



Final Report of the Study Visit to Ottawa, Canada by Chairs of Standing Committees on Ministries from the Parliament of Bangladesh

November 14 – 18, 2005

Prepared by the Parliamentary Centre

From November 14-18, 2005, the Parliamentary Centre organized a Study Visit to Ottawa, Canada for a delegation of Bangladeshi Parliamentarians at the request of the Bangladeshi Parliament, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Bangladesh, and the United Nations Office of Project Services (UNOPS), Asia Branch. The delegation was led by the Honourable Abdul Mannan, Member of Parliament & Chair of the Standing Committee on the Ministry of Agriculture, and consisted of eight members (seven Chairs of Standing Committee on Ministries and one senior staff). The main purpose of the Study Visit was to expose the delegates to the ways in which committees work in the Canadian House of Commons and Senate and to provide them with an opportunity to exchange experiences and insights with their colleagues on various parliamentary and policy issues.

During the visit, the Bangladeshi Committee Chairs were exposed to the Canadian parliamentary system with a particular focus on the way in which committees operate and the specific issues that they address. They gained an enriched understanding of how various committees and staff institutions operated and interacted in practice to support the efficient functioning of the overall system. The learning process was fulfilled through an opportunity to meet with a variety of their counterparts, as well as other officials from the Canadian and Provincial Parliaments, which included the Speaker from the House of Commons, Committee Chairs, and senior parliamentary staff. In order to present a picture as accurate and balanced as possible, parliamentarians of different partisan affiliations and officials from both chambers (the House of Commons and Senate) were invited to bring in different perspectives.

Outputs from the Study Visit

The Canadian Parliamentary System & Legislative Process

On the first day of the Study Visit Program, Mrs. Amelita Armit, Director of Asia and Eastern Europe Programs at the Parliamentary Centre, provided an overview of the functions, structure and procedures of the Canadian parliamentary system and how key aspects of a parliamentary democracy such as elections, committee structures, legislative process, and accountability mechanisms are practiced in Canada. This was followed with discussions on the different dynamics and operating procedures of the House of Commons and Senate, particularly in terms of their mandates, representation, composition, and partisan

relationships. Mrs. Armit outlined the constitutional definition of federal and provincial powers and shed insight into the practical implications of these power arrangements on the relationships between the two jurisdictions. The delegation also had a chance to meet with Mr. John Baird a Conservative Member of the Provincial Legislature of Ontario, who also explained the separation of powers between the federal and provincial jurisdictions.

Differences in certain parliamentary procedures in both countries were also discussed. For example, in Bangladesh, it is against the rules for Members of Parliament to cross the House in order to join another party. However in Canada, it is permissible, as was recently evidenced by a Conservative Member who crossed the floor to the governing Liberal Party the day before a crucial non-confidence budget vote that would have toppled the government. Further comparisons between the Canadian and Bangladesh Parliaments were made in this introductory session, such as that of the number of constituencies. In Canada and Bangladesh, the numbers of seats in Parliament are similar: 300 for Bangladesh and 308 for Canada. However, it must be noted that there is a large difference in the population within each constituency, with Bangladesh having over 140 million people in total compared to Canada's population of 32 million.

During their meeting with Mr. Blair Armitage, Principal Clerk of the Senate's Legislative Support Office and Mr. Michael Lukyniuk, Principal Clerk of Legislative Services in the House of Commons, the delegation were able to capture an overview of the process by which laws are drafted, reviewed, debated, amended and adopted. The senior officials mentioned that after second reading at the House of Commons, the bill was referred to committee for study, after which they would go through a more scrupulous review and debate of the bill and more substantive amendments would be made. It was mentioned that the first reading was intended mainly to introduce the principles and main ideas of a bill and the third reading was intended to report on the results of the committee review back to the plenary for final approval.

Procedures at various stages in the legislative process were less clear-cut and rigid at the Senate than at the House of Commons. For example, in the Senate process, amendments arising from the committee stage can be defeated at the report stage without nullifying the entire bill, whereas in the case of the House of Commons, any changes to the amendments at the report stage would defeat the whole bill. Therefore, Senators have the liberty to make new inputs even at the report stage whereas it is unlikely for Members of the House of Commons to do the same. In terms of the relationship between the two houses, it was noted that the Senate rarely voted formally against a bill passed by the House of Commons but rather would send a message recommending reconsideration. In the past 20 years there has only been 3 occasions where the Senate has not agreed with the House of Commons. In this case, messages are sent back and forth between the two chambers until an agreement is made on the bill in question. This to and fro can go on until the legislature is dissolved or prorogued. It was also mentioned that assent by the government is required in Canada, but the Governor General cannot send a bill back for review.

The delegates were curious to know the time limits provided for a bill to become a law. Mr. Armitage and Mr. Lukyniuk explained that there is no standard length of time, and it depends much on the substance of the bill. If bills are non-political, they can go through quite quickly. It is usually rare that the House of Commons will provide 3 readings within a day, but if all parties agree, then the government House leader can ask the Speaker for consent from the House of Commons in order to go through all 3 readings. The parties' spokespeople are responsible for explaining the reasons why they want to expedite the bill. This usually happens in the case of a lockout, strike or when there is a very limited time left in the life of the Parliament.

