

---

# The Parliamentary Conference of the Americas: An Unprecedented Event

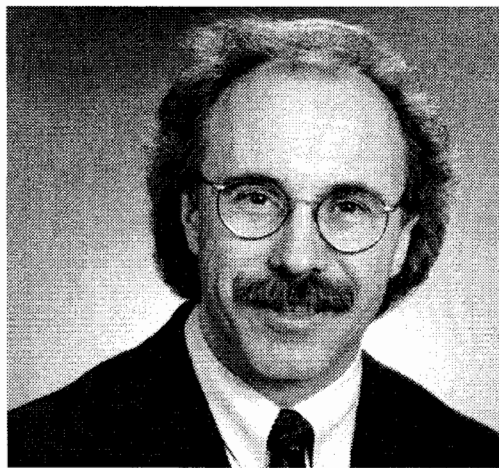
---

by Jean-Pierre Charbonneau

*For over a century and a half, the history of the Western Hemisphere has been marked by a desire to forge closer ties between the Americas, and there has recently been significant progress in economic integration. The Parliamentary Conference of the Americas, to be held in Quebec City from September 18 to 22, 1997 on the theme "Towards the Americas of the Year 2005: Democracy, Development and Prosperity", will bring together for the first time parliamentarians from some 200 unitary, federal and federated states of the Americas.*

This Conference will allow us, as political representatives to exchange views on the issues and impacts of continental economic integration and to clarify our role in this undertaking. It will provide an opportunity to debate the consequences of economic integration in the Americas in a variety of areas and to discuss means of action of parliamentarians that are tailored to the new realities in the Americas.<sup>1</sup> The first day will be devoted to an overview of the processes of integration in the Americas, while the second day will give us an opportunity to look into the role and participation of parliamentarians in those processes. Accounts of the various integration experiments currently under way in the Americas and the different means of action of parliamentarians in the integration process, in Latin America, in Europe and in the Asia-Pacific region will enable those present to spell out the role that parliamentarians could well play in the process of economic integration in the Americas.

The event's prestige is heightened by the presence of many eminent personalities who have agreed to act as the Honorary Co-Presidents of the Conference. They include:



Jean-Pierre Charbonneau

- Mr. José Sarney, President of the Federative Republic of Brazil (1985-1990), President of the Senate of the Federative Republic of Brazil (1995-1996) and Senator.
- Mr. Edgard Leblanc Fils, President of the Senate of the Republic of Haïti.
- Mrs. Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, President of the Republic of Nicaragua (1990-1997).

Mr. Oscar Arias Sánchez, Nobel Peace Prize Winner (1987) and President of the Republic of Costa Rica (1986-1990) will be the keynote speaker.

---

*Jean-Pierre Charbonneau is President of the Quebec National Assembly and President of the Parliamentary Conference of the Americas.*



**From left to right: First row:** The President of the Central American Parliament, **Ernesto Lima Mena**, the Chair of the Canadian Region of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, **Louise Dacquay**, the Speaker of the Senate of Canada, **Gildas Molgat**, the President of the Senate of the Republic of Haiti, **Edgar Leblanc Fils**, the President of the National Assembly and the President of the Parliamentary Conference of the Americas, **Jean-Pierre Charbonneau**, the Vice-President of the Latin American Parliament, **Martha Irene Lara Alatorre**, the President of the Assembly of Caribbean Community Parliamentarians, **Ishmael Roett**, the Speaker of the House of Commons of Canada, **Gilbert Parent**, the Co-Chair of the Eastern Regional Conference of the Council of State Governments, **Carol A. Kontos**.

**Second row:** The Vice-President of the Central American Parliament, **Marco Antonio Solares**, the President of the Joint Parliamentary Committee of Mercosur, **Carlos Alberto González**, the President of the Andean Parliament, **Julio César Turbay Quintero**, the Conference Vice-President, **Joseph Facal**, the Secretary of State of Maine, **Dan A. Gwadosky**, the General Co-ordinating Officer, Democracy Promotion, Organization of American States, **Elizabeth Spehar**.

Institutions associated with the Parliamentary Conference of the Americas are the Senate and House of Commons of Canada. Mr. Gildas Molgat, Speaker of the Senate, and Mr. Gilbert Parent, Speaker of the House of Commons, will sit on the Honorary Committee. The Conference will have twelve partners:

- the Assembly of Caribbean Community Parliamentarians,
- the Joint Parliamentary Committee of Mercosur,
- the Council of State Governments,
- the Andean Parliament,
- the Central American Parliament,
- the Latin American Parliament,
- the America Region of the International Assembly of French-Speaking Parliamentarians,
- the Canadian Region of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association,
- the Inter-American Development Bank,
- the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean,
- the Organization of American States,
- the Pan American Health Organization.

