



**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation  
respecting its participation at the Parliamentary gathering on  
the occasion of the 7<sup>th</sup> Summit of the Americas: Legislative  
Transparency and the 36<sup>th</sup> Board of Directors Meeting**

**Canadian Section of ParlAmericas**

**Panama City, Panama  
April 10-11, 2015**

# Report

## **Joint ParlAmericas and Latin American Parliament gathering to discuss legislative transparency**

### **a) Introduction**

On 10 April 2015, a joint gathering of members of ParlAmericas and the Latin American Parliament (Parlatino) was held at the Parlatino Parliament building in Panama City, Panama. The meeting was held on the occasion of the 7<sup>th</sup> Summit of the Americas, which was also held in Panama City.

ParlAmericas is an independent network made up of national legislatures that are also members of the Organization of American States (OAS). The purpose of ParlAmericas is to promote parliamentary participation in the inter-American system and develop inter-parliamentary dialogue on issues of importance to the hemisphere.

For its part, Parlatino is a permanent regional unicameral body comprised of parliamentarians of the national Parliaments located in Latin America. The purpose of Parlatino is to promote human rights and economic and social development, as well as to maintain and foster relations with other Latin American Parliaments, as well as international organizations.

Legislative transparency was the overarching theme of the gathering, while democratic innovations was the topic of the first moderated session, and parliamentary ethics was the topic of the second moderated session.

### **b) Opening Ceremony**

Prior to the commencement of the sessions, an opening ceremony took place, followed by the signing of a memorandum of understanding between ParlAmericas and Parlatino committing both organizations to work more closely together in the promotion of shared regional values and goals.

Speaking first during the opening ceremony, Mr. Adolfo Valderrama, Speaker of the National Assembly of Panama, gave background information on Panama's political and social history, then noted that Panama's current political vision includes the democratic values of free speech, access to information and providing for the social needs of citizens. He indicated that technology could be leveraged to better engage with citizens and to generally improve the quality of life of citizens and their individual capacities.

Ms. Blanca Alcalá, Senator (Mexico) and Secretary General of ParLatino, spoke about the need to strengthen governance and democracy in the region. She indicated that one of the shared purposes of the two organizations is to improve standards of living for citizens in the region. It is important, though, for members to carry out their legislative duties in a transparent manner.

Ms. Marcela Guerra, Senator (Mexico) and President of ParlAmericas discussed the role between technological advances and industrial and social development. She also provided a background on ParlAmericas as an organization, along with its role in promoting democratic values, cooperation and networking between parliamentarians of the

hemisphere. Ms. Guerra concluded by speaking about the benefits of open government and improving the exchange of information between parliamentary institutions.

Hon. Rob Nicholson, Member of Parliament for Niagara Falls and Minister of Foreign Affairs (Canada), spoke about the important link between the public's access to government information and the maintenance of a healthy democracy; such information acts to assist citizens in participating in public decision-making. He noted that the countries of the Americas faced common challenges that required closer collaboration and cooperation. Minister Nicholson noted that Canada supports a more prosperous, secure and democratic hemisphere through the promotion of economic opportunity, strengthened security and institutions. He also noted that the OAS represented a key channel for hemispheric cooperation, as does ParlAmericas.

Mr. Elias Castillo, Member of the National Assembly (Panama) and President of Parlatino, emphasized the importance of transparency before the public by noting that the land the Parlatino Parliament building was built on was formerly an off-limit area. He further indicated that closer ties between ParlAmericas and Parlatino would benefit both organizations in their work. Mr. Castillo stated it is important to find common ground across the different regions of the hemisphere and to work together to engage citizens who are disinterested in the current state of politics.

The keynote speaker for the opening ceremony was Mr. Luis Almagro, Senator (Uruguay) and Secretary General of the OAS. He emphasized the strong link that exists between democracy and legislatures by recalling the difficulties Uruguay experienced in establishing its National Assembly; this period was interrupted by a dictatorship. He noted that a time capsule was buried during the dictatorship to serve as a reminder to never forget the period when the country did not have a democracy. Mr. Almagro also spoke of the importance of certain core values that legislatures must be based on, such as transparency, accountability and communication with citizens. He indicated that legislatures with strong core values will have legitimacy, which in turn will improve public approval levels. He concluded by indicating the OAS' desire to seek areas of collaboration with ParlAmericas and Parlatino.

