, Switzerland, Chad and the Aosta Valley, having attended the Seminar of the APF Network of Women Parliamentarians concerning the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the role of women parliamentarians in conflict resolution in the Francophonie, held March 30 and 31, 2009, in Kinshasa,

- Recognize the role of women parliamentarians in the search for equitable solutions to the challenges posed by international conflicts in general and those in Africa in particular;
- Acknowledge that, for women to play an increased role in conflict resolution, they must participate in greater numbers in decision-making bodies, as provided for in CEDAW;
- Deplore the delays in implementing CEDAW, a situation which is aggravated by the failure of some States to ratify the Convention's Optional Protocol allowing for more effective implementation;

- Emphasize that situations of conflict do not exempt our member States from their obligations regarding CEDAW;
- Urge our member States to do more to translate their political will into budgets for programs, strategies and policies for implementing women's rights as provided for in CEDAW;
- Undertake to play our full parliamentary role by introducing advocacy and awareness mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of CEDAW;
- Ask the OIF and our other development partners to support us in implementing sub-regional mechanisms for the effective and sustainable implementation and monitoring of CEDAW.

Respectfully submitted,

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

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Branch of the <i>Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF)</i>
ACTIVITY	Seminar of the <i>Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF)</i> Network of Women Parliamentarians on the Role of Women in Conflicts and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
DESTINATION	Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo
DATES	March 30-31 st , 2009
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Rose-Marie Losier-Cool
HOUSE OF COMMONS	
STAFF	Christine Lafrance
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 8,580.75
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 480.27
PER DIEMS	\$ 444.61
MISCELLANEOUS	\$ 147.76
TOTAL	\$ 9,653.39