



PARLIAMENT
OF AUSTRALIA

Australian Parliamentary Delegation

Geneva, Switzerland
23-27 March 2024

148th Assembly of the
Inter-Parliamentary Union

REPORT | MAY 2024



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Members of the Delegation

Leader of the Delegation

- Senator Deborah O'Neill
Senator for New South Wales
Australian Labor Party

Delegates

- Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds CSC
Senator for Western Australia
Liberal Party of Australia
- The Hon Warren Entsch MP
Federal Member for Leichhardt, Queensland
Liberal National Party of Queensland
- Mr Julian Hill MP
Federal Member for Bruce, Victoria
Australian Labor Party

Officials

- Dr Jane Thomson, Delegation Secretary

148th IPU Assembly – Geneva, Switzerland

The 148th Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Assembly took place in Geneva, Switzerland from 23 to 27 March 2024.

The overall theme of the Assembly was: *Building bridges for peace and understanding*.

The Assembly was attended by delegates from 142 Member Parliaments as well as 32 observers. This attendance compares favorably to the 147th Assembly where there were 128 Member Parliaments.

Of the 711 Members of Parliament (MPs) who attended the Assembly, 454 were male and 257 were women. Women comprised 36 per cent of MPs present at the Assembly while the 194 young MPs at the Assembly (below 45 years of age) comprised 27.8 per cent of all MPs. Delegates included 56 Presiding Officers and 49 Deputy Presiding Offices.

	145 th Assembly October 2022 Rwanda	146 th Assembly March 2023 Bahrain	147 th Assembly October 2023 Angola	148 th Assembly March 2024 Geneva
Total MPs	600	661	619	711
Total Women MPs	35%	34%	36.2%	36.1%
Total Young MPs	32%	22%	31.28%	27.8%

Attendance of women and young MPs at IPU Assemblies 2022-2024

In accordance with contemporary practice, the 148th Assembly was an in-person event with adaptations for hybrid participation. In addition, the proceedings of the inaugural ceremony, Forum of Women Parliamentarians, general debate and all sittings of the Governing Council were live streamed.

The Australian delegation was led by Senator Deborah O'Neill and included Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds CSC, the Hon Warren Entsch MP, and Mr Julian Hill MP.



Australian delegation to the 148th IPU Assembly in Geneva, Switzerland

Background

The IPU is an international organisation of national parliaments. The IPU promotes democratic governance, institutions and values, working with parliaments and parliamentarians to articulate and respond to the needs and aspirations of the people. It works for peace, democracy, human rights, gender equality, youth empowerment, climate action and sustainable development through political dialogue, cooperation and parliamentary action.

Founded in 1889, there are currently 180 parliaments that are Members of the IPU and 15 Associate Members (mostly parliaments drawn from groups of nations or similar bodies).¹ The Bahamas became the most recent IPU member.

The IPU Strategy for 2022-2026 lists five strategic objectives:

1. Building effective and empowered parliaments.
2. Promoting inclusive and representative parliaments.
3. Supporting resilient and innovative parliaments.
4. Catalysing collective parliamentary action.
5. Strengthening the IPU's accountability.²

The IPU Assembly is the principal statutory body of the IPU and brings together parliamentarians to consider international issues and make recommendations for action. In accordance with its mandate to promote democracy, the IPU hosts events throughout the year. The major focus for the Australian delegation in relation to the IPU is participation in the twice-yearly assemblies.

Assembly

The 148th Assembly was formally opened on 23 March 2024. The Assembly's agenda included the following business:

- General debate on the theme: *Parliamentary diplomacy: Building bridges for peace and understanding*.
- Resolution – Addressing the social and humanitarian impact of autonomous weapon systems and artificial intelligence.
- Resolution – Partnerships for climate action: Promoting access to affordable green energy, and ensuring innovation, responsibly and equity.
- Decisions regarding the Human Rights of Parliamentarians.
- Reports of the Standing Committees and IPU specialised meetings.

In her report to the 213th session of the Governing Council on 24 March, the IPU President, Dr Tulia Ackson indicated that her activities over the previous six months had focused on reinforcing peace and security through dialogue, reinforcing the IPU's visibility, and supporting the implementation of the IPU Strategy.

¹ Inter-Parliamentary Union, *About us*, <https://www.ipu.org/about-us> (accessed 10 November 2023).

² Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Strategy 2022-2026*, <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/about-ipu/2022-01/strategy-2022-2026> (accessed 10 November 2023).

IPU President Dr Tulia Ackson – Report on Activities

Reinforcing peace and security through dialogue

President's visit to the Middle East (Israel and Palestine) – November 2023

Meeting with Prime Minister of Palestine, H.E. Mohammad Shtayyeh, Minister of Detainees and Prisoners Affairs, Hon Qadura Fares, and the Speaker of the PLC, Rawhi Fattouh.

Meeting with the Speaker of the Knesset, Hon Amir Ohana and other leaders of the Israeli Government including the Hon Avi Dichter, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Reinforcing the IPU's visibility

Webinar: Preventing and responding to violence against women in Parliament – 22 November 2023

9th MIKTA Speaker's Consultation on Strengthening Multilateralism, Addressing Intergenerational Challenges – 20 November 2023, Bali, Indonesia

Antalya Diplomacy Forum – 1 to 3 March 2024, Antalya, Türkiye

Women Speakers' Summit – 6 to 7 March 2024, Paris, France

Supporting the implementation of the IPU Strategy

High-Level Segment of COP28 – 9 December 2023, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

2024 Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations - 8 to 9 February 2024, New York, USA

Annual IPU – UN Women Parliamentary Meeting at the 68th session of the Commission on the Status of Women – 12 to 15 March 2024, New York, USA

Debates at the Assembly and other activities

The two major debates in the Plenary – the general debate and the debate on the emergency item – are the key focus of Assembly business.

On 26 March, Senator O'Neill contributed to the general debate on behalf of the Australian delegation.³ In her contribution, Senator O'Neill reflected on the fact that the IPU was founded on the notion that dialogue is central to the peaceful resolution of conflict. She noted that the Australian Parliament actively promotes parliamentary dialogue and recognises the importance of creating the opportunity to exchange ideas, respect differences, and identify shared aspirations. As part of these efforts, Senator O'Neill indicated that in 2023, Australian parliamentarians made 28 outgoing delegation visits and welcomed 9 delegations from countries including Germany, Vanuatu, and Indonesia. In addition, Australia hosted the Conference of Speakers and Presiding Officers of the Commonwealth in January 2023 and remains an active member of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

³ Senator O'Neill's contribution to the General Debate can be found in full on the IPU website at: <https://www.ipu.org/event/148th-assembly-and-related-meetings#event-sub-page-documents/> (accessed 23 April 2024).

Senator O'Neill reflected on the fact that as a global community, we face many challenges including conflict, rising inequality, lack of economic opportunity and rapid technological change. She noted that in this context, the globalisation and digitalisation of the economy present significant challenges for the international tax system as corporations exploit differences and gaps in our domestic tax rules and international standards to avoid or significantly reduce paying taxation.

It is estimated that base erosion and profit shifting, or BEPS undertaken by multinational corporations deny the world economy approximately \$500 billion in revenue every year. Senator O'Neill emphasised that these tax avoidance practices are a concern for all of us because they not only undermine the efficiency and sustainability of our international tax system, but also significantly hamper progress to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

By denying States revenue for essential public services, including healthcare and education, these tax avoidance practices foster inequality and undermine public trust, thereby causing significant harm, particularly to society's most vulnerable. Senator O'Neill concluded that as legislators, members of the IPU can act together to tackle BEPS, hold multinationals accountable for their global tax practices, restore public trust in our tax system, and build a more resilient global economy for a sustainable future.



Senator O'Neill making her contribution to the General Debate on 26 March 2024

The [Geneva Declaration](#) on the topic of parliamentary diplomacy, peace and understanding was adopted by the Assembly on 27 March. In the declaration, the IPU notes that:

We are meeting at a time of great turbulence and instability. From the resurgence of conflicts and geopolitical tensions, the increase in social polarization and a looming new global arms race, to the devastating impacts of climate change and the dangers posed by artificial intelligence – the multi-faceted and intractable challenges we face underscore the urgency for a collective, forward-looking and durable response that learns from the past and goes beyond conventional solutions. As we navigate this intricate landscape, it becomes increasingly evident that addressing these complex challenges demands a shared global commitment to building a resilient foundation for lasting peace, rooted in the upholding of human rights and democratic principles.⁴

⁴ Geneva Declaration – Parliamentary diplomacy: Building bridges for peace and understanding, <https://www.ipu.org/file/18873/download> (accessed 23 April 2024).