### **c) Panel 1: Democratic Innovations**

The first panel, on the topic of democratic innovations, was moderated by Mr. Luis Eduardo Quiros, Member of the National Assembly (Panama), and included the following participants who provided the gathering with their perspectives on the topic: Mr. José Roberto Alejos, Member of Congress (Guatemala), Ms. Gina Godoy, Member of the National Assembly (Ecuador), Mr. Earl Dreeshen, Member of Parliament (Canada), Mr. Domingos Neto, Member of the Chamber of Deputies (Brazil), and Mr. Alejandro Encinas, Senator (Mexico).

As moderator, Mr. Quiros introduced the panel topic. He noted that parliamentarians today could leverage new technologies to strengthen the democratic participation and engagement of citizens. Democratic innovations being utilized in the hemisphere, such as participatory budgeting and law making, "wiki" platforms that allow public input in drafting legislation and other web tools, serve to connect citizens to their legislature. Mr. Quiros noted, however, that challenges will be encountered by legislatures that adopt digital-age technologies aimed at engaging citizens, but that these innovations are an important

mechanism to counter decreasing confidence and satisfaction among citizens in the region with their legislature.

Mr. Alejos' presentation centred on the democratic innovations adopted by the Congress of Guatemala following the end of a period of dictatorship in 1986. They are designed to open its processes and proceedings to the public. He noted, among other things, that an Office of Information was established and congressional records were being published online.

Ms. Godoy's presentation examined the changes to citizen participation that resulted from the adoption of Ecuador's 2008 Constitution and how, through information and communication technology (ICT), Ecuador's Assembly has been able increasingly better engage with citizens. She noted that legislatures must act to motivate public participation and build consensus about how to solve problems facing the country.

Mr. Dreeshen's presentation touched on a number of topics, notably the use of technology in the parliamentary context to reach out and engage with communities and the role played by parliamentary committees in gathering a wide range of views regarding legislation. He also talked about the political financing system in Canada; specifically, the importance of limiting political donations to citizens only while prohibiting donations by corporations and unions, along with the role fundraising under such a system has in engaging citizens, levelling the playing field and opening opportunities for individuals interested in becoming members of Parliament. He also noted that a balance needs to be found between adopting new technologies and ensuring that these new technologies can allow for full engagement and participation among all groups of citizens.

In Mr. Neto's presentation, he indicated that a renewed commitment to engage with the public began as a result of the protests that occurred as a result of hosting the World Cup of football/soccer in which the public questioned its opportunity costs. He gave an overview of the new technologies the Brazilian National Congress has embraced, such as crowd-sourcing, an e-democracy portal where the public can provide feedback on legislation and propose agenda items of legislature, interactive real-time public hearings accessible on mobile phones, "wiki legs" (a platform for the collaborative drafting of legislation) and "hack-a-thons," where ICT students and professionals design web applications for use by the Congress.

Mr. Alejandro Encinas, Senator (Mexico) provided an overview of the constitutional reforms in Mexico as they relate to the access to information regime and gave details concerning the implementation of the access to information regime at the national and state levels.

A question and answer session followed between panellists and attendees of the gathering. Some themes brought up during this session included the role of the media and viewpoints in reversing the trend of public disengagement in political affairs. For his part, Mr. Dreeshen made several points to the gathering, including the benefits of reducing the cost of elections, that MPs in Canada often introduce private members' bills to address issues brought forward by their constituents and the unwanted effects of a 24-hour news cycle. He also provided information about Canada's *Federal Accountability Act*.

#### **d) Panel 2: Parliamentary Ethics**

The second panel, on the topic of parliamentary ethics, was moderated by Ms. Ana Matilde Gomez, Member of the National Assembly (Panama), and included the following participants who provided the gathering with their perspectives on the topic: Miguel Edgardo Martinez, Member of Congress (Honduras), Mr. Wade Mark, Speaker of the House of Representatives (Trinidad and Tobago), Ms. Epsy Campbell, Member of the Legislative Assembly (Costa Rica), and Mr. Jorge Pedraza, Senator (Colombia).

