

***Summary of the September 15, 2016 Workshop:  
"Voting System and Mechanisms  
to Diversify the Composition of the Parliament of Canada"***

Forwarded by the workshop organizers: Fédération des femmes du Québec, Mélanie Sarazin, president, and Mercédez Roberge

Submitted on October 7, 20[1]6 to the Special Committee on Electoral Reform

**Overview**

About twenty participants with recognized expertise in the matter met on September 15, 2016. The summary of their meeting highlights the importance of aiming both to diversify Parliament's composition and to diversify political options.

Participants applied gender-differentiated analysis and anti-racism analysis to electoral reform, then suggested several institutional mechanisms to increase the election of women and racialized persons within a compensatory mixed-member proportional voting system.

Considering the importance of the work of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform, on September 15 about twenty public figures participated in a workshop entitled "Voting System and Mechanisms to Diversify the Composition of the Parliament of Canada." (Proceedings attached.)

The participants (list attached) are considered by their peers to be specialists: specialized groups, community organizations and trade unions having submitted dozens of briefs, and experts from various networks.

The purpose of the meeting was to deal with an aspect that is rarely addressed, but is related to the theme of "accessibility and inclusiveness": choosing a new electoral system that not only offers proportional representation of the vote, but also increases the election of women and racialized persons.<sup>1</sup>

The participants have developed suggestions and asked the organizers to forward a summary of the meeting to the Committee.

**Their discussions led quickly to a consensus on the following findings:**

1. Canada is facing several needs:
  - a. The majoritarian system does little to reflect the diversity of the political opinions of the electorate. As the consequences of its deficiencies have been amply demonstrated, it must be replaced and proportional results must be achieved.
  - b. All of the elements that make up a society must contribute to its decisions. The deficit in representation by women and racialized persons is not only a statistical problem, it influences those decisions. Since the negative consequences and the systemic aspect are amply demonstrated, a solution must be found.
  - c. Many countries combine the use of a proportional representation system<sup>2</sup> and institutional mechanisms to increase the election of women. The results of their experiences are compelling and can inspire the design of similar mechanisms to increase the election of racialized persons.
2. Differences in socio-economic conditions can discourage some from political vocations: women and racialized persons are statistically poorer and hold more precarious jobs than the general population.
3. The choice of a new electoral system must be based on democratic principles (all votes count), but must also apply gender-based analysis (GBA<sup>3</sup>) and anti-racism analysis (ARA) (all people count).
  - a. This two-part analysis makes it possible to decide which institutional mechanisms should be put in place, and to choose an electoral system able to receive them and contribute to the diversification of Parliament's composition.
  - b. The application of these analyses leads to the establishment of a compensatory mixed-member proportional electoral system for Canada, because this model is conducive to reconciling all of the objectives.
4. Since the Elections Act has already outlined the entire process, it must institutionalize the rules that can diversify the composition of Parliament.

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<sup>1</sup> Explained below.

<sup>2</sup> Party list, compensatory mixed-member, or single transferable vote.

<sup>3</sup> [Footnote only applies to French version.]

5. For the best results, it is necessary to combine different institutional mechanisms:
  - a. Set targets to be met by the parties (% and positions of female and racialized persons candidacies);
  - b. Reward the parties that reduce representation deficits;
  - c. Ensure application and advancement, use the reimbursement of election expenses as an incentive and take socio-economic differences into account.

The workshop participants readily agreed that the government should apply GBA and ARA to all decisions, in line with the Prime Minister's own requests to his cabinet: "You are expected to do your part to fulfill our government's commitment to transparent, merit-based appointments, to help ensure gender parity and that Indigenous Canadians and minority groups are better reflected in positions of leadership."<sup>4</sup>

The intention is not to create more targets,<sup>5</sup> but to take into account the fundamental aspects of Canadian society, aiming to increase the election of women and racialized persons.<sup>6</sup> This last expression has been used in Canada for the past ten years by institutions and by the persons and groups directly concerned.<sup>7</sup> It replaces the words "racial minorities", "visible minorities", and "persons of colour", considered "outdated and inaccurate".<sup>8</sup> The literature specifies that to put an end to racism it must be understood "as a historical and current reality in Canadian society".<sup>9</sup> In the parliamentary context, the under-representation requiring intervention is that of groups that have historically been racialized, in particular persons born outside the country and visible minorities.<sup>10</sup> Mechanisms are applied based on self-identification.

