
The AIPLF: Always an Evolving Mission

by Marc Leman

Since its inception in 1967, the International Association (now Assembly) of French-Speaking Parliamentarians (AIPLF) has been at the very heart of the worldwide French-speaking community. In 1992, it will be 25 years since delegates from 23 countries (including Canada) on four continents (Europe, Africa, North America and Asia) met in Luxembourg and founded the AIPLF. In September the Assembly will meet in Canada for the fourth time. This article outlines the history and organization of the AIPLF.

The idea of creating an interparliamentary association whose members would be nations using French as their language of expression or of work, and thereby assuring their cultural co-operation and facilitating solidarity and fraternity, was to a great extent the inspiration of Senegalese President Léopold Sédar Senghor, one of the fathers of the modern French-speaking community. This statesman spoke of "la francophonie" as world-embracing humanism, a symbiosis of the energies dormant in all continents and races and awakened by their mutual warm feelings.¹ In the early 1960s, President Senghor suggested uniting the parliaments of all the countries where French was spoken in an interparliamentary association. A similar association which included parliamentarians from the Commonwealth countries was already in existence and had official status.

It was the French geographer Onésime Reclus who, in 1887, was the first to use the expressions "francophone" and "francophonie", in a ground-breaking attempt to classify peoples by language. At the time, he saw that French could not retain its role as the primary international language because of its limited demographic weight.² But the two words fell into

oblivion, and it was not until the start of the 1960s that they were to re-appear and earn the right to be cited in dictionaries.

Nonetheless, the idea of the extended French-speaking community built up by a family of peoples sharing both a language and certain ideals, and eager for solidarity and reciprocity, emerged just after the Second World War, first in the form of non-governmental organizations or associations. This is an important fact: the francophone movement is not something artificial, generated by an international convention, but rather an aspiration that came from the grass-roots level and took the form of a large number of international associations, such as the *Union internationale des journalistes et de la presse de langue française* (UIJPLF), founded in 1952; the *Fédération internationale des professeurs de français* (FIPF), founded in 1959, the *Association des universités partiellement ou entièrement de langue française* (AUPELF), created in 1961; and the AIPLF, founded in 1967. These non-governmental organizations created the conditions and the climate that would later make possible the emergence of the first official governmental organizations for the worldwide francophone community, such as the *Conférence des ministres de l'éducation* (CONFEMEN) in 1960; the *Agence de coopération culturelle et technique* (ACCT) in 1970; and, more recently, the Francophone Summits, which began in 1986.

The founding delegates gave the AIPLF essentially a cultural mission, that of "encourag[ing] all activities

Chief of the Political and Social Affairs Division in the Research Branch of the Library of Parliament, Mr. Leman has prepared numerous background studies for Canadian parliamentary delegations participating in international and regional Assemblies of the AIPLF.

tending to promote French language and culture and through the French language to establish the cultural life of peoples who normally use the French language without being French in culture or civilization." This mission matched the vision that the fathers of the French-speaking community then held. Referring directly to the dialogue between different cultures, President Senghor wrote, "This French-speaking community can both embody and convey the values of Blackness and of Arabness, of Asia and of the Americas, and be a place where the constellations of their own cultures can shine."³ Some years later, at the IVth General Assembly (held in Dakar, Senegal), the statutes of what was then still called the Association were amended so that its objectives included not only cultural but also economic and social concerns. The amended statutes asserted that the AIPLF "intends, by studying cultural, economic and social questions of common interest:

- to establish close co-operation among member parliamentarians, in order to strengthen the mutual solidarity deriving from the use of the French language; and
- to contribute to the establishment of an effective cross-cultural dialogue."

During the 1980s, in the wake of the Summits, the AIPLF had to define precisely the part it could play within the francophone community. An *ad hoc* commission set up in 1988 had the mandate of defining the AIPLF's role as an interparliamentary organization for the French-speaking community, such as the heads of state and governments had called for at the first Francophone Summit, held in Paris in 1986. Thus, the heads of state and government wished "the AIPLF to evolve towards a status more in keeping with what it represented and to play the role of interparliamentary organization for the French-speaking community". The *ad hoc* commission recommended that the Association should become an Assembly – the International Assembly of French-Speaking Parliamentarians. The commission felt that the word "Assembly" expressed the idea of a body that in the context of the Francophone Summits and their established mechanisms gives priority to deliberation and consultation. In short, what the AIPLF wanted was to be recognized as the French-speaking community's parliamentary assembly.

