PARLIAMENTARY ACTIONS TO PROMOTE RESPONSIBLE POLITICAL DISCOURSE: 14th PARLAMERICAS PLENARY ASSEMBLY

DATE
November 16–17, 2017

LOCATION
Medellin, Colombia

PARTICIPANTS
More than 50 parliamentarians and civil society representatives from 21 countries

The 14th ParlAmericas Plenary Assembly, hosted by the Chamber of Representatives of Colombia, brought together legislators, former legislators, and civil society representatives for discussions on phenomena such as "post-truth," fake news and a political climate that appears to privilege confrontation, polarization and reductionism. The Plenary fostered the exchange of initiatives at institutional and individual levels for promoting responsible discursive practices that model tolerance, respect and plurality – integral to the commitment to democratic strengthening in the region.

The gathering opened with welcoming remarks by Representative **Germán Blanco** (Colombia) as host of the Plenary; Senator **Marcela Guerra** (Mexico), President of ParlAmericas; and Governor of the Department of Antioquia **Dr. Luis Pérez Gutiérrez** (Colombia).

"When we talk about post-truth or fake news we are talking about a context in which media companies have enormous financial difficulties to survive providing quality information. Meanwhile search engines and social networks are growing both in terms of users and revenue, not from providing information, but for offering its users the possibility to express themselves."

The keynote address was delivered by Dr. **Pablo Boczkowski**, research professor and director of the M.S. in Leadership for Creative Enterprises program at Northwestern University.

"The political juncture in Colombia makes it an interesting scenario to reflect on the role of legislatures and their commitment to foster inclusive discursive practices, in a complex time for governance and democracy in the region."

Member of the Chamber of Representatives **GERMÁN BLANCO** (Colombia), Host of the Plenary and Member of the Board of Directors of ParlAmericas

Senator **MARCELA GUERRA** (Mexico), President of ParlAmericas

"The era of digital communication, while democratizing the distribution and consumption of information and news, also poses challenges to sovereignty, governance, security and democratic stability. While it is true that the actual magnitude of the effects of phenomena such as fake news and computational propaganda are just emerging, it is possible to state unequivocally that its consequences are serious and profound ."

"The best way to fight the bad in politics in the media and in social media is to try to assert the truth. The truth on its own is revolutionary."

Governor of Antioquia **DR. LUIS PÉREZ GUTIÉRREZ** (Colombia)

HUB SPACE

During the Plenary Assembly, a drop-by booth was available for delegates to pick up copies of specialized publications as well as access information about ParlAmericas' online communities for parliamentarians.

Newly launched resources that were featured at the Hub Space included:

- ParlAmericas Podcast, a series of audio recordings from select ParlAmericas activities that can be downloaded on applications like iTunes and Google Play
- Toolkit on "Male Allies for Gender Equality," part of an interactive learning portal for parliamentarians in the Anglophone Caribbean, developed with UN Women

The first session of the Plenary, "Raising Awareness to Address the Fake News Challenge," was moderated by **Francisco Guerrero**, Secretary for Strengthening Democracy at the OAS. It explored how computational propaganda and the distribution of fake news via social media pose challenges to democratic processes and political representation. Panellist **Nicholas Monaco**, researcher from the Digital Intelligence Lab, introduced the concept of computational propaganda (presentation) with examples of its role in the 2016 Brexit referendum and United States presidential election, and offered suggestions of potential solutions to curb negative impacts.

Natalia Arbeláez presented the fact-checking initiative of the Colombian digital media platform *La Silla Vacía* (presentation) which reviewed claims circulating on WhatsApp and other spaces in the context of the Colombian peace referendem — for both the Yes and No campaigns. **Kiran Maharaj**, President of Media Institute of the Caribbean, then presented on fake news and the future of journalism from the perspective of the Caribbean region (presentation), stressing the need to be "creative disruptors" in the new media ecosystem.

In the second session, "Parliamentary Practices to Facilitate Media Coverage of Legislative Issues," panellists presented successful institutional practices in parliaments to facilitate the access of journalists and the media to accurate, balanced and comprehensive information on parliamentary issues. The moderator **Patricio Vallespín,** member of the Chamber of Deputies of Chile, drew on the [ParlAmericas *Road Map towards Legislative Openness*](#) to promote open parliament and legislative transparency practices in the dissemination of information on legislative work. **Blanca Ibarra,** Director General of the Television

Channel of the Congress of Mexico ([presentation](#)), shared how the Channel's interactive features and audiovisual content have made it an international model for legislative communication with citizens – and how this work is support by a bicameral committee. **Wesley Gibbings,** who presides the Association of Caribbean MediaWorkers ([presentation](#)), outlined good practices that can be undertaken by parliaments to facilitate media coverage of legislative issues, as well as the challenges and common ground between parliamentarians and journalists. Finally, **Cristiane Brum Bernardes,** researcher at the Centre

for Qualification, Training and Improvement (CEFOR, for its Portuguese initials), outlined the communication strategy of the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies ([presentation](#)), sharing the different types of journalistic coverage housed on its online portal, with various mechanisms for live-streaming of proceedings including plenary sessions, committee meetings and other legislative activities.