As moderator, Ms. Gomez introduced the topic. She noted that numerous legislatures in the hemisphere have either adopted a code of ethics and conduct for their members or the adoption of a code was being considered and debated. In her view, the adoption by a legislature of a code of ethics is important as it helps to strengthen public confidence in the work of parliamentarians and the institution.

Mr. Martinez's provided information during his presentation on the efforts to create an open and transparent National Congress in Honduras. He noted a number of Among the steps taken to modernize Congress, including allowing the public to attend sittings of Congress, broadcasting sittings on television, posting bills online, and giving the Congress' ethics office greater independence from the Congress.

Mr. Mark provided an overview of the conflict of interest and ethics regime in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. He indicated that the conflict of interest and ethics regime for parliamentarians is not found in a single code; rather it is dispersed in various pieces of legislation. He provided an overview of disclosure obligations of parliamentarians as required by the Standing Orders, and gave information about legislation dealing with the prevention of corruption and bribery. Mr. Mark noted that the contravention of the conflict of interest and ethics regime by parliamentarians could result in expulsion.

Ms. Campbell's presentation reviewed the efforts made in the Congress of the Dominican Republic to reduce or eliminate unnecessary or unethical spending by congresspeople, in respect of the services and allowances provided to them in order to carry out their functions. She noted that in her view, ethical behaviour of congresspeople is a clear expectation held by the public.

In Mr. Pedraza's presentation, he indicated to the gathering that in recent times numerous scandals involving politicians corrupted by narcotics gangs in Colombia have resulted in dozens of members of the Legislature being convicted and sentenced to jail. In his view, early childhood education would assist in setting society-wide norms as to ethical behaviour. In terms of best practices for legislatures, he indicated that disclosure, monitoring of lobbying and public access to information were important features of a transparent and ethical institution.

A question and answer session followed between panellists and attendees of the gathering. Some themes brought up during this session included methods to increase the participation of civil society in public decision-making by, for instance, creating permanent channels of communication between civil society groups and legislatures, the important role of political will in making parliamentary ethics a priority, and the potential beneficial impacts on such matters that could occur by raising education levels in society and reducing income inequality.

Following the second panel, a Final Declaration was read and concurred in. The text of the declaration can be found in Appendix A.

## **36<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Board of directors**

### **a) Introduction**

The ParlAmericas Board of Directors held its 36<sup>th</sup> meeting in Panama City, Panama, at the Country Inn and Suites on 11 April 2015. The meeting was chaired by Ms. Marcella Guerra Castillo, Senator (Mexico) and President of ParlAmericas. Other participants were:

- Mr. German Alcides Blanco Alvarez, Vice-President, Member of the Chamber of Representatives of Colombia, representing South America;
- Dr. Jennifer Simons, Vice-President of the Group of Women Parliamentarians, and Speaker of the National Assembly of the Parliament of Suriname, representing South America;
- Mr. Randy Hoback, Past President, Member of the House of Commons of Canada, *ex officio*;
- Senator Michael L. MacDonald (Canada), representing North America;
- Ms. Guadalupe Valdez San Pedro, Member of the Chamber of Deputies of the Dominican Republic, representing Central America;
- Mr. Ignacio Urrutia Bonilla, Member of the Chamber of Deputies of the National Congress of Chile, representing South America;
- Mr. Hugh Buchanan, Member of Parliament of Jamaica, representing the Caribbean; and
- Mr. Wade Mark, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Trinidad and Tobago, representing the Caribbean.

The main objectives of this board of directors meeting were:

- To receive an update from board of directors members concerning recent ParlAmericas activities;
- To review and consider the International Secretariat's Report, including the Director General's report, a financial update of the organization, and new projects and financing; and
- To plan events for 2015.

### **b) President's Report**

Ms. Guerra's report began with her noting that she was growing increasingly comfortable in the role of President of ParlAmericas, and thanked the board for their support. She provided updates concerning the gathering of the Group of Women's Parliamentarians, in Argentina in June, and the efforts to encourage Peru's participation in ParlAmericas. When the floor was opened to comments from board members, some indicated their interest in having Canada host a future event, while acknowledging Minister Nicholson's participation in previous day's opening ceremony.

