



Parliament of Australia

Parliamentary Delegation
to
138th Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly
Geneva, Switzerland

24–28 March 2018

Commonwealth of Australia 2018

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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 Catryna Bilyk
Senator for Tasmania
Australian Labor Party

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

Official

Ms Toni Matulick
Delegation Secretary

138th IPU Assembly – Geneva

The 138th Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Assembly took place in Geneva, Switzerland from 24 to 28 March 2018. The Assembly was attended by 829 parliamentarians from 148 countries including 98 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 Catryna Bilyk and Mr Josh Wilson MP.



The Australian delegation to the IPU: Mr Josh Wilson MP, Senator the Hon Ian Macdonald and Senator Catryna Bilyk

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 lives by building strong national parliaments that can deliver better outcomes for citizens. 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. 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 supports 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 assemblies.

The IPU Assembly is the principal statutory body of the IPU and brings together parliamentarians to consider 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.

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



The 138th Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly

Assembly

The 138th Assembly was formally opened on Sunday 25th March 2018 (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 138th Assembly
- Consideration of emergency items for inclusion in the agenda
- General Debate: *strengthening the global regime for migrants and refugees: the need for evidence-based policy solutions*
- Special session with Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization in relation to the need for access to universal health coverage
- Special session with Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü, Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and Ambassador Nobushige Takamizawa, President of the Fourth Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty, who provided an overview of those agreements and encouraged all IPU Member Parliaments to play an active role in their ratification and implementation
- Resolutions: *sustaining peace as a vehicle for achieving sustainable development and engaging the*

private sector in implementing the SDGs, especially on renewable energy

- Reports of the Standing Committees
- Approval of the subject items for the Standing Committees on Peace and International Security and the Standing Committee on Trade, Finance and Sustainable Development for debate at the 140th IPU Assembly
- Amendments to the IPU Statutes and Rules.

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 *strengthening the global regime for migrants and refugees: the need for evidence-based policy solutions*. The IPU President, Ms Gabriela Cuevas Barron from Mexico, delivered the opening address. Heads of the key UN agencies involved in the process—Mr William Lacy Swing, Director General, International Organization for Migration (IOM), Mr Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and M. Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) also participated in the debate.

Senator Macdonald and Senator Bilyk both made a contribution to this debate and highlighted the role that Australia plays in resettling refugees, working with partner organisations to strengthen the global system, and the lead Australia is taking to combat modern slavery.²

² The Australian delegation's contribution to the general debate is published online: <https://www.ipu.org/event/138th-assembly-and-related-meetings/3074-speeches>.



Senator the Hon Ian Macdonald (above) and Senator Catryna Bilyk (below) speaking during the general debate



Governing Council

The Governing Council is the administrative and policy making body of the IPU and it meets during the twice yearly assemblies. During the 138th Assembly the Governing Council approved amendments to the Statutes and Rules aimed at enhancing youth participation at the IPU. Two other sets of amendments, submitted by the Russian Federation and the IPU President, were deferred to allow for further consultation among the geopolitical groups and the wider membership. A new set of proposals will be considered at a later assembly.

The Governing Council adopted the report and recommendations of the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians which

investigates complaints about alleged human rights violations of parliamentarians.³

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 of the votes cast in order to be accepted for debate.⁴

On 25 March 2018, the President informed the Assembly that four requests for an emergency item had been confirmed out of a total of seven initially submitted. Before the vote, the delegations of Palestine, Kuwait, Bahrain and Turkey chose to combine their individual proposals regarding the status of Jerusalem and the rights of Palestinians into one item. The four proposals were as follows:

- Repercussions of Iran's malign activities, led by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and its Quds Force, in core arenas in the Middle East, including Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen, and in the Palestinian arena (Israel)
- Violence against women in the workplace, in particular in parliaments, in the wake of the #MeToo movement (Sweden)
- The consequences of the US declaration on Jerusalem and the rights of the Palestinian people in Jerusalem in the light of the UN Charter and resolutions (Palestine, Kuwait, Bahrain and Turkey)

³ A copy of the report, 'Decisions on human rights cases adopted at the 202nd session of the IPU Governing Council', is available at <https://www.ipu.org/event/138th-assembly-and-related-meetings/3096-outcomes>.