The final session, "Promoting Responsible Political Discourse in Parliaments," consisted of a dynamic panel discussion led by **Norma Morandini,** director of the Human Rights Observatory at the

Argentinian Senate and a former parliamentarian. The panellists were **Randy Boissonnault,** member of parliament of Canada and special advisor to the Prime Minister on LGBTQ2 issues, Senator **Irene Sandiford-Garner** of Barbados, and **Miguel Jaramillo,** director of *Marketing Político y Gobierno Consulting*. Based on their professional and political backgrounds, each of the panellists shared reflections on fostering social inclusion through responsible political discourse.

"*Computational propaganda can be simply defined as the malicious use of software to megaphone or dampen political messages online. The goal is the manipulation of public opinion. This is not only a computational problem, but a very human problem. Correspondingly, solutions must be both computational and social in nature.*"

NICHOLAS MONACO

Digital propaganda researcher and computational linguist

NATALIA ARBELÁEZ

Coordinator at *La Silla Vacía*

"*According to our experience, fake news distributed by social networks and WhatsApp come from all sides. In this context, no verification effort will be in vain. It is important, however, to take into account the independence and credibility of those who carry out fact-checking initiatives.*"

Senator I**RENE SANDIFORD-GARNER** (Barbados)

"*In my country we say politics is no Sunday school, and that is true. But we have personal responsibility now to ensure that we can change the tone, we can change the atmosphere.*"

The Plenary concluded with the reading of the declaration which was adopted by the delegations of each parliament represented. The declaration recognizes that participation in democratic processes requires that citizens have access to truthful, rigorous and diverse information as a basis for constructive and critical dialogue on public issues, and that while the digital communication era democratizes the distribution and consumption of information and news, it also generates new challenges to sovereignty, governance, security and democratic stability. The commitments included in the declaration included:

- Advancing debate and legislative action to address the fake news phenomenon and the distribution of propaganda

- Working with stakeholders at all levels to update policies, protocols and regulations to respond appropriately to the development of new ICTs

- Adopting legislation that guarantees citizens' rights to public information

- Advancing educational reforms for media and information literacy

- Working collaboratively with the media, private sector and civil society to raise awareness of the impacts of fake news, including on women and other marginalized groups, without undermining freedoms of opinion and expression

- Modeling respectful and inclusive communication practices in parliament and public interactions (in person and online), recognizing the plurality of our societies

"The Congress' Channel plays a fundamental role in the context of the principles of open parliament, as opportunities and mechanisms that allow legislators to have direct communication with citizens, engage with society and approach our audience."

BLANCA LILIA IBARRA CADENA

Director General, Congressional Channel (Mexico)

"Canada has taken a deliberate human rights approach to address what we acknowledge is a need for greater equality in our society. It's an approach that combines powerful messaging with tangible action. I believe powerful, and visual, messages of inclusion can change minds, open hearts and ultimately, save lives."

Member of Parliament and Special Advisor to the Prime Minister on LGBTQ2 Issues **RANDY BOISSONNAULT** (Canada)

IN MEMORIAM

In memory of The Honourable Tobias C. Enverga, Jr., who passed away suddenly on the morning of November 16, 2017, in Medellin, Colombia, while on parliamentary business as a member of the Canadian delegation to ParlAmericas' Annual Plenary Assembly.

Senator Enverga was born in the Philippines and immigrated to Canada in the 1980s. He built a career in the banking sector and in local politics, and was extensively involved in his community. In addition to being active in a number of local and international organizations, he was the founder of the Philippine Canadian Charitable Foundation. After being appointed to the Senate of Canada in 2012 to represent the province of Ontario, Senator Enverga's work continued to reflect his dedication to multiculturalism and service to others. He was a champion for people living with disabilities. He co-chaired the Canadian-Philippines Interparliamentary Group and remained a passionate advocate for the Filipino community. He was also active in strengthening Canada's ties to the Latin American and Caribbean region, sponsoring the recently adopted Latin American Heritage Month Act in the Senate of Canada and serving as a member of the Executive Committee of the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas.

Senator Enverga was a valued contributor to the ParlAmericas community, and a devoted voice for his constituents and for Canada. He was a dedicated public servant and deeply respected parliamentary colleague. He is survived by his loving wife Rosemer Enverga and three daughters.

CRISTIANE BRUM BERNARDES

Researcher, Centre for Qualification, Training and Improvement of the Chamber of Deputies (Brazil)

"In Brazil, data from November 2016 indicates that digital inclusion reached 57% of the population. Digital tools are good but we cannot neglect that television and radio are still very important in our country."

