



NEW PERSPECTIVES WITH JAMAICA AND HAITI

Report on the France-Caribbean inter-parliamentary friendship group visit to Jamaica and Haiti

23 to 28 April 2018

A delegation of the France-Caribbean friendship group, headed by its President, Ms. Hélène Conway-Mouret, and along with vice-President Pierre Louault, and friendship group member Catherine Conconne, visited Kingston, Jamaica, from 23 to 24 April, and Port-au-Prince, Haiti, from 25 to 28 April 2018. It was the first time both countries were visited by a delegation from the friendship group.

Besides wishing to build relationships with their counterparts, the Senators wanted to visit Jamaica because of its thriving economic relations with France - the 3rd investor in the country - while political ties are more tenuous.

As for Haiti, the goal was to learn about current challenges, especially in terms of development, and to promote the growth of the Francophonie.

The visit underlined a strong sense of regional cooperation, due to common interests, and cultural and historical values these countries share with the French communities of America.

I. Jamaica : Building up political and economic relations

A - Political ties that could be strengthened

The Jamaican Parliament has two Chambers. The Senate has 21 senators - 13 from the parliamentary majority (the Jamaica Labour Party or JLP) and 8 from the opposition (the People's National Party or PNP). They are appointed for five years by the General Governor, a representative of Queen Elizabeth II, on the proposal of the Prime Minister. They may hold up to four ministerial offices.

The delegation was received by the President of the Senate, Mr. Thomas Tavares-Finson and by Mr Aubyn Hill, vice-President. Discussions focused on global warming and the role of France since COP21. The President

and vice-President of the Senate both wished for stronger ties with France, calling for a meeting at the highest state level.



At the Senate, vice-President Aubyn Hill and President of the Senate Thomas Tavares-Finson, the delegation and French Ambassador Jean-Michel Despax

The environmental issue was also discussed during the meeting at the town hall with the Mayor of Kingston, Mr Delroy Williams, and a number of elected officials, focusing more specifically on tropical storm management.

B - A booming economy

The Jamaican economy has a very positive growth outlook, due in part to the efforts made to reduce debt and to thriving foreign investment, especially within the tourism industry.

France is a reference partner with large groups present in many industries (water, highways, ports, oil distribution, call centres, etc.), and SMEs involved for instance in developing a single port operator and building a 37MW solar power plant, which will make it the largest in the Caribbean.

The delegation visited the building site in Kingston Harbour, for which the CMA-CGM group got a 30-year concession worth 660 million dollars, the biggest French investment in the Caribbean area.



Ms. Catherine Conconne, Mr Simon Farhat, Chief Operating Officer of Kingston Freeport, and Mr Cyril Fernagu (EGIS), Ms. Hélène Conway-Mouret and Mr Pierre Louault, and Ambassador Jean-Michel Despax

On site, the French companies Vinci Construction and Egis are in charge of renovating 1,200 meters of docks. They carry out high-tech work to take into account the local seismic risks.

During talks with Senators and with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, Ms. Kamina Johnson Smith, Ms. Hélène Conway-Mouret said that France was willing to use its expertise to support Jamaica in its current projects (population census and identification via the National Identity System, missions to secure coastlines) and those to come.



Ambassador Jean-Michel Despax, Minister Kamina Johnson-Smith, Ms. Hélène Conway-Mouret and Catherine Conconne, and Mr Pierre Louault

The meeting with Ms. Diane Edwards, representative of the government agency JAMPRO for import and investment, focused on the country's trade policy and its strategic position at the crossroads of shipping routes, as well as on the highly thriving tourism and customer relations industries.

The delegation deplored the lack of a direct air link from Paris, which hinders investment in this area.

Mr Delroy Williams presented the tourism development project for the capital, located near the uniquely beautiful Blue Mountains.

The project would involve creating specific "entertainment zones", which would preserve quiet residential areas, while upholding the "Sound system" model strongly tied to the country's identity? Safety and environmental preservation were also mentioned as significant elements of tourism development.

II. Haiti: fostering economic and social development

A - Political stabilization and effective decentralization as levers for development

The delegation then travelled to Port-au-Prince, where it met President of the Republic Jovenel Moïse the Senators, who presented the key points of the policy he has been conducting since his inauguration on 7 February 2017. Among these is the infrastructure work carried out as part of the "Caravan of Change", aimed at modernizing agriculture (by creating nurseries, cleaning up canals, etc.), generalising access to electricity (currently only 38% of the population has access) and opening up remote territories through road construction.



The delegation with President of the Republic Jovenel Moïse, and French Ambassador Élisabeth Béton-Delègue

As put forward by the President, the creation of a stabilized institutional framework and the strengthening of the rule of law fall within the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Support of Justice in Haiti (UNMIJUSTH) aiming at establishing a climate of trust among the population and economic investors. To reform the state, the government relies notably on the Office of Human Resources Management.

The fight against corruption was also discussed at the Senate, where the delegation was received by President Joseph Lambert, and Senators Salomon, Augustin, Fethière, Dumont and Senatus. The delegation insisted on the need for the political class to set an example, as shown by the measures implemented in France for greater transparency in public life.