The third Francophone Summit, which met in Dakar in May 1989, emphasized the AIPLF's special place in defining the francophone community and confirmed its vocation as the community's only parliamentary organization. The Summit passed the following resolution:

The heads of state and government wish to acknowledge officially the eminent role that the AIPLF, the francophone community's only interparliamentary organization, plays in the building-up and development of *la francophonie*. The representation it provides to our parliaments, the influence it exerts on opinion and the co-operative actions it has launched are an important stimulus for the success of the Summits' proposals. We therefore request the International Follow-up Committee⁴ to organize consultation and the exchange of information.⁵

Thus situated, the AIPLF could evolve into the deliberative institution of the French-speaking community and a link between the Summits and the parliaments and peoples. As the elected representatives of the world's French-speaking peoples, the members of the AIPLF are called upon to convey to the decisionmakers the profound aspirations of those peoples and to help bring about their fulfilment. The President of the AIPLF evoked this role in an article published in the journal *Parlements et Francophonie* in early 1988:

Our present vocation calls us to go beyond our role as the francophone community's deliberative body or as simply a witness to and security for the expansion of its influence. As representatives of our peoples, we have the legitimacy that is required to follow up on the political execution of Summit decisions and to advise the heads of state and government on new policy orientations. Our duties also include transmitting the message of the Summits to our peoples.⁶

Clearly, since its inception, the AIPLF has developed along lines that could lead to its becoming an intermediary between the public and the other partners in the international francophone community. Moreover, the AIPLF has several other achievements to its credit. Over the years, it has developed instruments and institutions capable of generating true interparliamentary co-operation among its member sections, furthering an authentic dialogue, and promoting fairer and more egalitarian economic co-operation.

Symbols of Solidarity Between Peoples

Communication is the essential way by which the AIPLF's member sections, regions and administrative bodies, and the francophone communities they represent, remain in touch and exchange ideas among themselves; it is the means by which they develop and blossom. The principal channels of communication in the AIPLF are the general and regional assemblies, the Executive, the Commissions, the General Secretariat and *La Revue*, and the sending of missions.

The General Assemblies

The AIPLF's special means of communication is the holding of regular General Assemblies, to which the member sections are invited.⁷ Since its founding, the AIPLF has held 17 General Assemblies, usually in a different country or place each time. The first met in Versailles in 1968. Others were held successively in Abidjan (1970), Montreal-Ottawa-Quebec City (1971), Dakar (1973), Brussels (1974) and Mauritius (1975). In 1976, for the first time, a special session was held elsewhere than in a member nation: the VIIth General Assembly met at UN Headquarters in New York City, and was opened by the UN Secretary General. The VIIIth General Assembly, marking the AIPLF's 10th anniversary, was held in Paris the following year. Since then, there have been General Assemblies in Gabon (1978), Geneva at the headquarters of the International Labour Organization (1979), Ottawa (1980), Dakar (1982), Jersey (1983) and Réunion (1984). The XVth was held in Quebec City (1986), the XVIth in Yaoundé (1988). The most recent was in Paris in 1989, on the occasion of the Bicentennial of the French Revolution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man. About 200 parliamentarians gathered from more than 40 countries on four continents.

The General Assembly might be called the AIPLF's supreme body. The by-laws describe it as the appropriate place for exchanging information, debate, and proposals on all subjects of common interest. As such, it maintains permanent relations with the institutions and organizations (whether governmental or not) active in the worldwide French-speaking community. It keeps abreast of all issues arising from the preparations for and follow-up to the Summits of heads of state and government of countries which have in common the use of French. It makes recommendations directed at strengthening solidarity among French-speaking peoples.⁸

During the General Assemblies, the parliamentarians meet in various commissions (these are now standing bodies): Policy and General Administration, Parliamentary Affairs, Cultural Activities and Co-operation and Development. There they discuss matters of common interest, assess the results that have been achieved, and submit to the General Assembly recommendations that, if approved, will constitute resolutions. Since the Francophone Summits began to be held, such resolutions have been designed primarily to impress a parliamentary viewpoint on the actions proposed at the meetings of heads of state and government.

Contacts between parliamentarians can only favour the healthy development of interparliamentary relations. As representatives of the people and leaders in the worlds of business, the liberal professions and many other fields, parliamentarians are in an excellent position to know the standards and needs of the societies they serve. In discussions with their counterparts, parliamentarians can deepen their knowledge of other countries and of areas that interest them, take note of solutions that other people have found for common problems, and establish friendly relations that will put co-operation on a still firmer footing. In addition, parliamentarians can provide liaison among the governments and groups that want to enlarge the horizons of inter-nation and multilateral co-operation.