"What we are trying to do is change the mentality of at least two generations, we have to be innovative and transformative. I like to say we have to be "creative disruptors." If we don't, we will be left behind, facing a global crisis posed by phenomena like the fake news."

KIRAN MAHARAJ

President of Media Institute of the Caribbean

"When we talk about parliament making more of its material accessible to people - via the media or directly - this is not a favour, but a matter of obligations: some juridical in nature, some by convention; a lot of it by obligations that are national, and some of it by obligations that are international."

WESLEY GIBBINGS

President, Association of Caribbean Media Workers

"Good political communication must be memorable, exciting and clear. Those are the three main virtues of any exercise of public, private, personal, massive or digital communication. It is possible to build these communication strategies by appealing to a language that is inclusive, democratic and plural."

MIGUEL JARAMILLO

Director at *Marketing Político y Gobierno*

In order to reduce our ecological footprint, the meeting documents, resources and publications are available at www.parlamericas.org. For easy and direct access through your mobile phone, we invite you to download a QR reader application.

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TRAINING SESSION: NAVIGATING INFORMATION: ONLINE RESEARCH PRACTICES TO SUPPORT PARLIAMENTARY WORK

DATE
November 15, 2017

LOCATION
Medellin, Colombia

PARTICIPANTS
24 parliamentarians
from 19 countries

This training session was delivered by **Marian Vidaurri** and **Pablo Thaler** from the Political Analysis Unit of the Organization of American States (OAS) on the margins of the 14th ParlAmericas Plenary Assembly. It offered parliamentarians a primer on online search tools – such as Google operators – and tips and tricks for research and gender analysis in their daily work.

A SAMPLE OF TIPS AND TRICKS PRESENTED IN THE TRAINING SESSION

- Familiarize yourself with Google search operators to focus your results.

    ⇒ Use "OR" in between words or phrases to search for one word/phrase or the other. E.g., "open parliament" OR "legislative openness"

- Be conscious of "filter bubbles" that can effectively isolate you from websites that present contrasting viewpoints.

    ⇒ Popular search engines like Google use algorithms to selectively guess what information a user wants to receive based on their past searches. To avoid this, disable tracking cookies and periodically delete cached files from your web browser.

- Use analytics tools like Twitonomy and Trendsmap to monitor, manage, track and optimize your activities on Twitter.

- Make use of ECLAC's Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean

    ⇒ It provides access to data for numerous indicators on women's autonomy, country profiles, and relevant legislation and resources to support policymaking on gender equality issues in the region.

- Make use of the application "Pocket" to save articles and other content from the web for later reading, making it available on any device, even offline. Saved content can also be organized with tags.

Download the ParlAmericas-OAS resource [Navigating Online Information](#)

PARLIAMENTS REPRESENTED

ARGENTINA

BARBADOS

BOLIVIA

BRAZIL

CANADA

CHILE

COLOMBIA

COSTA RICA

CUBA

ECUADOR

EL SALVADOR

GRENADA

GUATEMALA

HAITI

MEXICO

NICARAGUA

PANAMA

PERU

SAINT LUCIA

SURINAME

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

MEDIA INSTITUTE OF THE CARIBBEAN
INTEGRITAS VERITAS LIBERTAS SAPIENTIA

LASILLAVACÍA

oiioiiioii Oxford Internet Institute University of Oxford

Canal del Congreso
El Canal de la Unión

CÂMARA DOS DEPUTADOS

ASSOCIATION OF CARIBBEAN MEDIAWORKERS

OAS | More rights for more people

MPG
MARKETING POLÍTICO Y GOBIERNO
CONSULTING

The 14th ParlAmericas Plenary Assembly was made possible with the generous support of the Chamber of Representatives of Colombia and the Government of Canada through Global Affairs Canada.

CONGRESO DE LA REPÚBLICA DE COLOMBIA
CÁMARA DE REPRESENTANTES

Canada

ParlAmericas is the institution that promotes **PARLIAMENTARY DIPLOMACY** *in the* **INTER-AMERICAN SYSTEM**

ParlAmericas fosters **OPEN PARLIAMENTS** *by advancing the principles of transparency, accountability, citizen participation, ethics and probity*

ParlAmericas is composed of the **NATIONAL LEGISLATURES** *of the member States of the OAS from North, Central and South America and the Caribbean*

ParlAmericas promotes policies and legislative measures to mitigate and adapt to the effects of **CLIMATE CHANGE**

ParlAmericas facilitates the exchange of parliamentary **BEST PRACTICES** *and promotes* **COOPERATIVE POLITICAL DIALOGUE**

ParlAmericas works towards strengthening democracy and governance by accompanying **ELECTORAL PROCESSES**

ParlAmericas mainstreams **GENDER EQUALITY** *by advocating for women's political empowerment and the application of a gender lens in legislative work*

ParlAmericas is headquartered in **OTTAWA, CANADA**