⁴ Assembly Rule 11-2(a).

- The necessity to support the Palestinian people in achieving their inalienable rights and to reject the US Administration's decision on Al-Quds al-Sharif [Jerusalem] (Islamic Republic of Iran).

As there were no withdrawals or further changes to proposals, the Assembly proceeded with a roll-call vote on the four items from Israel; Sweden; Palestine, Kuwait, Bahrain and Turkey; and Iran.

The merged proposal on Jerusalem and related issues received the highest number of votes and was added to the agenda for debate. Following debate, the emergency item was referred to a drafting committee and the final resolution was adopted by the Assembly by consensus. While the resolution was adopted, a number of countries (including Australia), expressed reservations about the topic.

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.

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.⁵

⁵ 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.

Asia Pacific Group⁶

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 138th Assembly.

Twelve Plus Group⁷

The Twelve Plus Group met four times during the Assembly. The group considered reports from the standing committees, discussed positions on debating topics, including the emergency item, and considered nominations for vacancies to be filled during the Assembly. The group also discussed the proposed amendments to the statutes and rules and agreed to hold an Extraordinary Meeting in Lisbon during June 2018.

Audiences with delegations from Venezuela and Qatar were also held during the Twelve Plus meetings.



Mr Josh Wilson MP, Senator Catryna Bilyk and Senator the Hon Ian Macdonald at a Twelve Plus Group meeting

⁶ The membership of the Asia Pacific Group is available on the IPU website: <https://www.ipu.org/about-us/members/geopolitical-groups/asia-pacific-group>.

⁷ The membership of the Twelve Plus Group is available on the IPU website: <https://www.ipu.org/about-us/members/geopolitical-groups/twelve-plus-group>.

Forum of Women Parliamentarians

The 27th session of the Forum of Women Parliamentarians took place on 24 and 27 March. It brought together 116 participants from 63 countries and representatives of various international organisations.

The Forum considered the draft resolutions before the assembly from a gender-parity point of view, and proposed amendments to the resolutions.

Standing Committees

There are four standing committees of the IPU. A summary of their activities during the 138th Assembly is below.

Standing Committee on Peace and International Security

The Standing Committee on Peace and International Security held four sittings from 25 to 27 March. At its first sitting, the Committee examined an explanatory memorandum and a draft resolution entitled *sustaining peace as a vehicle for achieving sustainable development*. The amended text of the resolution was adopted on 27 March.

The item submitted by the delegation of Ukraine: *non-admissibility of using mercenaries as a means of undermining peace and violating human rights*, was adopted by the Committee and subsequently by the Assembly.

The Committee agreed to hold an expert hearing on that subject item at the 139th Assembly, as well as a panel discussion on the issue of combatting sexual violence in UN Peacekeeping operations and beyond.

Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade

The Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade held three sittings on 25, 26 and 27 March. The

committee discussed and adopted an amended version of the draft resolution before it: *engaging the private sector in implementing the SDGs, especially on renewable energy*.

The resolution was adopted by the Assembly on 28 March.



Mr Josh Wilson MP (second from left) attending a meeting of the Bureau of the Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade

Mr Wilson represented Ms Marino⁸ at the *in camera* meetings of the Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade, and presented a report on the Australian Parliament's consideration of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Mr Wilson proposed a topic related to fair trade and the SDGs for debate at the 139th Assembly meeting of the committee. An amended version of this topic was selected; *the role of fair and free trade and investment in achieving the SDGs, especially regarding economic equality, sustainable infrastructure, industrialization and innovation*, and Mr Wilson was appointed a co-rapporteur for the resolution, along with parliamentarians from Serbia and Ghana.

Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights

The committee held sittings on 26 and 27 March and held a preparatory debate on the theme of the next resolution: *strengthening inter-parliamentary cooperation on migration and migration governance in view of the adoption of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration*.

⁸ While Ms Marino is a member of the committee, she was unable to attend the Assembly due to parliamentary commitments.

The committee held a roll-call vote to hold a debate at the next Assembly on the following issue: *the role of parliaments in ending discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and ensuring respect for the human rights of LGBTI persons.*

Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs

The Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs met on 25 and 27 March with both sittings focused on the Sustainable Development Goals. The first sitting considered parliamentary action on the SDGs, and the second sitting focussed on preparing parliamentarians for the debate to be held at the High-level Political Forum on the SDGs to be held in New York in July 2018.

Other meetings



Senator the Hon Ian Macdonald, Senator Catryna Bilyk and Mr Josh Wilson MP meeting with the delegation from Ukraine

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 Catryna Bilyk and Senator the Hon Ian Macdonald attending a meeting of the Forum of Women Parliamentarians

Attending statutory assemblies of the IPU offers members of the Australian Parliament 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 138th Assembly, bilateral meetings were held with delegations from Israel the Ukraine, Canada, the United Kingdom and New Zealand. The Australian and New Zealand delegations met with delegates from Pacific Island nations, including delegates from the Marshall Islands, Fiji, Vanuatu and the Federated States of Micronesia.



Mr Josh Wilson MP, Senator Catryna Bilyk and Senator the Hon Ian Macdonald and the New Zealand delegation meeting with delegates from Pacific Island nations

The Australian delegation also attended a multilateral meeting of countries that are party to the Comprehensive and Progressive

Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP-11) that was convened by Mexico.



Senator the Hon Ian Macdonald, Mr Josh Wilson MP and Senator Catryna Bilyk at a meeting of the TPP-11

Mr Wilson attended side meetings related to nuclear non-proliferation, and was a panel member at a workshop on a Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Other functions and receptions

The delegation attended a function hosted by the government of Switzerland, and a reception at the United Nations hosted by the Lithuanian delegation.

Overall conclusions

The Australian delegation built on the work of previous delegations and actively participated in the debates before the Assembly and in the standing committees. The Australian delegation continues to be a highly regarded and reliable contributor to the work of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

The delegation wishes to acknowledge the work of staff of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Canberra and in Geneva. 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 138th IPU Assembly

22–29 March 2018

Senator the Hon Ian Macdonald, Senator Catryna Bilyk, Mr Josh Wilson MP in Geneva

Thursday 22 March

Delegation arrives in Geneva

Friday 23 March

First meeting of the Twelve Plus Group

Saturday 24 March

Forum of Women Parliamentarians

Meeting of Advisers and Secretaries to delegations

Asia Pacific Group meeting

Workshop on refugee protection

Sunday 25 March

Governing Council

Assembly: General Debate - *strengthening the global regime for migrants and refugees: the need for evidence-based policy solutions*

Standing Committee on Peace and International Security

Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade

Standing Committee on Peace and International Security

Assembly: decision on the emergency item

Bilateral meeting with Ukraine

Reception hosted by Switzerland

Monday 26 March

Meeting of the Twelve Plus Group

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

Standing Committee on Peace and International Security

Bilateral meeting with Israel

Multilateral meeting with countries party to TPP-11

Reception hosted by the Republic of Lithuania

Tuesday 27 March

Meeting of the Twelve Plus Group

Standing Committee on Peace and International Security

Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs

Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade

Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights

Interactive session with regional and other parliamentary assemblies and organizations on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

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

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

Multilateral meeting of Pacific Island Nations

Bilateral meeting with Venezuela

Multilateral meeting with Canada, United Kingdom and New Zealand

Wednesday 28 March

Governing Council

Workshop on the implementation of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

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

Thursday 29 March

Departure of delegation from Geneva