During a meeting with Mr. John Maloney, Chair of the Standing Committee on Justice, Human Rights, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, the delegates asked about the role the opposition plays in making new laws. Mr. Maloney explained that in a majority Parliament, the government has the power to make new laws as they please, but that in a minority Parliament situation, the opposition has a larger role as there is more room for compromise because the governing party does not always have the number of Members in Parliament to push through their own agenda without compromise and input from other political parties.

The delegates also had a chance to observe the 45-minute Question Period in the House of Commons and later on had an opportunity to question the Speaker of the House of Commons, the Honourable Peter Milliken, regarding what they had witnessed. Speaker Milliken described how there is a list of members provided to him before Question Period and he calls the members to ask questions according to that list. The delegates noticed that the Speaker had called some questions out of order and it was explained why those specific questions were out of order (in the case in question, it was because the questions being asked had an accusatory tone and were based on heresy not fact). The delegates explained how in Bangladesh, there is also a fixed time reserved for the Prime Minister only to answer questions. Speaker Milliken explained that in Canada there is no fixed question period specifically for the Prime Minister, but that instead the Prime Minister attends the regular Question Period when he is available. It was mentioned that the Prime Minister may choose to answer the questions himself or delegate Members of his Cabinet or government to answer specific questions. In general the Prime Minister will usually answer questions asked by other party leaders.

Speaker Milliken also talked about the structure of the Speakers Office, indicating that he has three deputy speakers, one from the opposition and two from the ruling party, and that they are chosen after consultation with party leaders. He also explained how the Speaker is elected as the primary order of business when the House of Commons first meets in any given legislature. Firstly, all Members' names are on the ballot unless they are a Minister, party leader or requests that their name not be put on the list of Speaker candidates. The Speaker needs to get over 50 percent of all the votes cast in order to be named. There are a number of ballot rounds that take place and members are knocked off in each successive round until a Speaker is chosen.

The delegates asked the Speaker whether Canada is heading towards political turmoil due to the current instability in Parliament. The Speaker answered that unfortunately Canada is not accustomed to working within a minority parliament situation as it has had majority governments for the most part and that it needs to adjust to this new minority situation if it is going to be effective because the political mood does not foresee any change to the current system of minority government even if another election is called.

Structure, Functions & Operations of Parliamentary Committees in Canada

An introductory session on parliamentary committees was provided to the delegates at the start of the Study Visit in order to provide them with a good grasp of how committees operate in the Canadian parliamentary context. This included a review of the composition of committees, their powers, functions, and jurisdictions, as well as the relationship between committees and the Executive with respect to the implementation of committee recommendations and the scrutiny of departmental expenditure.

During the meeting with Dr. Heather Lank, Principal Clerk of the Senate Committees Directorate, and Ms Miriam Burke, Clerk of the Standing Committee on Government

Operations & Estimates in the House of Commons, it was explained that there were 21 Standing Committees in the House of Commons and 19 committees in Senate (16 policy committees and 3 administrative committees). The committees in the Senate are structured along broad policy lines and are made up of 12 members (8 from the Liberal Party and 4 from the Conservative Party). In the House of Commons, there are also 12 members in each committee (5 from the Liberal Party, 4 from the Conservative Party, 2 from the Bloc Quebecois Party and 1 from the New Democratic Party) and the committees correspond to government departments for the most part. It was mentioned that both House of Commons and Senate Committees have the power to create sub-committees. At the present time there is 1 special committee with a specific 3-year mandate and that is the Committee on the Antiterrorism Act. There are 2 joint committees – one on the Scrutiny of Regulations and the other on the Library of Parliament, the latter of which is not very active and meets infrequently. Both the House of Commons and Senate have the power to create joint committees.

In Canada, Chairs of the Senate and House of Commons committees are elected at the beginning of each parliamentary session. They are elected by members of the committee; however negotiations on who would be the best Chair usually do occur in advance. Members of the opposition become Vice-Chairs of the committees in which the governing party has a committee Chair. And in the case where the opposition member is the Chair of the committee, a governing party member is elected as a Vice-Chair. There are currently 3 committees that are chaired by the opposition: Standing Committee on Public Accounts, Standing Committee on Government Operations & Estimates, and Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. It was explained that the Chair of the committees in the House of Commons are not allowed to vote in order to promote their neutrality; however, in the case of a tie, the Chairs are allowed to vote. Furthermore, any Member of the Senate or House of Commons can participate in a committee meeting; however, these Members cannot vote and need advanced approval in order to participate in the committee meeting.

In Senate committees, the investigation of a particular issue is provided through an order of reference that is tabled in the Senate chamber. On the other hand, House of Commons committees have the freedom to investigate any issue that is under their jurisdiction. The agenda of committee meetings in the House of Commons is set by the “steering committee” of each standing committee, which consists of the Chair, Vice-Chairs and another member. It was explained that the agenda is completely amendable and that the steering committees are only responsible for administrative and procedural matters, not for opinions, decisions and reports on substantive issues, the latter of which are the responsibility of the committee members as a whole. Furthermore, the committees are not bound by the agenda that the steering committee puts forth and can embark on studies that go beyond the agenda.

