



Parliament of Australia

Parliamentary Delegation
to
133rd Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly
Geneva, Switzerland

17 – 21 October 2015

Commonwealth of Australia 2015

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Members of the Delegation

Leader of the Delegation

Mrs Louise Markus MP
Federal Member for Macquarie
Liberal Party of Australia

Deputy Leader of the Delegation

Senator Glenn Sterle
Senator for Western Australia
Australian Labor Party

The Hon Philip Ruddock MP
Member for Berowra, New South Wales
Liberal Party of Australia

Senator Sue Lines
Senator for Western Australia
Australian Labor Party

Officials:

Mr Brien Hallett
Delegation Secretary

133rd IPU Assembly – Geneva

The 133rd Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Assembly took place in Geneva from 17 to 21 October 2015 and was attended by 647 parliamentarians from 134 member countries including 91 presiding or deputy presiding officers. A number of observers also attended.

The Australian delegation to the Assembly was led by the Mrs Louise Markus MP and included Senator Glenn Sterle (Deputy Delegation Leader), the Hon Philip Ruddock MP (from 19 October) and Senator Sue Lines.

Background

The IPU is the international organisation of parliaments of sovereign states and provides a focal point for world-wide parliamentary dialogue. The IPU works for peace and co-operation among peoples and for the firm establishment of representative democracy. To achieve these aims the IPU:

- fosters contacts, coordination and the exchange of experience among parliaments and parliamentarians for all countries;
- considers questions of international interest and concern;
- contributes to the defence and promotion of human rights; and
- contributes to better knowledge of the working of representative institutions and to the strengthening and development of their means of action.

There are currently 166 national parliaments who are members of the IPU and ten regional parliamentary assemblies which are associate members.¹ Most members are affiliated with one of six geopolitical groups that are currently active in the IPU.

¹ A list of current members of the IPU is available on the IPU website:
<http://www.ipu.org/english/membshp.htm>

While the major focus for the Australian delegation is participation in the twice-yearly assemblies, the IPU is constantly active in promoting democracy throughout the world. Its main areas of activity are:

- representative democracy;
- international peace and security;
- sustainable development;
- human rights and humanitarian law;
- women in politics; and
- education, science and culture.

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

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 Australian Delegation at the Assembly venue: Centre International de Conférences Genève (CICG)

Assembly

The 133rd Assembly was formally opened on Sunday, 18 October 2015. The Assembly agenda addressed the following items:

- General Debate – *The imperative for fairer, smarter and more humane migration;*

- Consideration of items for debate as an Emergency Item and the debate;
- Resolution: *Democracy in the digital era and the threat to privacy and individual freedoms*;
- Reports of the four standing committees; and
- the 197th session of the IPU Governing Council.

Meetings of geopolitical groups

The IPU has six geopolitical groups that meet immediately prior to, and during, each Assembly to consider matters on the IPU Agenda 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 and participated in meetings of both groups at the 133rd IPU Assembly.²

Asia Pacific Group³

The Asia Pacific Group met once during the Assembly and received a report from the ASEAN +3 Group as well as a briefing by IPU executive committee members. The meeting considered nominations for a number of vacancies to be filled during the 133rd Assembly including on the Executive Committee and the Bureau of the Standing Committee for Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade. The Group also considered the various topics proposed for debate as an emergency item by the Assembly and nominations to the drafting committee. As

² 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. Prior to the commencement of the 133rd Assembly, Australia advised the IPU Secretariat that it would exercise its voting rights through the Asia Pacific Group.

³ The membership of the Asia Pacific Group is available on the IPU website: <http://www.ipu.org/strct-e/geopol.htm>

delegation leader, Mrs Markus also attended a reception hosted by the Asia Pacific Group on Monday, 19 October.

Twelve Plus Group⁴

The Twelve Plus Group met three times during the Assembly. The meeting received a report of the executive committee and its finance and gender partnership sub-committees, reports on the meeting of chairs of geopolitical groups and standing committee presidents and considered a wide range of nominations for a number of vacancies to be filled during the 133rd Assembly.

The Group considered the proposal for an emergency item which is covered in more detail below, and after debate, resolved to accept the proposal put forward by New Zealand. The Group also considered the resolution proposed by the Third Standing Committee on *Democracy in the digital era and the threat to privacy and individual freedoms*. Respective reports from the Standing Committees, the Forum of Young Parliamentarians, the Meeting of Women Parliamentarians and the informal meeting on e-parliament were also considered.