Members of the board provided updates concerning their recent activities. Among the activities that were brought up was the Canadian section's recent bilateral visit to Colombia, which it was noted served as a good example of ParlAmericas fostering closer

ties between countries of the hemisphere. An update was also given by a member concerning a meeting held in Ecuador hosted by the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR).

#### **c) International Secretariat Report**

The Director General of ParlAmericas, Ms. Alisha Todd, provided the board with a report on the organizational and financial outlook of ParlAmericas. She indicated that the International Secretariat had been working closely with the government of Canada in order to achieve funding that would provide financial stability for the organization over the next five years. The board commended the International Secretariat for its work, with a view that securing a stable base of funding would allow the organization to seek outside funding. A discussion arose as to potential organizational partners and sources of funding, and plans and approaches for finding the way forward were discussed.

Ms. Todd also reviewed the projects, programs and workshops that ParlAmericas had planned for the five-year period ahead, noting that these would raise the profile of ParlAmericas in the hemisphere.

#### **d) Planning of Events for 2015**

The planned calendar of events and activities was presented in detail by Ms. Todd and reviewed by the board. It was noted that ParlAmericas was seeking to promote collaboration through hosting events or participating in events hosted by like-minded organizations.

The preliminary agenda for the gathering of the Group of Women Parliamentarians was presented to the board. Discussion on the agenda included considering ways to boost participation/attendance on the part of male parliamentarians at such events. It was noted that the location of Termas de Rio Honda, Argentina, was chosen as it is the home state of Argentina's first female governor.

#### **e) Points for Discussion**

It was brought to the board's attention that ParlAmerica's Strategic Plan had expired in 2014 and needed to be reviewed for potential updates. Some members indicated an interest in being involved in this exercise and a committee was struck to take this on.

#### **f) Annual General Meeting of the ParlAmericas Corporation**

Acting in his capacity as the President of the ParlAmericas Corporation, Sen. MacDonald provided the board with an update of matters concerning the corporation. Following the update, the appropriate motions were moved and passed concerning matters of internal business.

Respectfully submitted,

Mr. Randy Hoback, M.P.  
Chair of the Canada Section of ParlAmericas

## APPENDIX A

### DECLARATION OF THE ASSEMBLED PARLIAMENTARIANS OF THE AMERICAS ON THE OCCASION OF THE VII SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS\*

#### **Panama City, Panama**

The Government of Panama is hosting the VII Summit of the Americas from April 10 to 11, 2015, to serve as a platform for the heads of State and Government from across the hemisphere to hold debates under the theme of “Prosperity with Equity: The Challenge of Cooperation in the Americas” – including the sub-themes of democratic governance and citizen participation.

As pillars of democracy, parliamentarians from 26 countries of the Americas are convening on the occasion of the Summit, with the purpose of exchanging experiences and knowledge related to national and regional commitments on transparency, with a focus on democratic innovations and parliamentary ethics. To this end, at the *Parliamentary Gathering*, organized by the Latin American Parliament (*Parlamento Latinoamericano*) and ParlAmericas, delegations of parliamentarians committed to the promotion of high standards of legislative transparency:

#### **Whereas:**

It is an obligation of our parliaments to contribute to peace and to the region’s democracy through peaceful and constitutional avenues, and for this reason it is urgent to actively promote among citizens that would take advantage of new information technologies for education and citizen participation.

Legislatures benefit from a vibrant civil society and from the existence of strong mechanisms for inclusive political engagement of citizens, both in understanding citizen priorities and in helping ensure accountability of parliamentarians to the citizens they represent;

The nature of legislative representation is evolving, as citizens are able to communicate more easily with each other, and with their representatives, as a result of greater access to mobile communications and the internet, as well as the spread of social media;

The Americas has been a leading region in democratic innovation, from groundbreaking work on participatory budgeting; and through efforts to use new technology to engage citizens;

Latin America has played a leading role globally in sharing information on legislative openness through various organizations, among them the Legislative Openness Working Group of the Open Government Partnership;

New technologies also provide legislatures with increased opportunities to engage citizens in legislative work – including rural populations living in poverty and other marginalized groups – thereby providing an opportunity to strengthen confidence in public institutions;

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\* Source: “Declaration,” Parliamentary Gathering on the occasion of the VII Summit of the Americas: Legislative Transparency, Panama City, Panama, 10 April 2015.



