



Parliament of Australia

Parliamentary Delegation

to

137th Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly

St Petersburg, Russian Federation

14–18 October 2017

Commonwealth of Australia 2017

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Members of the Delegation

Leader of the Delegation

Senator the Hon Ian Macdonald
Senator for Queensland
Liberal Party of Australia

Delegates

Senator Chris Ketter
Senator for Queensland
Australian Labor Party

Mr Josh Wilson MP
Member for Fremantle (WA)
Australian Labor Party

Official

Ms Toni Matulick
Delegation Secretary

137th IPU Assembly – St Petersburg

The 137th Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Assembly took place in St Petersburg, the Russian Federation, from 14 to 18 October 2017. The Assembly was attended by 829 parliamentarians from 155 member countries including 146 presiding or deputy presiding officers. A number of observers also attended.

The Australian Parliament's delegation to the Assembly was led by Senator the Hon Ian Macdonald, and included Senator Chris Ketter and Mr Josh Wilson MP.



Senator Chris Ketter, Senator the Hon Ian Macdonald and Mr Josh Wilson MP

Background

The IPU is the international organisation of parliaments of sovereign states. It works with parliaments to promote democratic governance, institutions and values and aims to improve people's lives by building strong national parliaments that can deliver on issues like health, sustainable development, peace and security. It does this by:

- equipping members of parliament and parliaments to drive change
- building on the expertise of its members
- encouraging dialogue and bringing together members of parliament from across the world

- considering questions of international interest and concern.

There are currently 178 parliaments that are members of the IPU and 12 associate members (mostly parliaments drawn from groups of nations, or similar bodies).¹ More than 6.5 billion of the world's 7 billion people live in states whose parliaments are members of the IPU. The 137th Assembly welcomed four new members—Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Vanuatu, and the Marshall Islands. Most IPU members are affiliated with one of six geopolitical groups that are currently active in the IPU.

The IPU Strategy for 2017-2021, drafted under the guidance of IPU member parliaments, lists eight objectives:

- build strong, democratic parliaments
- advance gender equality and respect for women's rights
- protect and promote human rights
- contribute to peace building, conflict prevention and security
- promote inter-parliamentary dialogue and cooperation
- promote youth empowerment
- mobilize parliaments around the global development agenda
- bridge the democracy gap in international relations.

The Australian Parliament plays an active role in supporting a number of these objectives in partnership with the IPU, particularly in the Asia Pacific region.

While the IPU is constantly active in promoting democracy, the major focus for the Australian delegation is participation in the twice-yearly IPU Assemblies.

1 A list of current members of the IPU is available on the IPU website: <https://www.ipu.org/about-us/members>.

The IPU Assembly is the principal statutory body of the IPU. It meets bi-annually to bring together parliamentarians to study international problems and make recommendations for action. The assemblies include debates on significant international issues, the regular meeting of the IPU Governing Council, and meetings of specialist committees, working groups and geopolitical groups.



The 137th Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly

Assembly

The 137th Assembly was formally opened on Saturday, 14th October 2017 (though some meetings were held in the three days prior). The Assembly agenda addressed the following items:

- Election of the President and Vice-Presidents of the 137th Assembly
- Consideration of emergency items for inclusion in the agenda
- General Debate—*Promoting cultural pluralism and peace through inter-faith and inter-ethnic dialogue*
- Resolution: *Sharing our diversity: The 20th anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Democracy*
- Reports of the Standing Committees on Peace and International Security; Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade; and United Nations Affairs
- Approval of the subject item for the Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights at the 139th IPU Assembly

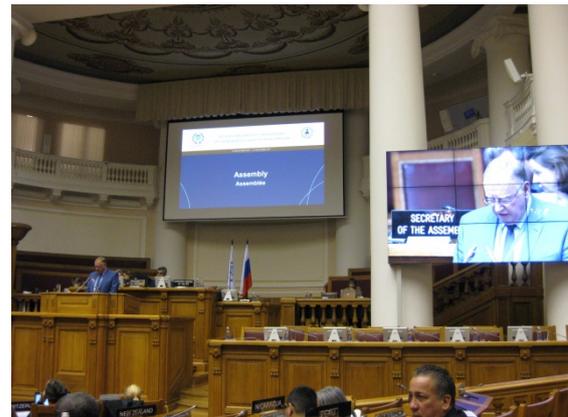
- Election of a new President of the IPU for a three year term ending October 2020.