Following the Group's Declaration on the Ukraine issued in Hanoi at the 132nd Assembly, the Ukrainian Delegation provided an update on issues raised in that statement.

IPU – debates in the Assembly and other activities

A key focus of Assembly business are two major debates in the plenary: (i) the general debate, and (ii) the debate on an emergency item.

The General Debate

The topic of the general debate was *The imperative for fairer, smarter and more humane migration*. Opening keynote

⁴ The membership of the Twelve Plus Group is available on the IPU website: <http://www.ipu.org/strct-e/geopol.htm>

contributions were provided by Mr. William Lacy Swing, Director General of the International Organization for Migration (IOM); Mr. Guy Ryder, Director-General of the International Labour Organization (ILO); and Ms. Cécile Kashetu Kyenge, Vice-President of the ACP–EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly.

Following a ballot to determine the order of speaking, both Mrs Markus and Mr Ruddock participated in this debate on Monday, 19 October and outlined the positive contribution made by Australia in settling and supporting more than 7.5 million migrants since 1945. Mr Ruddock drew on his experience as a former Immigration and Multicultural Affairs Minister to outline the challenges faced by Australia in recent years in the face of increased demands for resettlement places.



Mrs Markus and Mr Ruddock speaking in 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 of the votes cast in order to be

accepted [for debate]." (Assembly Rule 11-2(a))

On 18 October, the IPU President informed the Assembly that a total of five proposals had been received for consideration as emergency items as follows:

<i>Strengthening the role of parliamentarians in the effective implementation of the principles of international humanitarian law and international conventions on the protection of refugees.</i>	United Arab Emirates
<i>The role of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in urging countries, regional and international parliamentary organisations and the international community to provide the facilities required for those who have become refugees through war, internal conflict and economic situations.</i>	Sudan
<i>The role of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in countering the terrorism and extremism of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Al-Nusra Front (ANF) and other terrorist groups associated with them.</i>	Syrian Arab Republic
<i>Protecting human rights in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism.</i>	Mexico
<i>The role of parliaments in taking urgent action to protect the climate.</i>	New Zealand

Before the deadline, the delegations of the United Arab Emirates and Sudan merged their proposals to:

The role of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, parliaments, parliamentarians, and international and regional organizations in providing necessary protection and urgent support to those who have become refugees through war, internal conflict and socio-economic situations, according to the

principles of international humanitarian law and international conventions.

The Assembly held a roll-call vote on the four proposals and the proposal put forward jointly by the United Arab Emirates and Sudan was adopted and added to the agenda. Following debate, the emergency item was referred to a drafting committee and the final resolution was adopted unanimously.

Meeting of Women Parliamentarians

The 22nd Meeting of Women Parliamentarians was held during the Assembly and Mrs Markus and Senator Lines participated in these proceedings which involved 127 delegates from 75 countries in addition to representatives from various international organisations.

During its two sittings, the meeting considered reports from the co-ordinating committee of women parliamentarians, the gender partnership group and a briefing on recent IPU activities in the area of gender equality. Participants then examined (from the perspective of gender equality) the theme of the Assembly's General Debate, *The imperative for fairer, smarter and more humane migration*. At the second sitting the meeting engaged in a parity debate on the theme of parliamentary oversight and political will.



Senator Lines and Mrs Markus at the meeting of Women Parliamentarians

Standing Committees

The IPU has four standing committees that met during the Assembly to consider the following matters:

- Expert hearing on Terrorism: *The need to enhance global cooperation against the threat to democracy and individual rights* (first Standing Committee on Peace and International Security);
- Debate on *Ensuring lasting protection against destruction and deterioration for the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of humanity* (second Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade);
- Debate on and adoption of a resolution on *Democracy in the digital era and the threat to privacy and individual freedoms* (third Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights); and
- (i) Review of the work of the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) and (ii) Discussion on the work of International Court of Justice (fourth Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs).

Standing Committee on Peace and International Security

The first standing committee held one sitting which involved an expert hearing on *Terrorism: The need to enhance global cooperation against the threat to democracy and individual rights*. This topic will be the basis of a resolution that is expected to be adopted by the 134th Assembly in March 2016.

Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade

The second standing committee held one sitting and considered the 2015 Global Climate Legislation Study, heard a briefing on the parliamentary meeting planned by the IPU to be held in conjunction with the United Nations Climate Change conference in Paris in

December 2015 and debated the draft Parliamentary Action Plan on Climate Change.

Senator Lines attended a debate on *Ensuring lasting protection against destruction and deterioration for the tangible and intangible cultural heritage for humanity* which is expected to be the basis of a future committee resolution to be adopted at the 134th Assembly in Lusaka.

Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights

The third standing committee held three sittings to work on its draft resolution *Democracy in the digital era and the threat to privacy and individual freedoms* which was presented to the Assembly and adopted unanimously on 20 October.

The committee also considered two proposals for the subject of its next resolution from the Russian Federation and Australia and, at its final sitting on 20 October, voted in favour of the Australian proposal by 27 votes to 17. Accordingly, the subject of the next resolution, to be adopted at the 135th Assembly in October 2016, will be *The freedom of women to participate in political processes fully, safely and without interference: Building partnerships between men and women to achieve this objective*. The drafter of this resolution, Mrs. Markus, was appointed as one of the rapporteurs.

Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs

The fourth Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs held one sitting which reviewed the work of the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission and the role of the International Court of Justice.

Bilateral meetings

A key 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 and individual parliamentarians to discuss issues of mutual interest, to develop an understanding of different parliamentary models and to strengthen parliament-to-parliament relationships.

The opportunities for informal discussions are complemented with bi-lateral meetings and the Australian delegation held a formal meeting with the Swedish Delegation on Monday 19 October. In line with the topic of the general debate on *The imperative for fairer, smarter and more humane migration*, the Australian travelling party was interested to learn how Sweden is dealing with the influx of migrants being received by that country. The leader of the Swedish delegation, Mr Örnfjäder, outlined the challenges facing the authorities and local communities in dealing with the significantly increased numbers of refugees arriving at the Swedish border as the norther winter approaches and available accommodation is at capacity.

In addition, the New Zealand and Australian delegations again jointly arranged a meeting of representatives from the Pacific region on Sunday 18 October which fulfilled earlier undertakings to convene this informal network at each IPU Assembly. The New Zealand delegation hosted a light lunch prior to the meeting which gave delegates the chance to talk informally before the meeting.

Unfortunately, for various reasons the number of Pacific delegations attending the 133rd Assembly was less than in previous years. While Fiji was readmitted to the IPU at this Assembly, the only other Pacific region countries able to attend were the Federated States of Micronesia, Vanuatu (as an observer with a view to possible affiliation) and Australia and New Zealand. At recent Assemblies, Timor-Leste has also been invited to this gathering and attended this time. Following the informal lunch, delegates from Fiji, Timor-Leste, Australia and New Zealand discussed a number of issues based on the

IPU program including the topic of the emergency debate.

Many Pacific region parliaments face significant challenges in sending delegations to the IPU Assemblies, and this was the subject of discussion with Secretary General Chungong at a meeting the following day (see below).



The meeting of Pacific Island Delegations

Other sessions and meetings

On Tuesday 20 October, Mrs Markus and Mr Ruddock called on IPU Secretary General Martin Chungong. Following Mr Chungong's visit to Australia and New Zealand in June, Mrs Markus and Mr Ruddock were interested to discuss strategies to support IPU participation by members from the Pacific region and how Australia could complement IPU initiatives in this regard in light of the challenges faced by Pacific parliaments and resource constraints common to all parliaments and the IPU.

At the same meeting, Mr Ruddock briefed the Secretary General on the work that the Human Rights sub-committee of the Australian Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade in relation to referrals from the IPU to the Presiding Officers concerning possible abuses of the human rights of parliamentarians. Mr Chungong asked Mr Ruddock to share this information in the

plenary meeting of the Governing Council on Wednesday, 21 October.

At that plenary session when the reports and resolutions of the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians were considered, Mr Ruddock outlined the sub-committee's extensive work to follow up cases where members of parliament have been imprisoned, tortured, or executed: Mr Ruddock explained that in cases where the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has information from overseas posts, the sub-committee receives a detailed briefing. The sub-committee seeks DFAT's view on the bona fides of the cases, any sensitivities that may be involved and whether sub-committee involvement would be constructive. For those cases that the sub-committee decides to pursue, the sub-committee generally invites the relevant ambassador or high commissioner to attend a private briefing to discuss the case. The sub-committee has, on occasion, asked ambassadors for follow-up information or to convey its views to the relevant government. The sub-committee may also write to the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs concerning the case/s, putting the view of the sub-committee. Mr Ruddock's explanation of the lengths to which the Australian Parliament goes in following up these cases referred by the IPU attracted interest from other members present and at least one delegation has since asked for further information following the Assembly.