The delegates shared some comparative knowledge of the Bangladesh parliamentary committee system, mentioning that there can be anywhere between 8-15 (10 in general) members in Committees, and that there were 35 standing committees attached to each Ministry and based on proportional representation. They also mentioned that each committee does not have a Vice-Chair as is the case in Canadian parliamentary committees. They also indicated that their Public Accounts Committee Chair is from the government, while Canada’s is from the opposition. Another difference is in the election of Chairs for the committees. In the Bangladesh Parliament, the Chairs of committees are elected by the whole Parliament, while in Canada the Chairs are elected within the committee itself. Another main distinction between the Bangladesh and Canadian committee systems is the fact that in the Canadian system, committees do not include department officials, but in the Bangladesh system Ministers are included as members of the committee. The purpose for having Ministers in committees is to ensure that their views are heard and so that they can

answer the questions of other committee members. In Canada, the parliamentary secretary sits in the committee and acts as the eyes and ears of the department in question. The parliamentary secretary also acts as a liaison officer between the parliamentary committee and the respective department. Parliamentary secretaries also have voting rights in the committee. However, there is a certain distance between the parliamentary committees and the governmental department to ensure that there is not a conflict of interest.

In the House of Commons, each departmental budget is referred to its respective parliamentary committee in order to ensure transparency and accountability. This is in contrast to the situation in Bangladesh, where budgets are never referred to committees and even the Committee on Estimates does not get a budget in advance, but instead does a “post-mortem” review of the budget.

With respect to the effectiveness of committees in both houses, it was explained how some argue that the Senate is more effective because the primary focus of the Senate committees is on long term policy studies. Since Senators are appointed for a longer term and are generally less partisan than their counterparts in the House of Commons, they can undertake these longer term studies. Due to its partisan nature, some may think that House of Commons committees are not as effective as Senate committees; however, this is not necessarily the case. Mr. Thomas Wappel, the Chair of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, mentioned that his committee is an exception to other committees in the sense that it operates on a unanimous or consensus basis in terms of the tabling of its reports. There have been very few dissenting reports and these have not been based on party disagreements but on individual dissent based on members’ beliefs in what is best for their constituencies. Mr. Wappel mentioned that when he worked in the Justice Committee, there were a lot of partisan politics, but that this is not the case in his current committee.

In the House of Commons, the Chair presents the committee report to the plenary and it may be debated at that time. Dennis Martel, Senior Analyst at the Privy Council Office provided a description on how parliamentary committee recommendations were acted upon by the government. When the standing committee tables the report in the House of Commons, it must request a response from the government, as a response is not necessarily automatic. Once the response is requested, the Privy Council’s Office asks the Minister of the relevant department to submit their response to Parliament within 120 days in the form of a “Memorandum to the Cabinet”. It must be noted that although a response that is requested must be provided, it is up to the government whether it will act upon the recommendations of parliamentary committees or not.

The delegates were also exposed to mechanisms by which committees sought the opinion of the public. Ms Bonnie Brown, Chair of the standing Committee on Health, mentioned how public opinion is garnered through committees, who may invite the public in to their committee meetings to give comment on specific issues or even hold consultations across the country on how certain policies or legislation may affect the public. Mr. John Cannis, Chair of the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs, also emphasized the use of committees as a consultation mechanism, indicating that the best work that is done in Parliament is at the committee level where they are able to get much needed input from the public and constituents on a wide range of issues.

Support to Parliamentary Committees in Canada

The delegation learned about a range of in-house services offered to committees as well as individual parliamentarians to help them with their work. They were introduced to committee clerks and informed how these clerks assist the committees in a non-partisan

fashion. Committee clerks serve all members of the committee, although they have a closer working relationship with the Chairs of the committee. They are also a point of contact for the public and the media in terms of the work undertaken in the committee. It was indicated that all information in committee is made public via media such as television and the internet; all transcripts of meetings are posted on the internet. The committee clerk is also responsible for drafting of the proceedings of the committee meetings and the committee reports usually includes narrow guidelines on the formal decisions taken, while a verbatim of the committee discussion is transcribed and attached. Examples of committee reports were provided to the delegation.

Practical examples on how staff support the work of individual parliamentarians and committees were provided by Ms Bonnie Brown, Chair of the Standing Committee on Health. She talked about her experience in handling constituency work and the indispensable support of her constituency staff in this regard. She explained how meetings in her committee are handled and the assistance provided by the clerk of the committee and the researchers. She mentioned that if the committee is planning on a clause by clause review of legislation, they will more than likely invite another committee clerk to attend who is well versed in legislative issues, as well as a legislative research expert, such as a lawyer.

During the meeting with Ms Raymonde Folco, Chair of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, the clerk and the researcher to this specific Committee were invited to speak on their roles and responsibilities within the committee, which provided some practical examples of how staff support the work within committees. The clerk of the Committee explained her role of acting as a liaison between the Chair, Members, and witnesses to the committees. She described her various duties, including the writing of reports, meeting minutes, and so on. She also mentioned that clerks usually change positions and get appointed to other committees so that the committee doesn't become too reliant on one particular clerk, which makes them hard to replace. The researcher to the committee then explained his role in the committee to provide non-partisan advice on substantive issues under the direction of the Chair. It was emphasized that the opinions in the committee come from the members of the committee and is reached on the basis of consensus, while the researchers and the clerks are responsible for the provision of information so that the committee members can make informed decisions.