Special Accountability Segment of the General Debate

The IPU held a special accountability segment of the General Debate on 26 March. The purpose of the special segment is to consider good practices and actions that have been undertaken in response to IPU decisions in the areas of parliamentary solidarity to defend the human rights of parliamentarians, parliamentary engagement to promote inclusive societies, and parliamentary action to tackle climate change.

In her contribution to the session, Senator O'Neill focused on parliamentary action to tackle climate change. She stated that Australia recognises climate change as the greatest shared threat to our geographical region and is committed to working with Pacific Island neighbours and Southeast Asian partners to strengthen climate resilience and fulfil Australia's Paris Agreement obligations. Drawing on the most recent bilateral agreement on climate mobility, the Australia-Tuvalu Falepili Union Treaty, Senator O'Neill also drew attention to Australia's climate finance which supports countries on our region to adapt to the increasing impacts of climate change.



Senator O'Neill contributing to the special segment of the General Debate on 26 March 2024

Emergency Item

The IPU rules provide that any member country may propose a topic as an emergency item to be debated during an Assembly. The matter must relate to a major event of international concern on which it appears necessary for the IPU to express its opinion. The request must receive a two-thirds majority of the votes cast to be accepted for debate.

During the Assembly, the following six proposals were submitted for consideration as an emergency item:

- Raising awareness of the International Court of Justice provisional measures for Israel, in relation to Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, and urgent action on the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, proposed by South Africa with the support of the Arab Group and the African Group.
- The immediate release of hostages from Gaza, proposed by Israel.
- Parliamentary diplomacy for peace in Palestine, proposed by Indonesia and Malaysia.
- Free, fair and transparent elections without prohibitions: Towards an orderly and peaceful democratic transition in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, proposed by

Argentina on behalf of the delegations of Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay.

- Call for urgent action regarding the conflict in the Middle East, proposed by Denmark, France, Hungary, Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom.
- Call for urgent action to end the aggression and massive violations of human rights in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, proposed by the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

When the emergency items were considered, three were withdrawn. The IPU conducted a roll-call vote in relation to the three remaining proposals from South Africa, Denmark and Argentina respectively. The proposals from South Africa and Denmark both addressed the situation in Gaza.

For the second time in IPU history, no proposal achieved the required two-thirds majority and the IPU was not able to proceed with an emergency item. The first time in the IPU's history that a proposed emergency item didn't receive the required two-thirds vote took place at the previous 147th IPU Assembly in Angola.

On 27 March and in lieu of an emergency item, IPU President, Dr Akson and IPU Secretary General, Mr Chungong issued a statement on the situation in Gaza on behalf of the global parliamentary community.⁵ In the statement, the IPU leadership called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages, expansion in the flow of essential humanitarian aid to Gaza, and respect for international humanitarian law.

Governing Council

The Governing Council is the administrative and policy making body of the IPU and ordinarily meets during the twice-yearly assemblies.

During the Assembly, the Governing Council met twice on 24 and 27 March. The IPU President, Dr Akson opened the meeting on 24 March and provided an overview of her activities since her appointment as President at the previous Assembly in October 2023.

In his impact report to the Governing Council, IPU Secretary General, Mr Martin Chungong drew attention to the Impact Report 2023 which provides an overview of the IPU's activities and events over the year.

Mr Chungong presented on the IPU's activities in line with its four strategic objectives including the Interfaith Dialogue which took place in Marrakesh, Morocco (Objective 4). He drew attention to the policy on harassment, including sexual harassment adopted at the previous assembly, noting that two IPU secretariat staff had been appointed to lead the policy implementation process.

In relation to communications and outreach, the IPU database of parliamentarians now contains close to 22,000 contacts, which is a significant increase from last year's number of 12,000 contacts.

⁵ IPU Leadership Statement on the situation in Gaza, 27 March 2024, <https://www.ipu.org/event/148th-assembly-and-related-meetings#event-sub-page-documents/> (accessed 23 April 2024).