The General Assemblies have been the occasions of fruitful thinking about the fundamental concerns and problems of the worldwide francophone community. The relevance of the themes tackled in the Assembly, and in the standing commissions, has led to lively interchanges of views, illustrated with examples and references to the daily reality in the French-speaking world.⁹

Regional Assemblies

Regional Assemblies are another means of promoting contacts and communication between member sections of the AIPLF at the regional level. Toward the end of the 1970s, at a time when the AIPLF was experiencing substantial growth, the idea of decentralization began to take hold. The Assembly became progressively more international in nature at the same time as it saw the emergence of regions delineated by geographic proximity, cultural similarities or a common historic background. Europe, America and Africa were thus perceived as distinct sub-entities within the larger AIPLF family, possessing their own personality and dynamism and acting on a practical level as an intermediary authority or link with the organization.

In the initial phase of the regionalization of the AIPLF, positions of regional *chargés de mission* were created. They ensure that the Association is represented within regional institutions and agencies and oversee Assembly activities in the different regions and serve as a link between the General Secretariat of the AIPLF in Paris and the regional sections. The unique feature of the decentralization process is that all sections within a given region, each with its own national characteristics, can take credit and are responsible for the development of the francophone community and its offshoots.

The stature of the Regional Assemblies grew with the holding of the first Regional Assembly of the Americas

in Ottawa in October 1981. The European Region held its first Regional Assembly in April 1983 (in Arras, France), while the Africa Region held its first Assembly in February 1984 (Kinshasa, Zaire). These Assemblies, which were organized and co-ordinated by the heads of mission and the regional administrative secretaries, confirmed their purpose, which is to make sections from the same regions aware of one another's existence and similarities and thus to step up exchanges. The organization of activities at the regional level allows the small sections or those that are less well provided for to participate there, when they are not able to do so at the international level. Over the years, the Americas Region has clearly shown its dynamism by holding eight Regional Assemblies; the European Region has held five Assemblies, while the Africa Region has held two.

The General Secretariat, The Executive and *La Revue*

The General Secretariat of the AIPLF oversees the administration of the organization. It consists of a general parliamentary secretary, a general administrative secretary and a deputy general administrative secretary, as well as four advisors to the standing commissions, to carry out, in co-operation with the chargés de mission, the various co-ordination, communication and liaison activities with member sections and the regions. Working under the Executive,¹⁰ the General Secretary is responsible for the implementation of the decisions (resolutions) of the General Assembly and the Executive.

In addition to the biannual meetings of the Executive for the purpose of organizing, planning and co-ordinating the Assembly proceedings, the AIPLF puts out a publication called *La Revue*, in order to maintain regular contacts and ensure follow-ups with member sections. *La Revue des parlementaires de langue française*, which was renamed *Parlements et Francophonie* early in 1985, is a concrete way of sustaining contacts with member sections. Published quarterly by the General Secretariat, *La Revue* is a high quality information vehicle. It covers a broad range of activities: general reports of the international and regional assemblies, including resolutions, statements and important speeches by leaders of the world and regional francophone community; reports of Francophone Summits, including preparatory and discussion papers submitted to participants; signage and succinct summaries of activities, conferences and symposiums conducted by the chief organizations and associations of the world francophone community; in-depth articles on the world and regional francophone community, current parliamentary activities, etc.

Multilateral and Bilateral Missions

Missions are another privileged intervention mechanism in addition to the various other means of communication. Basically, the purpose of missions is to encourage new sections to become members; to reawaken the fervour of less enthusiastic sections and to encourage them to maintain and develop their participation in the AIPLF; to see firsthand the problems encountered by francophone communities; and to maintain personal ties between parliamentarians. Early after the founding of the AIPLF, parliamentarians expressed an interest in organizing missions and in 1973, the very first was sent to Niger, Upper Volta and the Ivory Coast. Subsequent missions were organized: to Haiti in 1974; to Lebanon, Syria and Iran in 1975; to Greece, Quebec, Zaire and Cameroon in 1978; and to Brazil in 1979. In all, 18 similar missions comprising parliamentarians from Europe, Africa and America travelled to various countries on each of these continents. Moreover, since the creation of the regions, the organization of missions has been largely taken over by the chargés de mission who act as intermediaries between the General Secretary and the sections in their respective regions. In the Americas Region, several regional missions have been constituted over the years to promote and expand the circle of regional members.

