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Council of
Ministers
of Education,
Canada

Conseil des
ministres
de l'Éducation
(Canada)

**Organization of American States (OAS)
VII Inter-American Meeting of Ministers of Education
Paramaribo, Suriname
March 1–2, 2012**

Report of the Canadian Delegation



OAS Secretary General, José Miguel Insulza, Inaugurates the VII Inter-American Meeting of Ministers of Education (Credit: OAS)

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I. Canadian Delegation

- The Honorable Erin Selby, Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy, Manitoba (head of delegation)
- Rory Henry, Associate Deputy Minister of Education, Manitoba
- Julia Clark, Second Secretary and Alternate Representative, Permanent Mission of Canada to the Organization of American States (OAS)
- David Ruiz, Conseiller en Affaires interaméricaines, Direction des organisations internationales, Ministère des Relations internationales du Québec
- Marcel Courchesne, Analyst, International, CMEC Secretariat

II. Introduction

Background

OAS was officially established in 1948 in order to achieve among its member states “an order of peace and justice, to promote their solidarity, to strengthen their collaboration, and to defend their sovereignty, their territorial integrity, and their independence.” Today, OAS brings together all 35 independent states of the Americas and constitutes the main political, juridical, and social governmental forum in the Western hemisphere. OAS recognizes that a good education is a vital component in fostering economic development, social equity, and security in any democratic society. OAS collaborates with member states in their efforts to ensure quality education for all by coordinating a variety of educational programs in many countries and providing scholarships to young men and women to promote greater opportunities.

Between 2001 and 2009, the ministers of education have met six times to discuss education in the political agenda, exchange experiences, review the progress of the mandates from the Summits of the Americas, and develop action strategies to respond to summit mandates.

Objectives of the meeting

At the VII Inter-American Meeting of Ministers of Education, whose central theme was “Transforming the Role of the Teacher to Meet the Challenges of the 21st Century,” ministers exchanged information on:

- The teacher that today’s students need;
- Schools as learning communities: the context for effective teaching;
- The role of government as guarantor of a quality education;

- The achievements and challenges of the work of the Inter-American Committee on Education (CIE);
- The relation between the ministerial process and the following Summit of the Americas, which took place on April 14–15, 2012, in Cartagena, Columbia.

In addition, ministers approved the Declaration of Paramaribo – “Transforming the role of the teacher in response to 21st-century challenges” – and elected the new CIE Authorities for the period 2012–2014.

This report will provide a summary of the main points of the meeting. A detailed report was provided by the OAS Technical Secretariat and is available upon request.

III. Structure of the Meeting

In order to facilitate the achievement of its objectives, the meeting was organized around nine plenary sessions, in which the ministers were invited to share their thoughts based on the experiences and needs of their respective countries.

A preparatory meeting of officials was scheduled for the day prior to the meeting to review meeting details and agree on the draft declaration. However, due to a lack of quorum, the preparatory session was cancelled. Even though the preparatory session did not officially take place, the Canadian representatives had the opportunity to share their concerns about the declaration with the Member States present, including the US, and seek a common approach.

IV. Participation of the Canadian Delegation

Minister Selby was the lead presenter for the fifth plenary, “Policies to promote teacher quality: the role of governments.” After introducing the topic, Minister Selby opened the debate by inviting ministers and delegates to elaborate on the topic and exchange information on best practices.

During her presentation, Minister Selby underscored the positive relationship between high-quality education and well-trained teachers. She pointed out that countries that have succeeded in making teaching an attractive profession have often done so not just through compensation, but also by raising the status of the teaching profession. In addition, she noted that recruiting high-quality teachers is not enough; teachers also require ongoing professional development.

In her concluding remarks, Minister Selby noted that Manitoba and other jurisdictions in Canada regularly monitor the rankings and compare their performance with high-performing

education systems around the world in order to learn from them. She also observed that globalization brings challenges and opportunities. For example, Manitoba, as well as other provinces and territories, recognizes innovation in education as an essential element to adapt Canadian classrooms to deal with cultural diversity and the different languages of its immigrant population.

During the plenary sessions on CIE, the Canadian delegation expressed its support for the educational programs of the OAS, including scholarships. For example, the Quebec government has contributed to the OAS Academic Regular Scholarship Program since 2009. Canada also stressed the importance of strengthening collaboration and cooperation among states and organizations, particularly between the education and culture sectors within the OAS. In addition, Canada welcomed the focus on early childhood education and care (ECEC).

Finally, during the discussions on projects related to languages in the Americas, Canada reminded participants not to forget French as an official language of OAS.

V. Main Outcomes of the Meeting

The main outcome of this meeting was the adoption of the Declaration of Paramaribo: “Transforming the role of the teacher to meet the challenges of the 21st-century” (see APPENDIX I).¹ The declaration emphasizes the importance of teachers at all levels of the educational process and recognizes the importance of teachers in efforts to improve the quality of education. The document also highlights the need for educators “to have access to quality initial preparation and continuing professional development” and acknowledges that “policies to strengthen the teaching profession and opportunities for quality professional development are vital to attract, employ, induct, develop, evaluate, motivate, and retain.” The declaration also emphasizes the importance of expanding access to new technologies in education, and notes progress made by the Inter-American Teacher Education Network (ITEN). The declaration was presented to the heads of state and government at the Sixth Summit of the Americas, held in Cartagena, Colombia, on April 14–15, 2012. The agreements reached at the VII Inter-American Meeting of Ministers of Education will provide the foundation for the CIE Work Plan for the period 2012–14.