Debates in the Assembly and other activities

A key focus of Assembly business is two major debates in the plenary—the general debate, and the debate on an emergency item.

The General Debate

The topic of the general debate was *promoting cultural pluralism and peace through inter-faith and inter-ethnic dialogue*. Senator Macdonald and Senator Ketter both made a contribution to this debate and highlighted the role that cultural pluralism plays in building strong and cohesive societies.²



Senator the Hon Ian Macdonald speaking during the general debate

Emergency Item

The IPU Rules provide that any member country may propose a topic for inclusion as an emergency item to be debated. The matter must:

...relate to a major event of international concern on which it appears necessary for the IPU to express its opinion. Such a request must receive a two thirds majority

2 The Australian delegation's contribution to the general debate is published online: <http://archive.ipu.org/conf-e/137/speeches/spklist.htm>.

of the votes cast in order to be accepted [for debate].³

On 15 October 2017, the President informed the Assembly that eight requests for the inclusion of an emergency item had been confirmed out of a total of 18 initially submitted. Many of those original proposals had been merged with others or subsequently withdrawn. Before the vote, the delegations of Morocco, Indonesia, United Arab Emirates, Bangladesh, Kuwait, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Sudan and Turkey decided to merge their individual proposals regarding the situation of the Rohingya people in Myanmar into one item. The delegations of Mexico and Japan also decided to merge their individual items on the nuclear tests conducted by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The eight proposals were as follows:

- The involvement and active commitment of parliaments in maintaining international security and peace through support for a political solution (Djibouti)
- The role of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in addressing the breakdown of the constitutional order and the disregard for the National Assembly in Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela)
- Promoting spaces for the establishment of a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration (Plurinational State of Bolivia)
- The role of parliaments in countering the growing threat of terrorism (India)
- Threats to peace and international security arising from nuclear tests conducted by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (Mexico and Japan)
- Ending the grave human crisis, persecution and violent attacks on the

Rohingya as a threat to international peace and security and ensuring their unconditional and safe return to their homeland in Myanmar (Morocco, Indonesia, United Arab Emirates, Bangladesh, Kuwait, Iran, Sudan and Turkey)

- The Inter-Parliamentary Union supports the Parliament of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, threatened in its functions, powers and existence (Chile)
- Humanitarian situation in Rakhine State (Myanmar).

As the delegations of Bolivia, Venezuela, Chile, Djibouti and India withdrew their proposals the Assembly proceeded with a roll-call vote on the remaining three items from Mexico and Japan; Morocco, Indonesia, United Arab Emirates, Bangladesh, Kuwait, Iran, Sudan and Turkey; and Myanmar.

The merged proposal on the Rohingya people received the highest number of votes, and was therefore adopted and added to the agenda for debate. Following debate, the emergency item was referred to a drafting committee. Senator Macdonald was appointed to the drafting committee as a representative of the Twelve Plus Group, and the final resolution was adopted by the Assembly by consensus.

Election of the IPU President

At its sitting on 18 October, after a single round of voting by secret ballot, the Governing Council elected Ms Gabriela Cuevas Barron from Mexico as its President for a three-year term ending in October 2020.

Meetings of geopolitical groups

The IPU has six geopolitical groups that meet immediately prior to and during the Assembly to consider IPU agenda items and, where possible, agree a group position. Candidatures for positions on IPU committees are also considered and submitted through the geopolitical groups.

3 Assembly Rule 11-2(a).

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.⁴

Asia Pacific Group⁵

The Asia Pacific Group met once during the Assembly and received a report from the ASEAN +3 Group as well as a briefing by the executive committee members. The meeting considered nominations for vacancies to be filled during the 137th Assembly.