Bilateral missions emphasizing direct contact between members of two or more sections in different regions have been formally established over the years. The groundwork for exchanges of this nature was laid by the Canadian, Quebec, French, Belgian, Senegalese and Cameroonian sections. These missions have promoted close ties and lasting friendships between members of these sections. They were likely responsible for the signing of bilateral agreements between the national assemblies of Quebec and France and between the Government of Quebec and the *Conseil culturel de la communauté française de Belgique*, establishing a joint co-operation commission.

Over the years, the AIPLF has sought to maintain strong, friendly ties and to co-operate with other francophone associations and organizations. Among other things, the AIPLF has developed special ties and co-operated on particular projects with the AUPELF, the Biennale de la langue française, the Fédération internationale des professeurs de français and the Agency for Cultural and Technical Co-operation. Moreover, the AIPLF played a decisive role in the Agency's creation, which had been proposed at the first General Assembly in Versailles in 1968.¹¹ The AIPLF has numerous and varied contacts with a number of other world and regional francophone associations and bodies. AIPLF parliamentarians and officials participate

regularly in meetings and symposia organized by major francophone associations.

The Assembly is officially accredited with international organizations such as UNESCO and the United Nations Economic and Social Council. It has also been granted a consultative status by the Council of Europe and has been registered on the special list of non-governmental organizations accredited by the International Labour Organization. The AIPLF maintains normal ties with the Assembly of European Communities, the Commission of European Economic Communities, the Union of African Parliaments, and with major inter-parliamentary associations such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

Parliamentary Co-operation: A New Approach

The decisive step in the direction of parliamentary exchanges and co-operation was taken at the IXth General Assembly held in Libreville, Gabon in 1978. The AIPLF passed a resolution affirming its desire:

to promote the bilateral and multilateral exchange of parliamentary experience, through the activities of the respective sections or those of the Assembly; to bring about, on a bilateral level, the signing of interparliamentary agreements of a cultural, economic, social, legislative or technical nature and the creation of friendship groups; to promote through the AIPLF genuine multilateral or bilateral co-operation with a view to enhancing the operation and work methods of our parliaments; to keep the General Secretariat of the AIPLF informed of projects and achievements.¹²

Since passing the Libreville resolution establishing the foundations of interparliamentary co-operation, the AIPLF has sought to define and lay down a framework for action to facilitate exchanges between parliaments. In 1981, the General Secretariat drafted a code for interparliamentary co-operation between new and former parliaments. The code focused on three main areas: parliamentary services (services that oversee the organization of parliamentary activities, that is, the work of the House, legislation and parliamentary commissions, and documentation and archival services available to parliamentarians); communication services and interparliamentary relations (including basically the publication and the dissemination of parliamentary documents, the press service, public relations, radio and television broadcasting of parliamentary proceedings, and interparliamentary relations); and administrative services such as financial services and personnel management.¹³

The code has brought to light the different levels on which interparliamentary co-operation can take place

and has demonstrated that the nature of the co-operative initiative varies according to the age and traditions of each Parliament. Newly-created assemblies are primarily in need of material and technical support and of training sessions for their officials, while older parliaments require general documentation on the administrative organizations of parliaments, seminars and educational missions for their officials.

The code has served as a backdrop for launching a range of co-operative initiatives between parliaments of the North and South, and between parliaments with similar traditions within the same regions. One well-known initiative is the training provided to parliamentary information officers, the result of a co-operative effort between the AIPLF and the Agency for Cultural and Technical Co-operation. Training and development sessions are held at the *École internationale de Bordeaux*. The study sessions result in the establishment of information exchange networks between parliaments and lead to parliamentary internships.

As *la Francophonie* is a microcosm of North-South relations, the AIPLF has taken on the goal of promoting and initiating stronger ties and relations between the sections from the various continents with a view to devising joint development programs which would form the basis of recommendations to the respective governments. Most initiatives focus on one of the following two areas: first, the operation of existing political institutions and the consideration of proposals for improving the operation of parliamentary institutions; second, the world political and economic order, in particular the socio-economic problems of disadvantaged nations.