Regarding the election of CIE Authorities, the following countries were elected by acclamation for the period 2012–2014, until the VIII Inter-American Meeting of Ministers of Education (dates to be confirmed):

¹ The Declaration of Paramaribo is available at : <http://www.scm.oas.org/VII-Education-Meeting/Documents/6.%20Declaracion%20version%20Aprobada%20DEC.1ENG.doc>

Position	Country
Chair	Suriname
First Vice Chair	Costa Rica
Second Vice Chair	Paraguay

Pursuant to the tradition of country rotation, Canada will serve as the Principal Delegate for the North America Sub-region on the CIE Executive Committee during its 2012–14 term. Mexico will serve as the Alternate Delegate. Participants also agreed on the following representation on the Executive Committee, noting that consultation with some sub-regions are still pending:

Sub-region	Country (Principal and Alternate Delegates)
North America Sub-region	Canada, Mexico
Andean Sub-region	(consultations pending)
Southern Cone Sub-region	Paraguay, Uruguay (consultations pending)
Central America Sub-region	(consultations pending)
Caribbean Sub-region	Antigua and Barbuda, Grenada

The forum concluded with the offer of the Ministry of Education of Paraguay to host the VIII Inter-American Meeting of Ministers of Education within the framework of the Inter-American Council for Integral Development (CIDI) in 2013 or 2014 (dates to be confirmed).

VI. Conclusion and Recommendations of the Canadian Delegation

Given the quality of the presentations as well as the opportunity to share pan-Canadian perspectives and establish collaborative links among participants, including the opportunity to engage bilaterally with priority countries and contacts, it is recommended that CMEC attend the next meeting, which will take place in 2013 or 2014 (dates and venues to be confirmed).

The role played by our head of delegation, Minister Selby, was much appreciated by the OAS Secretariat, OAS members, and the Permanent Mission of Canada to the OAS. High-level representation provides an opportunity for Canada to show its engagement and share our unique perspectives. Minister Selby, in turn, had the opportunity to exchange views with her counterparts in the region. Therefore, it is recommended that Canada continue to be represented by a Minister of Education at this event.

As Canada became the Principal Delegate for the North America Sub-region on the CIE Executive Committee for 2012–14, CMEC will provide support to the Canadian representative to CIE, Alan Lowe, Senior Advisor, School Board Relations, Department of Education, Nova Scotia, to fulfill his role. The Permanent Mission of Canada to the OAS in Washington will continue to attend planning meetings and report on developments related to the work of CIE.

Finally, CMEC will circulate the report to ministers of education, drawing attention to the Declaration of Paramaribo and the commitments contained therein.



ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES

Inter-American Council for Integral Development

(CIDI)



SEVENTH INTER-AMERICAN MEETING

OF MINISTERS OF EDUCATION

February 29-March 2, 2012

Paramaribo, Suriname

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DECLARATION OF PARAMARIBO

“Transforming the role of the teacher in response to 21st-century challenges”

(Adopted at the ninth plenary session, on March 2, 2012, and subject to review by the Style Committee)

WE, THE MINISTERS OF EDUCATION OF THE MEMBER STATES OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES (OAS), meeting in Paramaribo, Suriname, on March 1 and 2, 2012, at the Seventh Inter-American Meeting of Ministers of Education within the Framework of CIDI

REAFFIRMING that equal and timely access to education is a human right and that quality education is essential and constitutes an effective tool for reducing inequality and creating conditions for development and for the wellbeing of the population;

BEARING IN MIND the diversity of cultural contexts as well as the need to reduce social inequalities, foster competencies appropriate for a globalized 21st century, and narrow the digital divide;

AFFIRMING the need to improve the quality of education and educational offerings so as to prepare students for lifelong learning, active and committed citizenship, securing decent²/ work, and a good quality of life;

AWARE that teachers play a fundamental role in the quality of educational processes and outcomes and that for that purpose they need comprehensive initial and continuing preparation as well as appropriate employment conditions for the development of their professional career;

² The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela wishes to underscore that in the Declaration of Commitment of Port of Spain the Heads of State and Government committed to promote access to and to create dignified and decent work.

EMPHASIZING that teaching and learning take place within social and institutional systems and that no teacher can fulfill his or her role fully without the appropriate institutional and human environments; and

AWARE of the essential role of governments in promoting quality education for all and aware that special attention must be paid to the design and implementation of policies that strengthen the teaching profession and foster the educator's strategic role in facilitating learning and promoting values.

THEREFORE, WE, THE MINISTERS OF EDUCATION OF THE MEMBER STATES:

1. Underscore the importance of education as a fundamental aspect of development and, therefore, as essential to improving social, economic, cultural and democratic conditions in the member states.