As part of the overview of the research and information services provided by the Library of Parliament, Mr. Hugh Finsten, Associate Parliamentary Librarian, emphasized the conveniently accessible, specialized, non-partisan and confidential features of the research services being provided to individual parliamentarians and committees. He also explained the use of information technology used to deliver web-based information and knowledge to potential clients in the Parliament through the parliamentary intranet. Mr. Finsten indicated that the intention for maintaining political neutrality in the services provided to Members of the House of Commons and Senate was to gain trust from parliamentarians working in a partisan environment.

Policy Issues Discussed with Committee Chairs

During their meetings with their counterparts in the Canadian House of Commons, the delegates were able to share experiences and learn from the various committee Chairs that they met during this Study Visit to Ottawa. During the meeting with Mr. Paul Steckle, Chair of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, the delegates and Mr. Steckle discussed much about the agricultural system in Canada and the need for global fairness in terms of subsidies in Agriculture. Mr. Steckle explained that the government of Canada does

provide subsidies for certain sectors within agriculture (e.g. on products such as wheat, corn, barley, canola, grains and oil seeds), but that we do not do so for dairy and poultry farmers. The delegates responded that something needs to be done about this because International Financial Institutions are pressuring developing countries not to provide subsidies. The delegates indicated that it is unfair for developed nations to provide subsidies to their farmers, as it makes it harder for the developing country farmers to compete. In this sense, it is very difficult for developing countries to get ahead when working within this world system. They questioned how it is possible to combat this situation. Mr. Steckle mentioned that more developed countries need to stand by developing countries and that we cannot continue to do things to counter the advancement of developing countries. He mentioned that in the long run, we do not want to provide subsidies and they need to be cut down and rationalized in order to create a level playing field. The delegates urged Mr. Steckle to take a stand on this issue of subsidies in order to level the playing field.

Ms Bonnie Brown, Chair of the Standing Committee on Health, addressed the same issues that were raised in the delegates' meeting with Mr. Steckle, namely the subsidies on agriculture in Canada and the need to make for a more equal playing field so that developing countries can compete on a global scale. She also described how the provinces are mainly responsible for the delivery of healthcare and what services are generally covered under provincial health care plans.

During the meeting with Mr. Thomas Wappel, Chair of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, various fishery issues were discussed, including the devastation of the cod stocks on the eastern shore of Canada which had to do with over-fishing by domestic and foreign vessels. Mr. Wappel also talked about bottom trawling that destroys the habitat of the fisheries at the bottom of the oceans. He talked about the necessity for coordination between the Ministry of Fisheries and Oceans and the Ministry of Defence in terms of how to handle issues that arise in terms of defence of the oceans, as well as coordination with the Ministry of Environment on environmental disasters. Mr. Wappel gave the delegates an overview of the salmon fisheries on the western shore and the need for sustainable harvesting of such resources.

Mr. John Maloney, Chair of the Standing Committee Justice, Human Rights, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, discussed some of the policy issues that his committee has been working on in the recent past, including the gun registry. He also went into detail as to what types of gun licences were required in Canada and when certain gun registry laws were enacted. During this meeting, the delegates also took the opportunity to discuss the state of the garment industry in Bangladesh and the violation of human rights in terms of using child labour in garment factories. The delegates explained that in Bangladesh, children need to work in order to feed themselves and support their families and that there isn't a social safety net as there is in Canada. If children were not allowed to work, they would starve and take to the streets to a life of destitution and in some cases prostitution. They said that countries like Bangladesh require more time in order to build a social safety net so that they can afford to provide benefits to children in the future so that they do not need to work under difficult conditions. The delegates mentioned that in this sense, human rights may need to be redefined because developed countries do not understand the context in which some developing countries operate. They asked Mr. Maloney to motivate his government not to insist so much to disallow child labour and provide developing countries like Bangladesh with a grace period so that they can have time to catch up to developed countries in terms of social services provided to their populations. Mr. Maloney understood the practical argument the delegates were making, but said that as a member of the Justice Committee, he could not support child labour.

Mr. John Cannis, Chair of the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs, informed the delegates of the current state of defence in Canada, mentioning that we have an aging fleet and need to consider how we are going to update our defence systems to protect our country especially since we have two of the largest coastal areas and the largest running border. Mr. Cannis also talked about procurement of military equipment and the different mechanisms that are used in the process such as off-the-shelf and customized processes as well as the various ways that military equipment is delivered. In Canada, the military identifies its needs and the department allocates the funds for procurement in meeting those needs. The problem is that procurement takes so long, as do delivery times, and in some cases, by the time they get their military equipment, it has already become outdated. Mr. Cannis also mentioned that only 2 percent of total government expenditure is in defence and this is because we had to cut the defence budget in 1993 in order to address other economic problems that the country was facing at that time, including a high deficit, debt and unemployment. The delegates asked whether the National Defence policy is discussed in the House of Commons. Mr. Cannis indicated that in order to maintain a safe and secure society, sometimes the secrecy of certain information is required. This does not mean that a government is not trying to be transparent; it just means that they are trying to protect its citizens. However, Canada does have a defence policy statement that is shared, while the defence strategy is not. He also indicated that the Department of Defence is very open with respect to sharing information in parliamentary committees and the Auditor General does audit the department when required.

