



# North America

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## North American Regional President Attends IOI World Board Annual Meeting



It was an honour to attend the IOI World Board's annual meeting in Rabat, Morocco, from May 11–16. After a few challenging years for the IOI, I'm pleased to report that this gathering marked a return to the collegiality and shared purpose that have long defined our organization.



As always, we had a full agenda, beginning with an address from the IOI President. One of her key reflections resonated deeply: the need for constant vigilance in the protection and promotion of the Ombudsman institution.

In the face of growing threats to democratic systems, the role of the Ombudsman must not only be preserved, but actively reasserted. Around the world, democratic institutions—from the World Health Organization to national oversight bodies—are under attack. The post-truth era, accelerated by the Trump years, has seen rising hostility toward institutions that safeguard human rights and civil liberties. Tragically, Ombudsman personnel and human rights defenders are being threatened—and in some cases, killed—for doing their work. The scale of these challenges demands a united and strategic response.

The **UN Resolution** and the **Venice Principles** continue to serve as foundational references, reinforcing the systems that have provided democratic stability since the end of World War II. At the meeting, we discussed the IOI's responsibility to lead efforts to gather information and develop protective strategies to minimize the number of Ombudsman institutions at risk. Our broader goal must be to pre-empt such threats—by making it unmistakably clear to both governments and the public how vital the Ombudsman is to a healthy democracy.

I want to express my sincere thanks to Directors Diane Welborn and Nadine Mailloux for their assistance in representing the North American membership and the invaluable support they have provided me as President. It is a pleasure to collaborate with these exemplary Ombudsman practitioners.

## Membership Updates

The Board reviewed a large number of membership applications, including a non-voting membership application from Quebec's **National Student Ombudsman**, which I'm pleased to announce was approved.

## Regional Subsidies: Empowering Ombudsman Institutions Worldwide

The IOI is committed to strengthening Ombudsman institutions across the globe by continuing its regional subsidies program. Each region is eligible for up to €7,000 in funding, reflecting the IOI Board's dedication to sustaining this impactful initiative.

These subsidies provide direct and practical financial support, enabling IOI members to launch and expand projects that address pressing issues in their communities. The program not only empowers individual institutions but also fosters regional cooperation and capacity-building, creating a ripple effect of positive change.

A wide range of innovative and meaningful projects have already been supported. These include:

- Awareness campaigns on women's and children's rights
- Training programs on transparency, accountability, and good governance
- The creation of a "starter kit" for newly established Ombudsman offices
- Practical guidance on integrating a human rights-based approach in complaint handling
- Public information efforts aimed at combating human trafficking
- Tools for assessing the impact of Ombudsman investigations

These initiatives demonstrate the IOI's ongoing commitment to enhancing the reach, relevance, and effectiveness of its members.

In addition, the IOI has established a **Crisis Fund** to offer emergency financial assistance during times of instability or crisis, ensuring that Ombudsman institutions can continue their vital work even in challenging circumstances.

Through these targeted subsidies, the IOI not only invests in individual projects—it invests in justice, accountability, and human rights around the world.

## UN and International Relations Working Group

The **UN Working Group** was initially established to support the IOI's efforts to obtain permanent observer status at the United Nations. After considerable advocacy, including engagement with the Permanent Missions of Canada and the United States, we concluded that—given the current Security Council dynamics—this objective is not immediately achievable. As such, we are deferring this initiative for now.

However, our broader commitment to international collaboration remains unchanged. In fact, to reflect this expanded focus, we have renamed the body the **UN and International Cooperation Working Group**.

I have volunteered to draft an engagement paper that outlines the IOI's value proposition for international organizations such as the **UN** and **OECD**, positioning the IOI as a strategic partner in promoting good governance and the rule of law.