Twelve Plus Group⁶

The Twelve Plus Group met four times during the Assembly. The group considered reports from the standing committees, discussed positions on debating topics and considered nominations for vacancies to be filled during the Assembly. Mr Wilson acted as a teller for one of the election processes, and Senator Ketter as a scrutineer.



Mr Josh Wilson MP and Senator Chris Ketter during a meeting of the Twelve Plus Group

4 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 its voting rights through the Asia Pacific Group.

5 The membership of the Asia Pacific Group is available on the IPU website: <http://www.ipu.org/strct-e/geopol.htm>.

6 The membership of the Twelve Plus Group is available on the IPU website: <http://www.ipu.org/strct-e/geopol.htm>.

Forum of Women Parliamentarians

The 26th session of the Forum of Women Parliamentarians took place on 14 October 2017. It brought together 114 delegates from 74 countries and representatives of various international organisations. The Forum also conducted a panel discussion: *Marking the fifth anniversary of the Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments*.

Participants shared their experiences on measures taken by their parliaments to implement the Plan of Action for Gender-Sensitive Parliaments and discussed a number of other reforms.

Standing Committees

There are four standing committees of the IPU. A summary of their activities is below.

Standing Committee on Peace and International Security

The Standing Committee on Peace and International Security held two sittings on 17 and 18 October 2017. On 17 October the committee examined two items through back to back panels on the role of parliament in monitoring the action of national armed forces participating in UN peacekeeping operations, and on the implementation of a previous resolution on cyber warfare. On 18 October, the committee held an expert hearing on sustaining peace as a vehicle for achieving sustainable development, the topic of a resolution that was expected to be adopted by the 138th IPU Assembly in Geneva. The hearing opened with the statements of three experts from the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces.

Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade

The Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade held its sittings on 16 and 17 October. The committee

discussed the draft outcome document of the Parliamentary Meeting at the UN Climate Change Conference in Bonn, due to take place on 12 November 2017.

The committee also debated the subject item of the next resolution: *Engaging the private sector in implementing the SDGs, especially on renewable energy*. The committee also held a panel discussion entitled *Using science and research to achieve the highest health standards*. A panel of experts introduced the theme and triggered a discussion around the place of scientific evidence in the political arena.

Mr Wilson participated in meetings of the Bureau of the Standing Committee, in place of Mrs Nola Marino MP who is a member of the Bureau but who was unable to attend the Assembly.

Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights

The committee held sittings on 15, 16 and 17 October 2017 and considered and made amendments to the draft resolution: *Sharing our diversity: The 20th anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Democracy*.

The committee endorsed the subject item proposed by Morocco for debate at the 138th Assembly: *Strengthening inter-parliamentary cooperation on migration and migration governance in view of the adoption of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration*. It is intended that the resolution will be finalised at the 139th Assembly in October 2018.

Agreement was also reached to hold a panel discussion at the next Assembly on: *the role of parliaments in ending discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and ensuring respect for the human rights of LGBTI*.

Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs

The Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs held its main sitting on 15 October 2017. It consisted of two interactive debates moderated by the President of the Committee, Mr. A. Avsan of Sweden. The first debate took stock of the relationship between the IPU and the United Nations over the past 20 years and assessed the extent to which the original vision of a 'parliamentary dimension' to the work of the United Nations had been realised. The second debate focused on the question of the relevance of the UN General Assembly in today's system of international governance.

Other meetings

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

- Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians
- Committee on Middle East Questions
- Group of Facilitators for Cyprus
- Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law
- Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law
- Advisory Group on Health
- Forum of Young Parliamentarians of the IPU.



Senator Chris Ketter, Senator the Hon Ian Macdonald and Mr Josh Wilson MP meeting with delegates from the Republic of Belarus

The IPU Assembly offers the Australian delegation the unique opportunity to meet informally with other parliamentarians to discuss and share information about issues of mutual interest, and build on parliament-to-parliament relationships. Bilateral and multilateral meetings complement this opportunity. During the 137th Assembly in St Petersburg, bilateral meetings were held with delegations from the Republic of Belarus, Singapore, Israel and the Islamic Republic of Iran. In addition, the Australian delegation met informally with delegates from Pacific nations.