## 1. Data at the source of the findings

The following data was presented during the meeting.<sup>11</sup> It illustrates the results achieved by the 86 countries that have established institutional mechanisms to increase the election of women.

According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, as of June 2016, women made up 35% or more of elected positions in 28 countries. It is not a coincidence that 25 of these use proportional representation systems, while 14 of them are successful in combining institutional mechanisms that help increase the election of women. The effectiveness of this combination is proven.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/minister-status-women-mandate-letter>

<sup>5</sup> Similar actions could increase the representation of Aboriginal peoples, but we are letting principal stakeholders develop their own suggestions. Our concern is noted in suggestion #9.

<sup>6</sup> In French, "personne racisée". This term is used to describe those who belong (in reality or or not) to groups that have undergone a social and mental classification on the basis of "race", even though that concept has no biological reality.

<sup>7</sup> See: Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse (Quebec), Ontario Human Rights Commission, Library of Parliament (2014, "The Role of Language in Showing Respect for Diversity").

<sup>8</sup> Ontario Human Rights Commission <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/racial-discrimination-race-and-racism-sheet>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-and-guidelines-racism-and-racial-discrimination> 2005, page 12.

<sup>10</sup> Also noted by the Conseil des relations interculturelles (QC 2006).

<sup>11</sup> In particular the Inter-Parliamentary Union and Quota Project. The 8 document sources are detailed in [http://bit.ly/Donnees\\_MercedesRoberge\\_ReformeFederale](http://bit.ly/Donnees_MercedesRoberge_ReformeFederale) (in French only).

### Elected women, by electoral system and existence of institutional mechanisms (June 1, 2016)

Systems	86 countries with institutional mechanisms (58 proportional + 23 majority + 5 other)			108 countries without institutional mechanisms (50 proportional + 55 majority + 3 other)			World Total (108 proportional + 78 majority + 8 other)		
	1999	2016	Progress	1999	2016	Progress	1999	2016	Progress
Proportional (108 countries)	11.4%	26.7%	+ 15.3%	15.2%	23.7%	+8.5%	11.4%	20.6%	+9.2%
Majority (78 countries)	7.3%	17.5%	+10.2%	9.2%	13.8%	+4.6%			
194 countries <sup>12</sup>	10.5%	23.9%	+13.4%	12.1%	18.1%	+6%			

### Institutional mechanisms and effects on the election of women (June 1, 2016)

Institutional mechanisms in the 86 countries	Proportional systems		Majority systems		Gains
	% of women elected	Countries using it	% of women elected	Countries using it	
18 countries alternate men and women (among 29 regulating positioning)	34%	15	16.8%	3	+17.2%
47 countries target 30-50% of candidates (among 57 with targets)	27.7%	43	19.5%	4	+8.2%
37 countries reject party lists that are not compliant	28.1%	33	16.2%	4	+11.9%
33 countries tie public funding to the rules	22.2%	25	17.1%	8	+5.1%

<sup>12</sup> Other systems = 8 countries

## **2. Suggestions from September 15**

The following suggestions were readily agreed upon during the meeting. The short time did not allow the recommendations to be formally adopted, so they do not constitute official positions on the part of the persons and organizations present. Those parties have, however, validated this document as being consistent with the analyses and the consensuses expressed.

### **A. Basic principles**

1. In order to ensure that the results are sustainable and strongly rooted in democratic, egalitarian and anti-racist practices:
  - 1.1. The work should be done from the ground up, to ensure that society transposes these principles in every aspect of the political sphere.
  - 1.2. The electoral system should be chosen based on its ability to comply with these principles, in addition to the criteria usually associated with this approach (proportionality, political pluralism, etc.).
2. In order that the principles underpinning the rules dictated by the Elections Act be protected against changing circumstances:
  - 2.1. The principles should be stated in the governing documents, and the institutional mechanisms, their methods, and their monitoring should be integrated into the Elections Act.
    - 2.1.3. To encourage the efforts of the parties (% of candidates) and to support those that achieve results (% of persons elected).
  - 2.2. Parties should be required to establish their candidate lists according to democratic procedures involving their members and ensuring public transparency.