The official launch of the Parliamentary Conference of the Americas took place on April 14, 1997 in Quebec City

and was attended by the members of the Honorary Committee or their representatives. In addition to participating in a press conference, the personalities present took the opportunity to discuss the aims of the Conference and the themes to be debated. All agreed that the benefits and significance of this conference cannot be overemphasized.

*"Situated between citizens of States and the community of States, and by definition committed to dialogue, discussion and agreement, parliamentarians are a direct and motive force for democratization at the international level."*

*(Boutros Boutros-Ghali, December 20, 1996)*

In order to ensure a large turnout at the Conference, an invitation was sent last January to the presidents of some 300 hundred assemblies of the unitary, federal and federated states of the Americas.<sup>2</sup> Representatives of interparliamentary organizations, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and research institutes were also invited to attend.

A number of preparatory missions revealed that the Conference responds to a need expressed by

---

parliamentarians to speak out on the issue of the economic integration of the Americas and to express their constituencies' concerns about integration.

In September 1996, an initial preparatory mission traveled to Washington to present the Conference to representatives from the Organization of American States, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Another mission went to Brazil and Barbados early last December to promote the Conference. In Brazil, the delegates met with officials from the National Congress and representatives from the legislative assemblies of the states of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. They were also welcomed by the Latin American Parliament. In addition, they managed to meet with representatives of the Joint Parliamentary Committee of Mercosur who traveled to Brazil for the occasion. During their short trip to Barbados, the members of the delegation met with the President of the Assembly of Caribbean Community Parliamentarians and the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

Another parliamentary mission visited Mexico, Guatemala and Colombia. In Mexico, the delegates met with the President of the Senate and the President of the Chamber of Deputies. The members of the Central American Parliament and of the Andean Parliament were made aware of the Conference when the Quebec delegation traveled to Guatemala City and Cartagena.

Across our continent, there are increasing numbers of forums for dialogue because of the need to discuss the issues and impacts of the planned economic integration in the Western Hemisphere. The peoples of the Americas are now better able to express their dreams and to learn from one another. Conditions appear conducive to the establishment of stronger bonds between the American states, not only at the academic, labour and business levels, but also within the parliamentary community. The challenge facing the Parliamentary Conference of the Americas is to develop ties between elected officials who belong to different economic, political, social, cultural and linguistic worlds, and to convey the hopes and concerns of those we are privileged to represent.

#### Notes

1. The workshops to be held on the afternoons of Friday, September 19 and Saturday, September 20 will relate to the following themes: democracy; human rights; free trade and employment; education and job training; social and health policies; cultures, languages and communications; and sustainable development. Up-to-date information about the conference will be available on the Internet site for the

Parliamentary Conference of the Americas at:  
<http://www.assnat.qc.ca/copa>

2. The following parliamentary institutions have been invited to the Conference:

**Antigua and Barbuda** (Senate, House of Representatives and Barbuda Council)

**Argentina** (Senate, Chamber of Deputies and legislatures of 23 provinces)

**Bahamas** (Senate and House of Assembly)

**Barbados** (Senate and House of Assembly)

**Belize** (Senate and House of Representatives)

**Bolivia** (Senate and Chamber of Deputies)

**Brazil** (Senate, Chamber of Deputies, legislatures of the 26 States and the Federal District)

**Canada** (Senate, House of Commons and legislatures of 9 provinces and 2 territories)

**Chile** (Senate and Chamber of Deputies)

**Colombia** (Senate and House of Representatives)

**Costa Rica** (Legislative Assembly)

**Cuba** (National Assembly)

**Dominica** (House of Assembly)

**El Salvador** (Legislative Assembly)

**Ecuador** (National Congress)

**United States** (Senate, House of Representatives, legislatures of the 50 States, the Federal District and Puerto Rico, Mariana Islands, American Samoa, U.S. Virgin Islands and Guam)

**Grenada** (Senate and House of Representatives)

**Guatemala** (National Congress of the Republic)

**Guyana** (National Assembly)

**Haiti** (Senate and Chamber of Deputies)

**Honduras** (National Congress)

**Jamaica** (Senate and House of Representatives)

**Mexico** (Senate, Chamber of Deputies, legislatures of 31 States and the Federal District)

**Nicaragua** (National Assembly)

**Panama** (Legislative Assembly)

**Paraguay** (Senate and Chamber of Deputies)

**Peru** (Democratic Constituent Congress)

**The Dominican Republic** (Senate and Chamber of Deputies)

**Saint Kitts and Nevis** (National Assembly)

**Saint Lucia** (Senate and House of Assembly)

**Saint Vincent and the Grenadines** (House of Assembly)

**Suriname** (National Assembly)

**Trinidad and Tobago** (Senate and House of Representatives)

**Uruguay** (Senate and Chamber of Representatives)

**Venezuela** (Senate, Chamber of Deputies, legislatures of the 22 States and the Federal District)