The delegation questioned the very short one-year term period of the President of the Senate in Haiti, in terms of continuity needs. It went on to describe the French political organization, more specifically how competences are divided between the State and local authorities as part of the decentralization process. Mr Louault and Ms. Conconne shared their experiences as local elected officials and stressed that local communities are very strategically positioned to exercise the competences devolved to them, since due to their proximity they are best able to know and respond to the needs of citizens.

Decentralization was at the heart of discussions when the delegation visited the Town Hall of Tabarre, on the outskirts of Port-au-Prince.

Antenor Denoil, vice-President of the National Federation of Mayors in Haiti (FENAMH), outlined the challenges of decentralization, and stressed the need to speed up the transfer of state powers to local communities. Out of 146 municipalities, 130 receive less than USD 1,000 a month. Communities are still waiting for budgetary resources, which greatly limits their means of action. There are no intermunicipalities - seemingly the best way to provide the right level of competences (e.g., for waste processing) - due to a legal loophole, which leaves management to communities located downstream in case of severe weather.

The delegation highlighted the financial risk carried by some complex contracts - such as public-private partnerships - signed with a number of companies, and based on its own experience, outlined the benefits for the community as a whole to make use of the manpower available locally.

B - Projects carrying hope

In this densely populated State of more than 10 million inhabitants, decision makers are faced both with development and environmental management issues, while the country is vulnerable to natural disasters. The delegation asked about the work of various actors in charge of cooperation, which is essential to support the country in its development projects.

Through the French Development Agency (AFD), France is now involved as part of a bilateral effort focused mainly on education, health, the environment and rural development.

The delegation visited the rebuilding site of the public and university hospital Hôpital de l'Université d'État d'Haiti (HUEH), which was more than 50% destroyed in the 2010 earthquake. Co-funded by France, the United States and the Haitian government, the

hospital will operate 524 beds and should be completed in 2019.

The delegation then went to the Sport for Hope (Sport pour l'Espoir) centre, as part of a visit organized by Mr Hans Laarsen, President of the Haitian Olympic Committee.

Talks focused on political difficulties related to work "duplication", a form of competition between government and cooperation actors. The delegation called for the various parties to overcome such differences in approaches and to establish greater trust between partners. It also praised the thriving cooperation between Haitian and French local authorities, which resulted in tangible projects.

III. Two strong points: regional environment and the Francophonie

Emphasizing geographic proximity, but also the common fabric of a historical past, cultural heritage and joint challenges - especially climate change -, the senators in general emphasized the benefits of reinforcing cooperation all around - in the political, commercial, cultural, educational, medical fields, etc. - within the Caribbean area, especially with the French overseas departments, and to carry out more projects, such as the integrated study program of the University of West Indies in Kingston, involving the Université des Antilles and the Institute of Political Studies (Sciences Po) in Bordeaux.

A - For greater regional integration through CARICOM

At the political level, the delegation supported the membership application submitted in 2012 by Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyana and Saint-Martin to CARICOM (Caribbean Community), a coordination forum covering many sectors, with 14 votes at the UN. The issue was discussed with political and economic actors both in Haiti, who has been holding presidency since 1 January 2018, and in Jamaica, who will succeed it in the second half of 2018.

The senators stressed the need to break down the language barrier and deplored the low network of intra-Caribbean air links, a major hindrance on which the status quo is no longer possible.

Besides, direct air links with Paris would also contribute to the development of this part of the world, calling for new investors who are currently hampered by the lack of direct access to many Caribbean countries, especially for tourism activities attracting a potentially large number of people.

B - Promoting dialogue through the Francophonie

In Jamaica, the Senators also went to Shortwood Teachers' College, the only training institution for prospective French teachers in high schools and secondary schools. Through talks with the students, they were able to appreciate the quality of the teaching there.

The interest in the French language was also noted during the visit to the Alliance Française, which is doing remarkable work with limited resources. Transferring to a more central site would increase the visibility of cultural "supply".

In Haiti, French is the official language along with Creole, but faces competition from English, and the added difficulty of being a language accessible only to a minority of the population, even though it is used within the official framework, such as legal proceedings.

In this respect, the delegation visited the French lycée Alexandre Dumas, where 800 students are enrolled, most of them Haitian. Officials reported management difficulties related to a decline in endowments, leading to increased tuition fees, which some families find difficult to afford. The delegation also took note of the vibrant cultural exchanges organized by the French Institute in Haiti.

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The Senators said they wished to continue on the path of dialogue and interparliamentary cooperation with their partners in Jamaica and Haiti, and wished for new relations of cooperation to develop, specifically praising the role played by local communities. To give new impetus to such relations, the delegation hopes for a meeting at the highest state level with Jamaica, as previously mentioned during the talks at the Senate in Kingston. In addition, it suggested that an upcoming session of the Parliamentary Assembly of La Francophonie (APF) should be held soon in Haiti.

Composition de la délégation



Ms Hélène CONWAY-MOURET

Group President,
Senator representing
French Citizen living outside
(Socialiste et républicain)



Mr Pierre LOUAULT

Group vice-President,
Senator of Indre-et-Loire
(Union centriste)



Ms Catherine CONCONNE

Group Member, Senator of Martinique
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Members of the Friendship Group: http://www.senat.fr/groupe-interparlementaire-amitie/ami_642.html