IPU regional offices – Uruguay and Egypt

In June 2023, the IPU and Government of Uruguay signed an agreement to establish an IPU Regional Office in Montevideo. In accordance with the agreement, the IPU is granted the status of an international organisation in Uruguay, entitled to related privileges and immunities. The signing of this agreement completes the first step of the establishment of a regional office in the Group of Latin America and the Caribbean (GRULAC) region. The regional office in Uruguay will be the first such office for the IPU. Negotiations are underway regarding the location of the office.

In relation to the proposed second regional office in Egypt, exchanges have taken place between the IPU and Egyptian Government and negotiations are ongoing between the two parties regarding recognition of the IPU as an international organisation with the related privileges and immunities.

149th Assembly and beyond

The Governing Council approved the dates for the 149th IPU Assembly which will take place on 13 to 17 October 2024 in Geneva, Switzerland.

The 150th IPU Assembly is set to take place from 5 to 9 April 2025 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.



Australian delegation at the Governing Council meeting on 24 March 2024

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee oversees the administration of the IPU and makes recommendations to the Governing Council, assesses candidates for the position of Secretary General and propose the IPU's annual work program and budget.

At the 147th IPU Assembly, the Hon Milton Dick MP, Speaker of the House of Representatives was endorsed as the Asia-Pacific Group candidate for a position on the IPU Executive Committee for a period of four years (until October 2027).

During the 148th IPU Assembly in Geneva, Senator O'Neill as Delegation Leader represented Mr Speaker at the Executive Committee in his absence as a 'substitute' member. The Executive Committee held its meeting on Friday, 22 March in two sessions.

In his capacity as Speaker of the House of Representatives and member of the Executive Committee, Mr Speaker was appointed to the Preparatory Committee for the Sixth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament. The conference is set to take place in the second half of 2025 in Geneva.



Senator O'Neill addressing the Executive Committee on behalf of Mr Speaker on 22 March 2024

Meeting of geopolitical groups

Most IPU members are affiliated with one or more of the six geopolitical groups that are currently active in the IPU:

- Africa Group – comprising 52 members.
- Arab Group – comprising 20 members.
- Asia-Pacific Group – comprising 36 members.
- Eurasia Group – comprising 10 members.
- Group of Latin America and the Caribbean – comprising 26 members.
- Twelve Plus Group – comprising 47 members.⁶

The geopolitical groups meet immediately prior to and during assemblies to consider IPU agenda items and, where possible, agree a group position. Candidates for positions on IPU committees are also considered and submitted through geopolitical groups.

Most member countries are members of at least one geopolitical group. Australia is a member of two geopolitical groups – the Asia-Pacific Group and the Twelve Plus Group.⁷

⁶ About the IPU, *Geopolitical Groups*, <https://www.ipu.org/about-ipu/members/geopolitical-groups> (accessed 10 November 2023).

⁷ The IPU Statutes stipulate that members that belong to more than one geopolitical group should indicate which geopolitical group they represent for the purposes of submitting candidatures for positions within the IPU. Australia usually exercises these rights through the Asia-Pacific Group.

Asia-Pacific Group

Australia chaired the Asia-Pacific Group (APG) in 2023 and handed over the role to Bangladesh for 2024.

The APG met on Saturday, 23 March 2024 and was chaired by the Hon Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, Speaker of the Bangladesh Parliament.

During the meeting, Senator O'Neill provided a briefing on the IPU Executive Committee on behalf of Mr Speaker. She updated the forum on the Executive Committee meetings held in January and March 2024. During her presentation, Senator O'Neill brought attention to the activities of Mr Speaker in relation to advancing the APG and prospect of an IPU activity in the Asia-Pacific region.

The APG also considered a report of the ASEAN+3 Group meeting and endorsed a candidate from Thailand for a position on the Committee for the Respect for International Humanitarian Law.

The forum considered a draft emergency item proposed jointly by Indonesia and Malaysia and appointing representatives on the emergency item drafting committee.

The IPU President, Dr Akson attended the meeting and provided an update on her activities.

Twelve Plus Group

The Twelve Plus Group met on four occasions during the Assembly.⁸ During its meetings, the group considered the draft resolutions before the Assembly and endorsed candidates to fill Twelve Plus Group vacancies on various IPU committees and other bodies.

At its first meeting on Friday 22 March, Senator O'Neill presented a draft proposal for a resolution regarding a fairer global financial system. The proposed resolution, for the consideration of the Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, seeks to address the issue of tax base erosion and profit sharing (BEPS) by Multinational Enterprises (MNEs). In her presentation, Senator O'Neill made the point that such tax avoidance practices erode the corporate tax base, and by doing so, BEPS disproportionately impact developing nations, leading to critical underfunding of public services and investment.