### **B. Institutional mechanisms encouraging the parties to submit nominations according to rules:**

3. In order to encourage the parties to submit nominations in line with society's composition and the principles:
  - 3.1. Targets for the parties to reach should be added to the nomination rules; these targets should be adapted to the two components of the compensatory mixed-member proportional model: electoral district seats and compensatory seats.
    - 3.1.3. The parties should not submit less than 40% or more than 60% of the same gender candidates:
      - For all electoral district nominations (balancing out the application of this rule across the territory).
      - For each of the provincial lists, used for compensation.
    - 3.1.4. The parties should submit a percentage of nominations of racialized persons:
      - For all their electoral district nominations (balancing out the application of this rule across the territory).
      - For each of their provincial lists, used for compensation.
      - The percentages to be reached would be established based on regional demographic data, and according to the accepted definitions.
    - 3.1.5. Specifically for the compensation seats:
      - Lists should be composed by alternating between the two genders for the entire list, ensuring that racialized persons are not found at the end of the list.

- Provincial lists should be closed, for their capacity to translate the intentions of society into concrete actions.
4. Failure to follow the list composition rules should result in a decrease in public funding as a penalty and a party's list should be rejected if it does not reach a certain threshold, for example based on the percentage of nominations submitted at the previous elections (terms and amounts to be defined).

**C. Institutional mechanisms supporting the parties that achieve results (% of women and racialized persons elected):**

5. In order to encourage the parties to support the election of women and [racialized] persons and to ensure public funds contribute to this objective:
  - 5.1. The reimbursement of party election expenses should be increased to account for the % of women and the % of racialized persons they get elected across Canada and across all seats; this increase would be graduated in order to account for the situation before the elections (for example, tiered, to reward an increase over the previous election) and the level of results achieved.
  - 5.2. The parties should present action plans on how to reach the targets set (reports to the Chief Electoral Officer), and they should be required to spend a portion of the public funds to execute those action plans, in particular in relation to the breakdown of their advertising budget (terms to be defined).
6. In order to maintain the diversification of the composition of Parliament between the elections:
  - 6.1. The situation at the time when a vacancy occurs (% of women and of racialized persons in office) should be taken into account to fill a vacant seat (terms to be defined).

**D. Institutional mechanisms that take into account the socio-economic inequalities and make it easier to hold political office:**

7. In order to ensure that women and racialized persons are encouraged to run for office:
  - 7.1. Election expense reimbursements granted to female candidates and racialized person candidates should be increased (terms and amounts to be defined).
8. In order for Parliament to adjust to the diversification of the political class, to the increase in political pluralism, and to changes in the boundaries of the electoral districts:
  - 8.1. The operating budgets of parliament members should be increased.
  - 8.2. Parliament should amend its practices and rules so they promote balance between political representation duties and family life or other obligations.

**E. The situation of Aboriginal peoples with respect to representation in Parliament**

9. In order to take into account the particular situation of Aboriginal people:
  - 9.1. The Government of Canada, speaking one nation to another, should invite the Aboriginal peoples to discuss this matter, in a process that is separate from the present consultation and timetable.
  - 9.2. If the Aboriginal peoples would like to establish institutional mechanisms to increase the election of Aboriginals, the government should be open to their requests.

## **Conclusion**

The content of this document is the product of an impressive collection of expertise. The diversity of the participants' work and activism backgrounds illustrates how much interest there is in questions of representation.

When the problems to be corrected are identified and documented, not building on the success achieved elsewhere would mean knowingly depriving ourselves of the benefits observed. It would be irresponsible to reform the electoral system without at the same time acting to diversify the composition of Parliament.