Ms Raymonde Folco, Chair of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, invited other committee members to join the meeting with the delegates. They discussed the issue of the welfare state and the importance of providing benefits such as unemployment insurance and old age pension to citizens, as well as ensuring support programs for a trained and skilled workforce in order to further growth and development in the country.

The delegates were curious to know why this particular committee was responsible for so many issues. The Chair explained that at one point the committee was only responsible for one governmental department, but then over time became responsible for three. She also mentioned that a lot of the responsibility for the implementation of educational and disability programs is under the jurisdiction of the provinces and so this is also a partial explanation as to why the committee can take on more responsibilities than usual.

The delegates had similar questions with respect to other committees, and asked Mr. Wappel why "oceans" had been singled out in the name of the committee. Mr. Wappel said that the names of the departments and the committees usually change and depend on which government is in power and which issue they want to emphasize at that particular time. He further explained the importance of oceans to Canada in the sense that the country is surrounded by three oceans with each one being unique.

The delegates also asked why "veteran's affairs" is singled out in the name of the Standing Committee on Defence and Veterans Affairs and why it is not just a part of "defence". Mr. Cannis responded that Canada puts a great emphasis on those that endanger their lives for their country and so they must treat them separately because there are many support programs that are created and administered for veterans. He emphasized that defence and veteran's affairs have separate governmental departments and separate budgets as well.

One of the most interesting meetings of this visit was with Mr. John Williams, Chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. This committee focuses on accountability and oversight of the government. Mr. Williams described the "sponsorship scandal", where \$100 million of public money was misspent and corruption allegations were mounted with a trail

leading right to the Prime Minister's Office. He mentioned that the Standing Committee on Public Accounts was one of the bodies responsible for bringing this scandal to light. Mr. Williams emphasized that if our societies are to subscribe to the Rule of Law, then we need to exercise ways in which to hold the government accountable. He mentioned to the delegates that this Study Visit would only be considered useful if they went back to Bangladesh and implemented change that would hold the government accountable for their actions. His main emphasis was to make committee meetings public, since in Bangladesh, committee proceedings are held under closed doors. He mentioned that Parliament is an institution of accountability, not management, and as leaders of their respective countries, parliamentarians must ensure this through proper oversight. Mr. Williams then talked about the Global Organization for Parliamentarians Against Corruption (GOPAC) and how this organization can provide parliamentarians with the means to fight corruption through peer support and education for parliamentarians.

The delegates mentioned that it is quite difficult to change the situation in Bangladesh because it is difficult for members to vote against their party, as well as the fact that all committees, including the Public Accounts Committee, are chaired by the governing party. Mr. Williams countered that Parliament's role is not to support what government wants, but to ensure that it serves society. Although it is a big job to change the current system in Bangladesh, Mr. Williams urged the delegates to start by just doing one thing: make the parliamentary committee meetings public. The delegates said that they do not have a means of revolting because the constitution states that if they do not vote with their party, they will lose their seat. The discussion got a bit heated as the delegates thought that they were powerless and that Mr. Williams did not understand the local situation. The delegates argued that Bangladesh should be afforded as much time as Canada has had to make their system more transparent and accountable. However, Mr. Williams replied that that shouldn't necessarily be the case, because at the present time we have the benefit of learning from others' experiences so that we can make the transition much quicker. In the end, the delegates were very impressed by Mr. Williams' resolve and agreed to make attempts at opening up a GOPAC chapter in Bangladesh. They were provided with the "Seven Steps to GOPAC Charter Development" and the "Draft GOPAC Constitution" that would allow them to start up a Country Chapter. They were encouraged that if they can collectively work together to make a change for the better in terms of combating corruption in their country, they would succeed. Some of the delegates were hesitant and cautioned that whoever takes the leadership in this regard must work very carefully.

Lessons Learned from the Study Visit

Mr. Bob Miller, Executive Director of the Parliamentary Centre led a debrief session for the delegates and asked two main questions of the delegates:

1. What issues did the delegates learn about the Canadian Parliament that may be useful to them in the context in which they work?
2. Is there any additional information that the delegates need before they leave or that we can provide as follow-up after they return to Bangladesh?

The delegates expressed their appreciation for the program arranged for them and then went on to describe some of the most important things that they learned. One of the delegates mentioned that he would like to introduce two things into the parliamentary system in Bangladesh upon his return. One is to try to ensure that committee meetings are held in public. This may require a change in the rules of the Parliament, but he will report this to the Speaker and mention that he supports this initiative. The second issue would be to call witnesses to committee meetings in order to hear their experiences and opinions.