At the same meeting on 22 March, IPU President, Dr Akson addressed the forum and responded to matters raised from the floor. Questions were raised to the President regarding the prospect of a permanent IPU group focused on people with disabilities as proposed by Türkiye and a permanent group focused on LGBTQI+ as proposed by Malta.

The 12 Plus Group also considered proposals for an emergency item. Senator O'Neil and Mr Hill MP contributed to the discussion.

⁸ The Twelve Plus Group met on 22 March, 24 March, 25 and 26 March 2024.



Mr Hill MP contributing to the discussion at the 12 Plus Group meeting on 22 March 2024

Forum of Women Parliamentarians

The Forum of Women Parliamentarians met twice during the Assembly, on 23 March. The Bureau of Women Parliamentarians, of which Senator Reynolds is a member, also met twice during the Assembly on 23 March.

At its meetings, the Forum of Women considered, from a gender perspective, the proposed resolution on *Addressing the social and humanitarian impact of autonomous weapons systems and artificial intelligence*, advanced through the Standing Committee on Peace and International Security.

At the Assembly, Senator Reynolds served as the Rapporteur of the Forum of Women. During the debate in the Forum of Women regarding the proposed resolution, 21 delegates shared their views. In her capacity as Rapporteur, Senator Reynolds presented the Forum of Women's views regarding the resolution from a gender perspective and proposed two amendments to the resolution.



Senator Reynolds as Rapporteur reporting on the Forum of Women debate on 23 March 2024

At the 148th Assembly, the Governing Council endorsed the Executive Committee's recommendation that the Forum of Women hold an annual meeting akin to the annual conference for young parliamentarians.⁹ The IPU Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians provides an opportunity for young MPs to meet over two days to identify common challenges and innovative strategies to advance youth engagement. Set to begin in 2025, the Forum of Women will hold a two-day conference each year to address gender equality issues and complement its work during assemblies.

Standing Committees

In accordance with the IPU 2022-2026 Strategy adopted by the IPU Governing Council, the Standing Committees of the IPU agreed to focus their work on specific focus areas. These focus areas provide a guide when setting the agenda and workplan for the Standing Committees.

Standing Committee	Focus areas
Standing Committee on Peace and International Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. • Violent conflict prevention, crisis response and sustainable peace. • Improving multilateral management of peace and security challenges.
Standing Committee on Sustainable Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change. • Sustainable development.
Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements in the functioning of parliaments. • Democracy and human rights in the digital era. • A more inclusive, fairer world.

The Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs sets its agenda through a different process and adopts short motions and engages in campaigns.

Standing Committee on Peace and International Security

The Standing Committee on Peace and International Security met twice on 24 March and once on 25 March and 26 March respectively. During its meetings, the committee debated the draft resolution, *Addressing the social and humanitarian impact of autonomous weapon systems and artificial intelligence* and 28 pages of proposed amendments to it.

⁹ The Tenth IPU Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians is due to take place in September 2024 in Yerevan, Armenia.



Mr Hill MP contributing to the Standing Committee on Peace and International Security debate on the draft resolution on 25 March 2024

Standing Committee on Sustainable Development

The Standing Committee on Sustainable Development met on three occasions during the Assembly from 24 to 26 March 2024. During its meetings, the committee considered and adopted a draft resolution on *Partnerships for climate action: Promoting access to affordable green energy, and ensuring innovation, responsibility and equity*.

On 25 March, Senator O'Neill was invited to address the closed meeting of the Bureau of the Standing Committee on Sustainable Development to present her draft proposal for a resolution regarding tax avoidance on behalf of the Australian delegation. The Bureau agreed to hold a panel discussion on the topic of tax avoidance at its next meeting at the 149th IPU Assembly in October 2024. The panel discussion will be informed by the proposal presented by Senator O'Neill who has been invited to serve as moderator for the purposes of the discussion.

Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights

The Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights met twice during the Assembly. On 24 March, the committee met to debate a draft resolution for adoption at the 149th IPU Assembly on, *The impact of artificial intelligence on democracy, human rights and the rule of law*.