Mr Ruddock also attended a panel discussion held on Tuesday, 20 October on parliamentary action in meeting international commitments to counter terrorism and spoke from the floor in the debate that followed presentations by the expert panel. In his contribution, Mr Ruddock drew on his experience as a long-standing Immigration Minister and Attorney-General to describe how Australia had met the challenges of terrorism in recent years while at the same time continuing to support a successful migration program. The IPU believes that this panel discussion which was attended by more than 200 parliamentarians was the first ever

international platform for fostering parliamentary action to counter terrorism.



Senator Sterle, IPU President Saber Chowdhury and Mrs Markus on the floor of the Assembly

Other functions and receptions

The delegation attended a reception for IPU Assembly participants on the evening of Monday 19 October hosted by the Swiss Government. This informal gathering provided a further opportunity for the Australian travelling party to continue discussions with a wide range of parliamentary colleagues.

Overall conclusions

Despite the challenge of sending a delegation during a parliamentary sitting period, the investment made by the Australian Parliament has continued to build on the work of previous delegations. Comments received at the Assembly from other parliamentarians and IPU officials indicates that the Australian delegation continues to be regarded as a focussed, professional and well organised IPU member. The Australian travelling party also valued the opportunities offered by participating in the the IPU Assembly, including the chance to meet parliamentary colleagues, gain new perspectives and discuss matters of mutual concern.

Finally, the delegation acknowledges the support provided by the Australian Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the World Trade Organisation (WTO), Mr Hamish McCormick, and his staff. Particular thanks are also due to Ms Greer Alblas, Ms Kate O'Malley and Ms Tanya Bennett at the post in Geneva for advice and practical

assistance provided to the delegation in the lead-up to and throughout the Assembly. The work of Mr Peter Manvell from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Canberra and Ms Cat Barker from the Parliamentary Library in co-ordinating briefings prior to departure is also appreciated.

Mrs Louise Markus MP
Delegation Leader

Attendance at the 133rd IPU Assembly

17 – 21 October 2015

Mrs Louise Markus MP, The Hon. Philip Ruddock MP (from 19 Oct), Senator Glenn Sterle, and Senator Sue Lines

Friday 16 October 2015

Main delegation arrived Geneva

Saturday 17 October 2015

Briefing by Ambassador Hamish McCormick and staff

Asia-Pacific Geopolitical Group Meeting

Meeting of Women Parliamentarians

Twelve Plus Geopolitical Group Meeting

Meeting of advisers and secretaries to delegations

Sunday 18 October 2015

Meeting of the IPU Governing Council

General Debate in the Assembly on *the moral and economic imperative for a fairer, smarter and more humane migration*

Meeting of Pacific Island delegations and informal lunch hosted by New Zealand

Assembly – decision on the emergency item

Monday 19 October 2015

Twelve Plus Geopolitical Group Meeting

Assembly: debate on the emergency item and continuation of the general debate (including contribution by Mrs Markus and Mr Ruddock)

Reception hosted by Asia Pacific Geopolitical Group

Meeting with the Swedish Delegation

Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade debate on *Ensuring lasting protection against destruction and deterioration for the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of humanity*

Reception hosted by the Swiss Government

Tuesday 20 October 2015

Panel discussion on Parliamentary action in meeting international commitments to counter terrorism

Meeting of Women Parliamentarians parity debate

Assembly – adoption of resolutions

Meeting with IPU Secretary General Martin Chungong (Mrs Markus and Mr Ruddock)

Wednesday 21 October 2015

Meeting of 12 Plus Group

Governing Council – Resolutions on the human rights of MPs, and reports from specialized meetings

Media interview (Aida Balamci, UN Women, and Senator Lines)

Assembly – Adoption of resolutions, reports of the Standing Committees, Outcome Document of the General Debate, and Closing Sitting

Thursday 22 October 2015

Departure of delegation from Geneva