Another delegate expressed his interest in creating a GOPAC chapter in Bangladesh in order to fight corruption in the country. This initiative was also supported by other members of the delegation. Other practices that could be implemented in Bangladesh, as reported by the delegation, included creating a steering committee in committees to handle agenda formulation and administrative issues, as well as allowing any member of parliament to attend committee meetings. At the present time, these things are not in existence in the Bangladesh Parliament. The delegates also expressed a need to ensure that budgets are sent to committees for review in order to ensure proper oversight. As indicated above, at the present time there is no pre-review of the budget, as the budget is only reviewed after expenditures have occurred.

With respect to additional information, the delegates requested more information on how the Liaison Committee Chair is selected. It was mentioned that the Liaison Committee is made up of the Chairs of all other Committees. The Parliamentary Centre did some further investigation on this issue after the delegation had left and found out that the Liaison Committee Chair is selected in the same manner as the other committees, in other words, it is done through secret ballot among the members of the committee. However, unlike the other committees, there is only one Vice-Chair to the Liaison Committee, as compared to two Vice-Chairs for all the other committees.

The delegates also expressed their interest in having a videoconference between Parliamentarians from Bangladesh and Canada in order to share information and experiences, as it would allow many more parliamentarians to benefit from the Canadian experience and vice versa. The Centre mentioned that it would look into the issue and see what could be arranged.

In the opinion of the Parliamentary Centre, this Study Visit of Committee Chairs held from November 14-18, 2005 was a major success. During the past year, the Centre has had the opportunity to organize three Study Visits from the Bangladesh Parliament and during this time we have been able to improve each successive visit. No major logistical challenges arose during this visit and this was mainly due to three factors:

1. Effective Coordination between the Parliamentary Centre and the UNDP in Bangladesh: The coordinators of both UNDP and the Bangladesh Parliament, particularly Dr. A.T.M. Obaidullah, made persistent efforts to assess the needs of participants and to identify key issues of interest to be addressed through the Study Visit. Information was shared with the Parliamentary Centre that enabled us to design a program that fit the needs of the delegates. The agenda was shared and finalized with the delegates well in advance of the Study Visit, which prevented any unforeseen problems during the course of the Visit.
2. Careful selection of Delegates and Head of Delegation: The Speaker of the Bangladesh Parliament did a tremendous job in selecting the delegates for this Study Visit. The head of the delegation was well versed in the Canadian parliamentary system and had met previous Canadian parliamentarians before, which allowed him to provide context to his colleagues throughout the Visit. The size of the delegation (8 in total) was also perfect, in terms of allowing for sufficient time and space in the sharing of experiences and insights. The delegation asked some very pertinent and challenging questions and engaged their counterparts in the Canadian Parliament in some very interesting and mutually beneficial dialogue. After the Study Visit, the Centre received some very positive feedback from the Canadian parliamentarians and senior staff whom the delegates met. They mentioned to the Centre that they were very impressed by the calibre of the delegation and the issues that they raised during the meetings. It is safe to say that this Visit would not have been a success

were it not for the inquisitive and engaging nature of the delegates and the leadership provided by the Head of the Delegation.

3. Invaluable Support of the Bangladesh High Commission to Canada: The Bangladesh High Commission to Canada offered generous in-kind assistance with this visit in terms of both programming and logistical arrangements. The Bangladesh High Commissioner, His Excellency Mr. Rafiq Ahmed Khan, and other diplomatic officials, including the Mr. Masud Mahmood Khundoker, Counsellor, and Mr. Mamunur Khalili, First Secretary of Commerce, greeted the delegation in person upon their arrival in Ottawa. The High Commissioner provided the delegation with a briefing on the relationships between Canada and Bangladesh, which set out a good context for the delegation to make better sense of information gained from other meetings during the visit. In fact, during various meetings, the delegates mentioned that they were quite happy with the relationship between Bangladesh and Canada and that they had learned from the Bangladesh High Commissioner that Canada is one of the countries that Bangladesh has a surplus trade balance with and that this indicated that Canada is a good friend to Bangladesh in terms of business and trade. The High Commission also provided enormous help in terms of handling contingencies such as air ticket changes and personal transportation needs of the delegates. The relationship between the Bangladesh High Commission to Canada and the Parliamentary Centre has grown throughout the past year and the Centre finds the assistance provided by the High Commission is a large factor that has contributed to the success of all three Study Visits, including this one.

It should be noted that one meeting had to be cancelled by the Acting Chair of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics due to unforeseen circumstances that required Mr. David Tilson to report to the House of Commons during the scheduled time of his meeting with the delegation. This cancellation was regrettable and could not be rescheduled due to the time constraints and already heavy schedule of the delegation.

We appreciate having the opportunity to facilitate this mutually fulfilling initiative of exchanges between the Canadian and Bangladesh Parliaments. On the whole, we believe that the Study Visit offered a pleasant and productive learning opportunity for both the Bangladesh Committee Chairs and their Canadian counterparts in the House of Commons of the Canadian Parliament. The effective delivery of the program is attributable to the continuous support of UNDP throughout the process of preparing for and implementing the Study Visit. The Parliamentary Centre certainly looks forward to future opportunities to continue building upon this mutually beneficial cooperation.