On 26 March, the committee held a panel discussion on the topic of *Sustainable actions to improve the life conditions of people with disabilities, including their chances for education and work opportunities*.

Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs

The Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs met twice on 26 March and adopted a motion regarding reform of the United Nations Security Council.¹⁰ In the motion, the committee

¹⁰ Reform of the United Nations Security Council, Motion adopted by the IPU Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs, 26 March 2024, <https://www.ipu.org/file/18879/download> (accessed 23 April 2024).

acknowledged the 'diminishing trust in the UN multilateral system' and noted that reform of the Security Council has been on the agenda for decades. The committee's motion continued:

Without effective Security Council reform, the Committee believes that the overall effort to make the multilateral system more democratic and accountable to the people will be severely hampered. The Committee looks to this year's Summit of the Future as an opportunity to demonstrate meaningful progress in order to restore trust and faith in multilateralism when global cooperation is most needed.

As part of the motion, the committee called on IPU Member Parliaments to engage with their government leadership and demand that reform of the Security Council be undertaken with an eye to the Summit of the Future in September 2024 as a turning point.

Other committees and activities

In addition to the Forum of Women Parliamentarians and the four standing committees, several other subsidiary bodies of the IPU met during the Assembly, including:

- Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law
- Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians
- Working Group on Better Implementation of IPU Resolutions
- Forum of Young Parliamentarians of the IPU
- Committee on the Middle East Question
- Gender Partnership Group
- Advisory Group on Health
- Group of Facilitators for Cyprus
- High-Level Advisory Group on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism
- Working Group on amendments to IPU Statutes and Rules

In addition, the following activities were held during the 148th Assembly:

- Roundtable – From Luanda to the UN Summit of the Future: Addressing strategic and existential threats through common security and the rule of law. Organised by the IPU in cooperation with Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (PNND) and the World Future Council.
- High level meeting on the crisis of multilateralism: Root causes and possible solutions.
- Workshop on strengthening climate legislation: Practical tools for parliamentarians.
- Panel discussion on interfaith dialogue: Building bridges through interfaith dialogue for more peaceful and inclusive societies.
- Workshop on Human Security: Equipping parliamentarians for peacebuilding and conflict resolution.
- Workshop on artificial intelligence organised by the IPU in cooperation with UNESCO and the Internet Governance Forum.
- Event on the protection of minorities jointly organised by the IPU and UNOCHA.
- Panel discussion on climate change and conflict: How can parliamentarians ensure health during times of crisis?

Members of the Australian delegation attend these events and activities where possible.

During this Assembly, Mr Hill MP attended and contributed to the event on the protection of minorities jointly organised by the IPU and UNOCHA.

Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law

The Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law (IHL) met on 26 March and considered recent developments regarding specific IHL and refugee crisis situations. It paid particular attention to recent developments regarding refugees and displaced persons from and in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Sudan.



Senator O'Neill chairing the Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law meeting on 24 March 2024

In relation to Afghanistan, the committee was informed that 23.7 million people need urgent humanitarian assistance to survive. As of 30 June 2023, over 1.5 million Afghan refugees had been displaced to neighbouring countries since the Taliban takeover and 3.25 million had been internally displaced. The committee was particularly concerned about the plight of Afghan parliamentarians of whom 38 former members of the Afghan Parliament, as well as 12 parliamentary staff and their families, remain in danger in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries. The committee called on IPU Member Parliaments to consider providing refuge to those colleagues.

The committee acknowledged that the situation in the DRC had deteriorated since January 2024 with armed clashes across the country, leaving 6.1 million people internally displaced in addition to over 500,000 refugees and asylum-seekers fleeing to neighbouring countries.

The committee also noted that the situation in Sudan was now dire, especially since April 2023 when armed conflict had broken out. The conflict has now displaced nearly 6 million people within Sudan and driven 1.4 million to five neighbouring countries. Half of Sudan's population now requires humanitarian aid and protection.

Serving as Rapporteur of the IHL committee, Senator O'Neill provided a report on the committee's activities to the Governing Council on 27 March 2024.



Senator O'Neill as Rapporteur of the Committee on Respect for International Humanitarian Law reporting to the Governing Council on 27 March 2024

Committee on the Human Right of Parliamentarians

In 1976, the IPU set up a procedure for the treatment of complaints regarding human rights violations of parliamentarians and entrusted the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians with implementing this procedure.