Senator Chris Ketter, Mr Josh Wilson MP and Senator the Hon Ian Macdonald with delegates from the Knesset in Israel

Other functions and receptions

The delegation attended the inaugural ceremony of the Assembly hosted by the Parliament of the Russian Federation, a luncheon of the Twelve Plus Group, and a

performance at the Mariinsky Theatre hosted by the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation. Mr Wilson represented the delegation at a function hosted by the Chairperson of the Council of the Federation.

Overall conclusions

The Australian delegation continued to build on the work of previous delegations, deepening relationships between parliamentarians and nations. Formal and informal comments received at the Assembly through standing committees, other parliamentarians and IPU officials show that the Australian delegation is well regarded as a diligent and reliable contributor to the work of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

The delegation wishes to thank His Excellency Mr Peter Tesch, Australian Ambassador to the Russian Federation and First Secretary Ms Siobhan Purcell from the Australian Embassy in Moscow for their high level support during the Assembly. In addition, the delegation wishes to acknowledge the work of staff of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Canberra for written and oral briefings, in particular Ms Christiane Aigner, Mr Marcus Lumb and Mr Ed Wilkinson. Once again, the delegation was able to rely on briefing materials prepared by the Parliamentary Library and acknowledges the work of Ms Cat Barker. Thanks are also due to Mr Raymond Knight from the International and Parliamentary Relations Office who arranged travel and accommodation for the travelling party.

Senator the Hon Ian Macdonald
Delegation Leader

Attendance at the 137th IPU Assembly

14–18 October 2017

Senator the Hon Ian Macdonald, Senator Chris Ketter, Mr Josh Wilson MP in St Petersburg

Friday 13 October

Senator Ketter and Mr Wilson arrived in St Petersburg

Saturday 14 October

Senator Macdonald arrived in St Petersburg

Secretaries' meeting

Briefing from the Australian Ambassador, HE Mr Peter Tesch and First Secretary, Ms Siobhan Purcell

Asia-Pacific Group meeting

Forum of Women Parliamentarians

Twelve Plus Luncheon

First meeting of the Twelve Plus Group

Inaugural Ceremony

Sunday 15 October

Governing Council

General Debate: *Promoting cultural pluralism and peace through inter-faith and inter-ethnic dialogue*

Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights: presentation and debate of draft resolution on *Sharing our diversity: The 20th anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Democracy*

Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade

Interactive session on *Ending AIDS through sexual and reproductive health: the need for urgent parliamentary action*

Meeting with Pacific Island Nations (co-convened with New Zealand delegation)

Bilateral meeting with Israel

Bilateral meeting with Belarus

General Debate

Decision on the emergency item

Monday 16 October

Meeting of the Twelve Plus Group

Bureau of the Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade

Bilateral meeting with Singapore

Bilateral meeting with the Islamic Republic of Iran

Assembly: debate on the emergency item, and continuation of the General Debate

Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights

Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade: briefing on *The Parliamentary contribution to the 2017 UN Climate Change Conference*, and debate on *Engaging the private sector in implementing the SDGs, especially on renewable energy*

Interactive session on *The UN process for the prohibition of nuclear weapons: What hope for nuclear disarmament?*

Tuesday 17 October

Meeting of the Twelve Plus Group

e-Parliament interactive session: *The digital tools that parliamentarians use to do their work*

Standing Committee on Peace and International Security: expert hearing on *Sustaining peace as a vehicle for achieving sustainable development*, and panel discussion on *The implementation of a previous resolution on cyber warfare*

Open session of the Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law on *Forty years since the adoption of the Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions: How does the law still protect in contemporary war?*

Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights

Assembly: adoption of the resolution on the emergency item, and conclusion of the General Debate

Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade Panel discussion on *Using science and research to achieve the highest health standards*

Hearing with candidates for IPU President

Cultural Evening

Wednesday 18 October

Governing Council

Standing Committee on Peace and International Security: panel discussion on *The role of parliament in monitoring the action of national armed forces participating in UN peacekeeping operations*

Assembly: adoption of resolutions, reports of the Standing Committees, outcome document of the General debate, and closing sitting

Thursday 19 October

Departure of delegation from St Petersburg