Appendices

Appendix A: List of Participants for Study Visit to Ottawa, Canada

Appendix B: Final Agenda for Study Visit to Canada

Appendix A: List of Participants for Study Visit to Ottawa, Canada

Chairs of Standing Committees on Ministries, Parliament of Bangladesh November 14 – 18, 2005

Please find below the list of participants for the Study Visit to Canada:

1. **Hon. Mr. Abdul Mannan**, Member of Parliament & Chair of the Standing Committee on the Ministry of Agriculture (**Head of the Delegation**)
2. **Hon. Mr. Khondker Mahbubuddin Ahmed**, Member of Parliament & Chair of the Standing Committee on the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs
3. **Hon. Mr. Muhammad Mahbubur Rahman**, Member of Parliament & Chair of the Standing Committee on the Ministry of Defence
4. **Hon. Mr. Syed Manzur Hossain**, Member of Parliament & Chair of the Standing Committee on the Ministry of Communication
5. **Hon. Mr. Hazi Mozammel M. Haque**, Member of Parliament & Chair of the Standing Committee on the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries
6. **Hon. Mr. Md. Moshir Rahman**, Member of Parliament & Chair of the Standing Committee on the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
7. **Hon. Mr. Shamsul Alam Pramanik**, Member of Parliament & Chair of the Standing Committee on the Ministry of Education
8. **Mr. Md. Azmal Hossain**, Joint Secretary, Committee Support Wing of Bangladesh Parliament Secretariat

Other Accompanying Participants:

9. **Mr. Imran Arshad**, Senior Program Officer, Asia - Parliamentary Centre

Appendix B: Final Agenda for Study Visit to Ottawa, Canada

**Chairs of Standing Committees on Ministries,
Parliament of Bangladesh**

November 14 – 18, 2005

Sunday November 13 Arrival

19:30

Arrival at Ottawa International Airport – Flight AC 889

Greeted by representatives from the Parliamentary Centre and officials from the Bangladeshi High Commission in Ottawa
Check-in at Holiday Inn Hotel

Monday November 14

10:00 – 11:45

Orientation Session at Parliamentary Centre & Overview of the Parliamentary System in Canada

Purpose: Introduction to the Parliamentary Centre and overview of the Canadian Parliamentary System, including its legislative process, functions, procedures, organizational structure, history and trends

Speaker: Mrs. Amelita Armit – Director of Asia & Eastern European Programs, Parliamentary Centre

Location: Boardroom 806, Parliamentary Centre

12:00 – 13:45

Welcome Lunch on Parliament Hill hosted by the Parliamentary Centre

Location: Parliamentary Restaurant – Room 602, Centre Block

13:45 – 14:15

Tour of Parliament

Location: Parliament Hill – Centre Block

14:15 – 15:00

Observe Question Period in the House of Commons

Location: Parliament Hill – Centre Block

19:00

Welcome Dinner Hosted by the Bangladesh High Commissioner to Canada, His Excellency Mr. Rafiq Ahmed Khan

Location: Residence of the High Commissioner
105 Pond Street, Rockcliffe

Tuesday November 15

10:00 – 11:15

Session on the Work of Committees

Purpose: Overview of the committee system in the Canadian Parliament, including a review of the composition of committees, their powers, functions, and jurisdictions, as well as the relationship between committees and the Executive with respect to the implementation of committee recommendations and the scrutiny of departmental expenditure.

Speakers: Dr. Heather Lank, Principal Clerk, Committees Directorate, Senate
Ms Miriam Burke, Clerk of the Standing Committee on Government Operations & Estimates, House of Commons

Location: Parliament Hill – Room 172-E, Centre Block

11:15 – 11:30

Break

11:30 – 12:00

Meeting with the Honourable Peter Milliken, Speaker of the House of Commons

Purpose: Courtesy Visit

Location: Parliament Hill – Room 216-N, Centre Block

12:00 – 13:30

Lunch

13:30 – 14:15

Meeting with the Chair of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

Purpose: Overview of the functions of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food in inquiring, reviewing and making recommendations on matters assigned to the Executive branch, as well as the mandate of the Committee with respect to the scrutiny of departmental expenditure.

Speaker: Mr. Paul Steckle, Member of the House of Commons & Chair of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

Location: Parliament Hill – Room 172-E, Centre Block

14:15 – 15:00

Session on the Implementation of Parliamentary Committee Recommendations at the Executive Level

Purpose: Description of the process by which governmental departments respond to and implement parliamentary committee recommendations

Speakers: Denis Martel, Senior Analyst, Economic and Regional Development Policy, Privy Council Office

Location: Parliament Hill – Room 172-E, Centre Block

15:00 – 15:15

Break

15:15 – 16:00

Meeting with the Chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Purpose: Overview of the work of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to illustrate the oversight function of committees in inquiring, reviewing and making recommendations on matters assigned to the executive branch

Speaker: Mr. John Williams, Member of the House of Commons & Chair of the Public Accounts Committee

Location: Parliament Hill – Room 172-E, Centre Block

Wednesday November 16

10:30 – 12:00

Briefing with the Bangladesh High Commissioner to Canada, His Excellency Mr. Rafiq Ahmed Khan

Location: Bangladeshi High Commission in Ottawa - 275 Bank Street, Suite 302

12:00 – 13:30

Lunch at Bangladeshi High Commission in Ottawa

13:30 – 14:15

Meeting with the Chair of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

Purpose: Overview of the functions of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans in inquiring, reviewing and making recommendations on matters assigned to the Executive branch, as well as the mandate of the Committee with respect to the scrutiny of departmental expenditure.