## Annex 1: Attendance and summary of the proceedings of the meeting of September 15, 2016

Although broadly speaking the people who participated in these discussions were delegated by the organizations with which they have an employment or activism connection, they were not formal representatives, because it was understood that the document filed would be a workshop summary and not a brief. The organizations appearing in this list are therefore not bound by the present document, since they did not have to adopt the suggestions developed during the workshop.

First Name	Last Name	Title and employment or activism connection
Janie	Beaupré Quenneville	Adviser on matters of women and work-life balance Syndicat des professionnelles et professionnels du gouvernement du Québec
Vanessa	Bevilacqua	Union adviser, socio-political sector Fédération interprofessionnelle de la santé du Québec
Willy	Blomme	Quebec Director Broadbent Institute
Line	Bonneau	Director Mouvement démocratie nouvelle
Luc	Bordeleau	Treasurer Mouvement démocratie nouvelle
Marie-Andrée	Gauthier	Coordinator Réseau des tables régionales de groupes de femmes du Québec
Lorraine	Guay	Citizen Former member of Collectif Féminisme et Démocratie
Élaine	Hémond	Gender and governance consultant Founder of Groupe Femmes, Politique et Démocratie and Officer of the Order of Quebec
Jean Claude Aimé	Kumuyange	Research assistant Observatoire québécois de la démocratie (UQAM)
Esther	Lapointe	Executive director Groupe Femmes, Politique et Démocratie
Émilie	Nicolas	President of Québec inclusive and member of the board of directors of the Fédération des femmes du Québec
Blanche	Paradis	Citizen Former member of Collectif Féminisme et Démocratie
Will	Prosper	Spokesperson Montréal-Nord Republik
Marie-Ève	Rancourt	Political adviser Fédération autonome de l'enseignement
Marie-Claude	Raynault	Secretary for the national executive board Alliance professionnelle et technique de la santé
Florence	Thomas	Union adviser, status of women Fédération interprofessionnelle de la santé du Québec



<b>First Name</b>	<b>Last Name</b>	<b>Role during the meeting</b>
Ariane	Émond	Moderator
Henry	Milner	Resource person Associate researcher for the Canada Research Chair in Electoral Studies, Department of Political Science of the University of Montreal
Mercédez	Roberge	Resource person Activist for voting system reform and diversification of the political class, member of the board of directors of the Fédération des femmes du Québec

### **Summary of the proceedings**

- Presentation of meeting objectives and proposed procedure
- Participants brought up to speed on key technical aspects of the two most frequently mentioned voting systems (compensatory mixed-member proportional and single transferable vote), in connection with the application of mechanisms
- Sharing of information on mechanism families used around the world
- Discussion in breakout groups followed by pooling of thoughts on the mechanisms worth considering for the Parliament of Canada
- Selection of mechanisms to suggest to the Committee and presentation strategies
- Validation of the meeting summary and conclusion

## **Annex 2: About the meeting organizers**

Founded in 1966, the *Fédération des femmes du Québec* (FFQ) has a long history of interest in political representation. Ever since 1971<sup>13</sup> it has frequently intervened to call for a reform of the electoral system that incorporates institutional mechanisms to correct the deficits of representation.

As an independent feminist organization, it works to transform and eliminate gender social issues and domination in all spheres of life. It fights for the emancipation of women and the affirmation of their right to full and free participation in social, cultural, political, and economic life. FFQ rejects any system and any practice of oppression and domination that generates and maintains violence, poverty, intolerance, discrimination, or exclusion.

**MercédeZ Roberge**, an indefatigable activist for voting system reform since 2001, chaired the Mouvement pour une démocratie nouvelle from 2003 to 2010, and received its "RÉFORMERA" award in 2014. She has coordinated awareness and engagement campaigns, produced a plethora of outreach documents, carried out research and given numerous presentations.

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<sup>13</sup> Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada (1971), Commission de représentation électorale (QC 1983), Commission of institutions (2002), États généraux sur la réforme des institutions démocratiques (2003), Commission spéciale sur la loi électorale sur l'avant-projet de loi (2004-2006).