The committee seeks to protect and defend MPs who face abuse, mistreatment and even death by holding hearings, undertaking missions, and sending trial observers. In its report to the Governing Council on 27 March, the committee raised human rights concerns in relation to 268 parliamentarians in 14 countries including 68 parliamentarians in Türkiye, 136 parliamentarians in Venezuela and 41 parliamentarians in Zimbabwe.

The IPU Governing Council [adopted](#) decisions in relation to the cases brought to its attention by the committee from Africa (Egypt, Eswatini, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Somalia and Zimbabwe), Israel and Israel/Palestine, Türkiye, Kyrgyzstan, Venezuela as well as Bangladesh, Pakistan and the Philippines.

Multilateral and bilateral meetings

A significant benefit of attending the IPU Assembly is the opportunity for Australian parliamentarians to meet their international colleagues in both formal and informal settings. By assembling representatives from such a large number and diverse range of parliaments in one place, the IPU offers a unique opportunity for delegations as well as individual parliamentarians to discuss issues of mutual interest, to develop an understanding of different parliamentary models, share best practice and to strengthen parliament-to-parliament relationships.



Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds CSC with Rt Hon Dame Karen Bradley, UK Delegation Leader

The opportunities for informal discussions are complemented by multilateral and bilateral meetings. During the 148th Assembly, the Australian delegation held a multilateral meeting with the following Pacific Islander and neighbouring country delegations:

- Fiji led by the Hon Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu, Speaker of the Parliament.
- New Zealand led by Mr Stuart Smith MP, Delegation Leader and Chairperson of the New Zealand IPU Group.
- Timor-Leste, led by Ms Veneranda Lemos, President of the IPU Group of the National Parliament of Timor-Leste.
- Tonga led by Lord Fatafehi Fakafanua, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.



Multilateral meeting with Fiji, New Zealand, Timor-Leste and Tonga on 24 March 2024

The Australian delegation also held bilateral meetings with parliamentary delegations of Thailand, Ukraine, Viet Nam, Timor-Leste, Nigeria, Indonesia and Afghanistan.



Bilateral meeting with Indonesian delegation on 25 March 2024

In addition, the delegation held meetings with organisations including the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and the World Health Organisation.

Other functions

On 22 March, Senator O'Neill attended a dinner of the Executive Committee members hosted by the IPU Secretary General. The same evening, the rest of the delegation attended a reception hosted by the Twelve Plus Group.

On 22 March, the delegation held a dinner with the New Zealand delegation and on 23 March, the delegation attended a reception offered by the Switzerland delegation.

On 25 March, the delegation attended a reception hosted by Ambassador Gorely, Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations and to the Conference on Disarmament, Geneva at her residence.

Each of these gatherings and events provided further opportunities for the Australian delegation to continue discussions with a wide range of parliamentary colleagues.



Acknowledgements and concluding remarks

The Australian delegation was extremely active during the 148th Assembly and acknowledges the valuable support provided to it during this time.

The delegation acknowledges and thanks Ambassador Amanda Gorley, Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations and to the Conference of Disarmament, Geneva for her support to the delegation, including hosting the delegation at her residence.

The delegation also thanks Ambassador Emily Roper, Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations and staff of the Australian Permanent Mission in Geneva. Mr David Hevey, First Secretary – Cyber and Digital Affairs provided ongoing support and invaluable assistance to the delegation during the Assembly. The delegation also appreciates the logistical support provided by Ms Josette Annoni and other staff of the permanent mission in Geneva.

The delegation also wishes to acknowledge the work of Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) staff in Canberra who provided background briefing materials, including Ms Sheree Mineham and Ms Victoria Fitzgerald who coordinated the provision of the materials. The materials were invaluable to the delegation.

The Parliamentary Library also provided briefing materials to the delegation which were extremely helpful and informative. The delegation acknowledges the work of Mr Jerome Gavin and his colleagues at the Parliamentary Library for providing this material and thanks them for it.

The delegation appreciates the assistance and support of the International and Parliamentary Relations Office (IPRO). Ms Renae Onitiri arranged travel and accommodation for the delegation. The delegation thanks her and IPRO for its support.

Finally, the delegation would like to acknowledge the efforts of the delegation secretary, Dr Jane Thomson who accompanied the delegation to support its work.

Senator Deborah O'Neill

Delegation Leader