Speaker: Mr. Thomas Wappel, Member of the House of Commons & Chair of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

Location: Parliament Hill – Room 306, West Block

14:15 – 15:00

Session on the Canadian Legislative Process

Purpose: Overview of the process by which laws are drafted, amended, adopted and reviewed, accompanied by a discussion on how parliamentary procedures guide this process

Speakers: Mr. Blair Armitage, Principal Clerk, Legislative Support Office, Senate
Mr. Michael Lukyniuk, Principal Clerk, Legislative Services, House of Commons

Location: Parliament Hill – Room 306, West Block

15:00 – 15:15

Break

15:15 – 16:00

Meeting with the Chair of the Standing Committee on Health

Purpose: Overview of the functions of the Standing Committee on Health in inquiring, reviewing and making recommendations on matters assigned to the Executive branch, as well as the mandate of the Committee with respect to the scrutiny of departmental expenditure.

Speaker: Ms Bonnie Brown, Member of the House of Commons & Chair of the Standing Committee on Health

Location: Parliament Hill – Room 306, West Block

16:15 – 16:45

Observe a Committee Meeting of the House of Commons

Purpose: Practical example of the ways in which Committees operate in the Canadian parliamentary context. The delegates will be exposed to a meeting of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. The specific topic of this particular meeting will be the effects of the Avian-Flu outbreak on Canadian farmers.

Location: Parliament Hill – Room 209, West Block

Thursday November 17

10:15 – 11:00

Meeting with the Chair of the Standing Committee on Justice, Human Rights, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness

Purpose: Overview of the functions of the Standing Committee on Justice, Human Rights, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness in inquiring, reviewing and making recommendations on matters assigned to the Executive branch, as well as the mandate of the Committee with respect to the scrutiny of departmental expenditure.

Speaker: Mr. John Maloney, Member of the House of Commons & Chair of the Standing Committee Justice, Human Rights, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness

Location: Parliament Hill – Room 172-E, Centre Block

11:00 – 11:15

Break

11:15 – 12:00

Meeting with the Chair of the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs

Purpose: Overview of the functions of the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs in inquiring, reviewing and making recommendations on matters assigned to the Executive

branch, as well as the mandate of the Committee with respect to the scrutiny of departmental expenditure.

Speaker: Mr. John Cannis, Member of the House of Commons & Chair of the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs

Location: Parliament Hill – Room 172-E, Centre Block

12:00 – 13:30

Lunch

13:30 – 14:15

Proposed Meeting with the Acting Chair of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics (Cancelled)

Purpose: Overview of the functions of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics in inquiring, reviewing and making recommendations on matters assigned to the Executive branch, as well as the mandate of the Committee with respect to the scrutiny of departmental expenditure.

Speaker: Mr. David Tilson, Member of the House of Commons & Acting Chair of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics

Note: Due to unforeseen circumstances, Mr. Tilson was called on House Business and could not meet with the delegation at this time.

14:15 – 15:00

Meeting with the Library of Parliamentary Information and Research Service

Purpose: Presentation on the role of the Information and Research Service of the Library of Parliament in providing information, research and analysis services by assigning subject specialists to assist parliamentary committees as well as providing research services to individual parliamentarians

Speaker: Mr. Hugh Finsten, Associate Parliamentary Librarian

Location: Parliament Hill – Room 901, Justice Building

15:00 – 15:15

Break

15:15 – 16:00

Meeting with the Chair of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

Purpose: Overview of the functions of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities in inquiring, reviewing and making recommendations on matters assigned to the Executive branch, as well as the mandate of the Committee with respect to the scrutiny of departmental expenditure.

Speaker: Ms Raymonde Folco, Member of the House of Commons & Chair of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

Location: Parliament Hill – Room 901, Justice Building

Friday November 18

10:00 – 11:00 **Meeting with a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario Province on Community Development Initiatives**

Purpose: Overview of the roles and responsibilities of Members of Provincial Legislative Assemblies, with a specific focus on community development initiatives undertaken within constituencies

Speaker: Mr. John Baird, Member of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Ontario (Nepean-Carleton)

Location: Boardroom 806, Parliamentary Centre

11:00 – 11:15 **Break**

11:15 – 12:00 **Debriefing Session with Mr. Robert Miller, Executive Director of the Parliamentary Centre**

Location: Boardroom 806, Parliamentary Centre

Afternoon **Free Time**

19:00 **Transfer of 4 delegates to Ottawa International Airport
Departure to Bangladesh at 21:45**

Saturday November 19 Departure

19:00 **Transfer of remainder of delegates to Ottawa International Airport
Departure to Bangladesh at 21:45**