Advances in digital communications have also helped to increase citizens' expectations of their legislatures, including an increase in said expectations with respect to transparency and ethics;

Leaders of the parliaments of the Americas issued the Lima Declaration in July 2014, through which they made commitments to bring governments closer to the people, support transparency and accountability in parliamentary work, and facilitate social inclusion;

It is the will of the Parliaments of the continent to promote and improve transparency mechanisms, recognizing the work that various organizations carry out on this issue, among them the *Red Latinoamericana por la Transparencia Legislativa*;

There exists a growing body of international norms and standards on legislative transparency and ethics, including the Santiago Declaration on Parliamentary Transparency and Integrity in Parliaments and Political Parties, which was signed in Santiago de Chile in January 2012; the Declaration on Parliamentary Openness, which has been endorsed by more than 160 civil society organizations in more than 80 countries, and new standards on codes of ethics for parliamentarians being developed by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association;

## **RESOLVE**

To support the following recommendations:

- 1) To commit to the strengthening of regional cooperation and to the exchange of best practices, keeping in mind the evolution of citizen expectations of legislatures with respect to transparency and ethics in our societies, and to utilize the technological advances and the experience of leaders on these themes in the Americas, with the objective of strengthening regional cooperation and the exchange of best practices, including the possibility of developing common benchmarks on openness and parliamentary ethics and conduct. For this reason, the participating organizations at this Gathering invite other forums and legislative assemblies to promote parliamentary transparency and ethics that respond to citizens' expectations.
- 2) Facilitate collaboration between the Latin American Parliament and ParlAmericas, with the Legislative Openness Working Group of the Open Government Partnership and other stakeholders to work on legislative transparency that would lead to regional cooperation.
- 3) Foster among member parliaments of the organizations mentioned above to collect and share information on codes of conduct and codes of ethics, as well as best practices on disclosure of interests, with the possibility of developing regional and sub-regional initiatives on parliamentary ethics and transparency.
- 4) Encourage the opening of the legislatures of the region so that they may collaborate with civil society groups, technologists and citizens with the objective of improving the capacity of parliaments in the digital era.

Parliamentarians expressed their satisfaction with and approval of the agenda of the VII Summit of the Americas which convenes the Heads of State and Government of our countries and agree with the necessity of achieving true regional integration, the only path for countries to achieve sustainable development on central issues such as education, health, energy, the environment, migration, security, citizen participation and democratic governance.

Adopted on April 10, 2015 in Panama City, Panama

## Travel Costs

<b>ASSOCIATION</b>	Canadian Section of ParlAmericas
<b>ACTIVITY</b>	7 <sup>th</sup> Summit of the Americas: Legislative Transparency and the 36 <sup>th</sup> Board of Directors Meeting
<b>DESTINATION</b>	Panama City, Panama
<b>DATES</b>	April 10-11, 2015
<b>DELEGATION</b>	
SENATE	Hon. Michael L. MacDonald, Senator
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Mr. Earl Dreeshen, M.P. Mr. Randy Hoback, M.P. Hon. Lawrence MacAulay, P.C., M.P. Mr. Marc-André Morin, M.P.
STAFF	Mr. Andre Barnes, Association Analyst Mr. Alexandre Roger, Association Secretary
<b>TRANSPORTATION</b>	<b>\$ 20,348.90</b>
<b>ACCOMMODATION</b>	<b>\$ 4,348.05</b>
<b>HOSPITALITY</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>
<b>PER DIEMS</b>	<b>\$ 3,348.80</b>
<b>OFFICIAL GIFTS</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>
<b>MISCELLANEOUS REGISTRATION FEES</b>	<b>/ \$ 2.08</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 28,047.83</b>