2. Emphasize the intrinsic value of education, its social function, and its impact on the quality of life of every person and community, as well as its role in strengthening the economy, fostering social inclusion and mobility, and promoting equal access to greater opportunities, poverty reduction, and the building of citizenship and identity.

3. Reiterate that it is the responsibility of governments to ensure access to quality education for all.

4. Reaffirm the key role of the teacher in educational processes and results and recognize that the participation of teachers in efforts to improve the quality of education is important, so as to help ensure that the results are effective and lasting.

5. Affirm that it is important for all teachers to have access to quality initial preparation and continuing professional development that will enable them to guide and promote meaningful learning, social harmony, intercultural dialogue and respect for diversity, and whose pedagogical practice appropriately includes reflection, innovation, creativity and ICTs, as well as the development of skills to attend to students with diverse needs and to interact effectively with their peers, students and families.

6. Recognize that policies to strengthen the teaching profession and opportunities for quality professional development are vital to attract, employ, induct, develop, evaluate, motivate, retain, and recognize teachers so that they become ever better educators.

7. Attach priority, within efforts to raise the quality of education in our countries, to fostering appropriate pedagogical practices that are adapted to the diversity of local environments so as to more effectively meet the needs of the 21st century student. We also favor providing opportunities for teachers to observe, analyze, adapt, and adopt innovative teaching practices.

8. Emphasize that the student is the central figure in the educational process and therefore we promote active participation by students in learning and in educational processes that affect them. We further emphasize our commitment to foster greater international student exchange in order to provide the greatest possible learning opportunities for our students.

9. Affirm the need to conceive of 21st-century schools as learning communities whose central mission is to offer quality education to each student and where all staff work as a team, fostering learning and personal growth, and integration and ongoing participation by students, family members and guardians, and other educational actors. To that end, we will strive to provide leadership to see that this mission is fulfilled.

10. Pledge to promote the strengthening, professionalization and social valuing of the teaching profession through dynamic means of fostering dialogue and cooperation among educational systems, universities and other teacher preparation institutions, professional societies and unions, civil society organizations, the private sector, and other government sectors.

11. Affirm the importance of reviewing and, where necessary, in accordance with each member state's circumstances, strengthening legislative, regulatory, and administrative frameworks to formulate and implement policies that are responsive to the needs of 21st century students and the requirements of local contexts.

12. Recognize the importance of expanding access to ICTs in education at all levels and in all sectors, particularly as a contributing factor in the preparation of students, their learning, and their active and democratic participation in the political, social, cultural, and productive arenas. We will endeavor to promote training of teachers to use these tools effectively in the teaching and learning process.

13. Will redouble our efforts to generate knowledge and to exchange good practices concerning innovative policies and programs for initial preparation, professional development, improvement of labor conditions, and strengthening the teaching profession. We entrust the Inter-American Committee on Education (CIE), with support from its Technical Secretariat, with following up on this issue through the region's cooperation mechanisms, including the Inter-American Teacher Education Network (ITEN), whose progress we applaud.

14. Reaffirm our Hemispheric Commitment to Early Childhood Education, adopted at the Fifth Inter-American Meeting of Ministers of Education, held in Cartagena de Indias from November 12 to 14, 2007, in which we undertook to increase the coverage of quality comprehensive early childhood education in each member state in accordance with its circumstances. We express our satisfaction at the progress in implementing the mandates that we agreed to on that occasion and, in the inter-American framework, under the coordination of the CIE.

15. Recognize with satisfaction the progress made in implementing the Inter-American Program on Education for Democratic Values and Practices, given its contribution to strengthening a democratic and nonviolent culture, through formal and nonformal education, promoting active and meaningful participation by youth in the decisions that affect them and providing teachers with tools that will support them in making their classrooms more democratic.

16. Express our conviction that the CIE has become a valuable forum for ensuring that the political mandates emanating from this and prior ministerial meetings receive appropriate technical support and follow-up. We instruct the CIE, with the support of the Executive Secretariat for Integral

Development (SEDI), to draw up a work plan for 2012 and 2013, the central objective of which should be to implement and follow up on our decisions, with special attention to strengthening horizontal cooperation and technical assistance in lines of action that include (1) promoting and monitoring policies of quality, equity, and inclusion; (2) strengthening initial teacher preparation, professional development, and the teaching profession; (3) comprehensive early childhood care and education; (4) education in democratic values and practices; and (5) the use of information and communications technologies in the teaching and learning process.

17. Instruct the CIE authorities to convene a meeting for this purpose no later than May 2012. In that connection, we encourage member states to continue supporting initiatives now under way; and we instruct the CIE, with support from the Technical Secretariat, to seek partnerships with other organizations to secure additional resources for implementation of the work plan, and to present a progress report on its implementation at our next ministerial meeting and to other appropriate political organs in the OAS framework.

18. Thank the people and Government of Suriname for the special welcome they have extended to us during this Seventh Inter-American Meeting of Ministers of Education within the framework of CIDI. In particular, we wish to acknowledge the leadership of the Ministry of Education and Community Development in ensuring the success of this event.