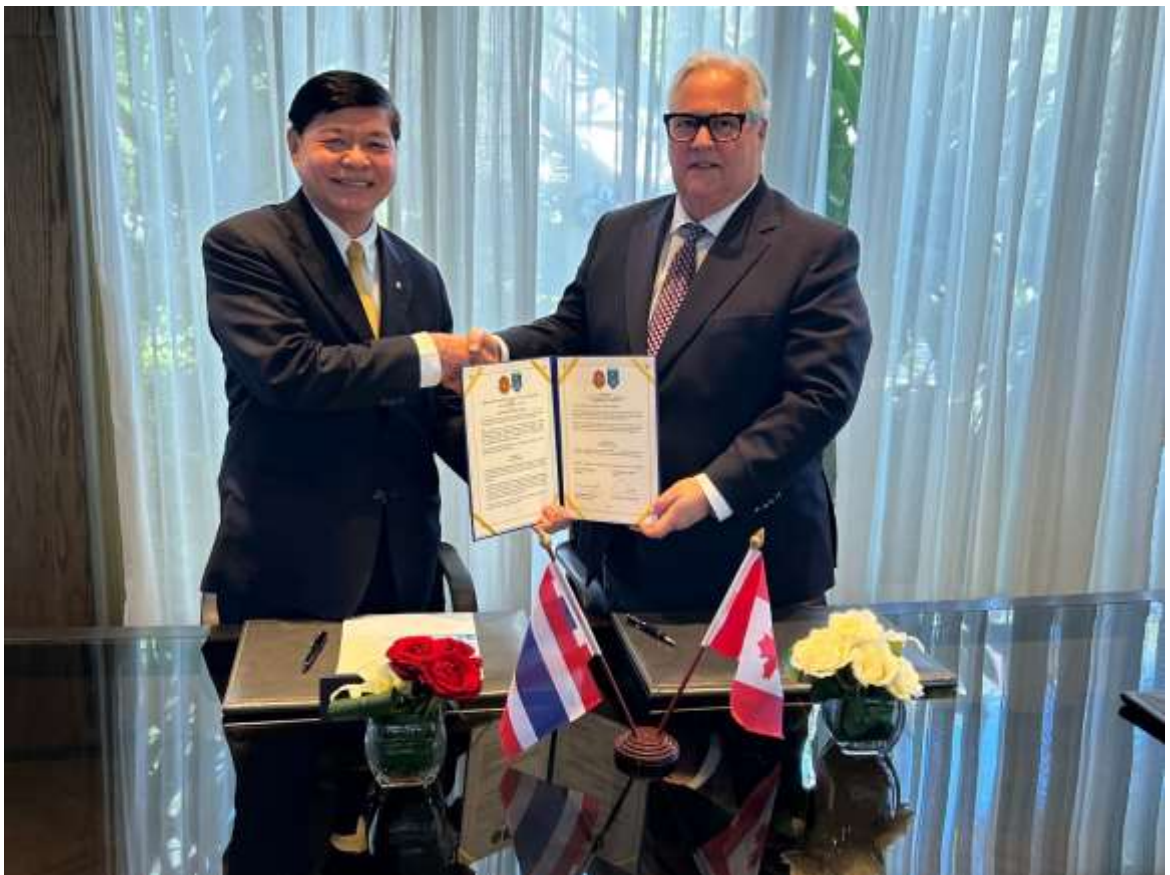
### **Ontario Ombudsman Signs MOUs with Global Partners**

As part of our office's 50th Anniversary campaign and our ongoing efforts to strengthen oversight institutions globally, I had the privilege of signing **Memoranda of Understanding** with my Ombudsman colleagues from **Thailand**, **Curaçao**, and the **Netherlands**.



These agreements will foster the exchange of knowledge, best practices, and strategies for promoting fairness, transparency, and accountability—while operating within the legal frameworks of our respective jurisdictions.





## Regional Report

One of my goals as Regional President has been to expand our North American membership. We came close to achieving our target of 20 members—just enough to secure an additional seat on the IOI World Board. Unfortunately, we have since experienced membership losses, bringing our total down to 12.



Despite this, I was proud to highlight the outstanding work being done by Ombudsman offices across North America. Though many of our member institutions are small, their contributions are substantial and inspiring. A detailed [Regional Report](#) is attached to this newsletter to spotlight the remarkable achievements of our colleagues.

## **Conclusion: A Call to Action**

At a time when democratic values and institutions are under strain globally, Ombudsman offices represent a critical safeguard for justice, accountability, and the protection of rights. Yet the value of our work is not always well understood by the public—or by the very governments we are mandated to oversee.

It is imperative that we shift from a defensive posture to a proactive one. We must seize every opportunity to educate, inform, and engage—showing clearly how the Ombudsman model strengthens democratic governance, protects individual freedoms, and builds trust in public institutions. We have a UN Resolution and the Venice Principles to assist us in this regard. All of us in the Ombudsman community must take the lead in this effort: by explaining our principles, sharing our stories, demonstrating our impact, and building alliances with civil society, international organizations, and governments. Our relevance is not automatic; it must be continuously asserted and earned.

Let us be bold in our advocacy, clear in our message, and united in our mission. The health of democracy depends on institutions like ours not just surviving—but thriving.



A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be 'Paul Dubé', written in a cursive style.

Paul Dubé, Ontario Ombudsman