The contribution of the standing commissions is significant. For example, the Parliamentary Commission has turned its attention to the question of the public financing of political parties and election campaigns. In light of the central role of political parties in ensuring the survival and stability of democratic institutions, delegates have ratified a resolution recommending the adoption of legislative provisions which would allow "a reasonable limit on election expenses and disclosure of the financing of political parties,"¹⁴ including the control to be exercised by a public body. Other parliamentary-related issues have also been studied by the Parliamentary Commission. Election techniques, in particular the investiture of candidates and voting methods and the participation of women in parliamentary life have been the subject of discussions and reports. More recently, the Commission focused its attention on the access of parliaments to a modern documentation network. In so doing, the AIPLF wanted

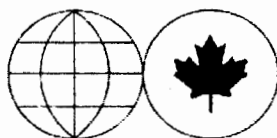
to demonstrate how important it was for the people's representatives to have access to comprehensive, reliable information in order to fulfil their two-fold mission of drafting legislative standards and exercising executive control. The proposed interparliamentary documentation network will involve two types of initiatives to be carried out in a parallel manner. The first project component is the development of documentary services for parliaments of the South and the second is the Centre for Comparative Parliamentary Data.

The Co-operation and Development Committee is notably interested in audiovisual co-operation. It is associated with the *Institut de coopération audiovisuelle francophone* and has established closer ties with the International Centre for Communication so as to support audiovisual activities in African countries, working with European nations, and in francophone America. Working through this Commission, the AIPLF has also become deeply interested in developments in the Sahel region, which is periodically affected by scourge of drought. The essential idea behind the AIPLF's commitment to co-operation and development issues is that parliamentarians, whether from the North or South, can see for themselves that the projects undertaken are appreciated and carried through and that they truly correspond to the needs of the people. The presence of parliamentarians ensures the development of a genuine knowledge of the countries to which assistance is being provided and thus may prevent the inconsistencies that have been seen in some forms of aid. The Committee has also looked at the issue of literacy and the struggle to fight illiteracy in countries in the South. The resolutions passed by the AIPLF in this area have helped to promote respect for the individual, as well as the economic, social and cultural development of the countries concerned. More recently the AIPLF has been the forum for debate on the idea of a francophone economic area.▲

Notes

1. Quoted in Philippe Decraene, "Les chances de la francophonie," *Le Devoir*, 20 February 1969.
2. Reclus also noted that English was going to be called upon to play a more important role, given its considerable demographic weight and in particular the entry of the United States on to the world stage.

3. Quoted in Georges Dussault, "La francophonie: une réalité mal connue," *L'Action nationale*, Vol. 76, January 1987, p. 434.
4. The International Follow-Up Committee is the body responsible for implementing Summit decisions.
5. Quoted in *Parlements et Francophonie*, 2nd quarter 1989, No. 73, p. 99-100.
6. Martial Asselin, "Une vision plus globale de la francophonie," *Parlements et Francophonie*, 1st quarter 1988, p. 6.
7. At the present time, there are 34 sections, formed within the following Parliaments: Brazil, Cameroon, Canada, Central African Republic, Comoros, Congo, Communauté française de Belgique, Djibouti, Egypt, France, Gabon, Ivory Coast, Jersey, Jura, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Mali, Manitoba, Mauritius, Monaco, Morocco, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Quebec, Rwanda, Senegal, Switzerland, Syria, Togo, Tunisia, Valle d'Aosta, Vanuatu, Zaire. The AIPLF also has three associate sections (Andorra, Louisiana and Maine).
8. AIPLF, *Règlement de l'Assemblée*, September 1989, Article 2.
9. A few examples will illustrate how closely the choice of themes has reflected life in the francophone community: "The Social Implications of Development" (VIIIth General Assembly, UN, 1976); "The French Language: Its Role and Influence in the World" and "Co-operation Through Francophone Associations" (VIIIth General Assembly, Paris, 1977); "Management and Development," "Instruction in French as a First and a Second Language" and "Continuing Education: Literacy, Retraining and the Fight Against Unemployment" (XVth General Assembly, Quebec City, 1986); "A Francophone Economic Area" (XVIth General Assembly, Yaounde, 1988).
10. The General Assembly delegates authority to the Executive, the executive body of the AIPLF which, between sessions, oversees the implementation of the decisions made by the General Assembly. It is made up of representatives of the 15 member sections and meets twice a year.
11. Since 1975, the AIPLF has been linked to the Agency for Cultural and Technical Co-operation through a memorandum of understanding and co-operation. Moreover, the AIPLF commissions generally correspond to the major missions of the Agency in the fields of culture, language industries, science and development methods and co-operation.
12. Quoted from the October 1978 edition of *Revue des parlementaires de langue française*, No. 33, p. 67.
13. For further information, see *Revue des parlementaires de langue française*, No. 51-52, 4th quarter 1983, 1st quarter 1984, p. 234-256.
14. *Parlements et Francophonie*, No. 64, 1st quarter 1987, p. 21.



A. I. P. L. F.