

The Parliament of the  
Commonwealth of Australia

**127<sup>th</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly  
in Quebec City, Canada and  
Bilateral visit to Argentina**

**Report of the Australian Parliamentary Delegation**

**13 – 28 October 2012**

June 2013

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For more information about the Australian Parliament visit [www.aph.gov.au](http://www.aph.gov.au) or contact the International and Community Relations Office:

Email: [icro.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:icro.reps@aph.gov.au)

Phone: +61 2 6277 4340

Fax: +61 2 6277 2000

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# Membership of the Delegation

<b>Leader</b>	The Hon Dick Adams MP Member for Lyons, Tasmania Australian Labor Party
<b>Deputy Leader</b>	Mr Patrick Secker MP Member for Barker, South Australia Liberal Party of Australia
<b>Members</b>	Senator Sue Boyce Senator for Queensland Liberal Party of Australia  The Hon Joel Fitzgibbon MP Member for Hunter, New South Wales Australian Labor Party (attended Inter-Parliamentary Assembly only)  Mr Harry Jenkins MP Member for Scullin, Victoria Australian Labor Party (attended Inter-Parliamentary Assembly only)  Senator the Hon Ursula Stephens Senator for New South Wales Australian Labor Party
<b>Officials</b>	Mr David Elder Deputy Clerk House of Representatives (attended meetings of the Association of Secretaries General in Quebec City)  Ms Jeanette Radcliffe Department of the Senate Delegation Secretary

Ms Dee Alty and Mr Bob Stephens also accompanied the delegation.





## Foreword

Between 13 and 28 October 2012, it was my pleasure to lead the Australian parliamentary delegation that attended the 127th Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Assembly in Québec City, Québec, Canada. Prior to the Assembly the delegation undertook a bilateral visit to Argentina.

This report details the work undertaken by the delegation at the IPU Assembly and outlines the delegation's observations from its visit to Argentina. Both the Assembly and the bilateral visit provided the opportunity for the delegation to engage on issues of significance to Australia, including free trade, nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, renewable energy and parliamentary strengthening.<sup>1</sup>

The Australian delegation participated fully in the work of the IPU throughout the 127th Assembly, taking part in various debates and meetings and as chairs of plenary sessions and workshops.

I contributed to the Assembly's Special Debate on *Citizenship, Identity and Linguistic and Cultural Diversity in a Globalised World*, during which I emphasised the various ways in which Australia has sought to recognise and celebrate its diverse and multicultural society and ensure that all members of society have a voice in Australia's democratic system.

Once again, the Australian delegation was sought after to take an active leadership role in the work of the Assembly, reflecting the high esteem in which Australia's parliament and parliamentarians are held. I would like to highlight the following contributions by the delegation:

- Senator Sue Boyce participated in the work of the First Standing Committee which discussed the theme: *Enforcing the responsibility to protect: The role of parliament in safeguarding civilian's lives*;
- Mr Patrick Secker MP and I participated in work of the Second Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade where we both spoke on the theme: *Fair trade and innovative financing mechanisms for sustainable development*;
- Senator the Hon Ursula Stephens participated in the work of the Third Standing Committee which discussed: *the use of media, including social media, to enhance citizen engagement and democracy*;
- The Hon Mr Joel Fitzgibbon MP, with support from Mr Harry Jenkins MP and Mr Secker, chaired an informal meeting to discuss the formation of an international network of whips and others with organisational responsibilities within parliaments;
- Mr Fitzgibbon and Mr Jenkins participated in the work of the IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs:

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1 The delegation's program is available at Appendix 1 to this report.

- Mr Fitzgibbon was invited to Chair the Special Session to observe United Nations Day which debated the theme *Does the United Nations Take democracy seriously enough* and participated in the work of the Committee's Advisory Group;
- Mr Jenkins participated in the Committee's roundtable discussion on *Multilateralism and the role of parliamentary diplomacy* and in the discussion on *the UN Declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples: Five Years On* and chaired a workshop to familiarise parliamentarians with a range of online tools that could assist them in advancing nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament;
- Mr Jenkins also took part in the Special Gender Partnership Session on Gender-sensitive Parliaments which considered the IPU Report on *Gender-Sensitive Parliaments – A Global Review of Good Practice*, authored by Dr Sonia Palmieri;
- The Australian and New Zealand delegations held a lunch with delegates from Micronesia, Timor-Leste and Tonga to discuss the engagement of Pacific Island Parliaments in the work of the IPU; and
- The Australian delegation held bilateral discussions with members of the delegations from Ireland and Serbia.

On behalf of the delegation I would like to express our sincere thanks to the Parliament of Canada for its effective organisation of the 127th IPU Assembly. The format of the Assembly provided many valuable opportunities for parliamentarians from a diverse range of parliaments and political perspectives to meet and discuss issues of great significance globally.

Immediately preceding the IPU Assembly the delegation undertook a bilateral visit to Argentina. The delegation was privileged to participate in a comprehensive program that allowed it to gain an appreciation of the opportunities and challenges for Australian business in Argentina, particularly in the mining and energy sectors. The warmth with which the delegation was welcomed and the frankness of the discussions it was able to have underscores the strength of the relationship between Australia and Argentina. The delegation would particularly like to acknowledge Senator Sonia Escudero for the time and assistance that she extended to the delegation during its stay in Argentina. The delegation would also like to express its sincere appreciation to the Argentinian Parliament and the Government of San Juan Province for providing such a rich and engaging program and for the time devoted to the delegation's visit.

I would like to acknowledge the support provided by Australia's diplomatic representatives to Canada and Argentina. Both missions are to be commended for their work and careful attention to detail which was vital for the success of the delegation.

The delegation would express its gratitude to HE Ambassador Patricia Holmes and other staff of the Australian Embassy in Argentina for their part in arranging the delegation's program and for their briefings and support throughout the visit.

Particular thanks are due to Mr Lucas Robson, Third Secretary at Australia's High Commission in Ottawa, for his advice and practical assistance to the delegation during the IPU Assembly. The delegation also thanks officers of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Parliamentary Library for comprehensive and informative oral and written briefings provided prior to the delegation's departure.

The delegation thanks Mr Geoff Barnett, International Community Relations Office, for his logistical support and assistance and the staff of FCM Travel Solutions and Mr Tony Styles, Finance Section, Department of the Senate.

Finally, I thank my fellow delegates for their thoughtful participation in the delegation's meetings and their commitment to our program of work.

**Mr Dick Adams MP**  
**Delegation Leader**



# Chapter 1

## The Inter-Parliamentary Union

### Introduction

1.1 The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) is the international organisation of parliaments, providing a focal point for world-wide parliamentary dialogue. It currently comprises 162 member parliaments and ten regional parliamentary assemblies as associate members. A list of members is available online.<sup>1</sup>

1.2 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 of 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.

1.3 Most members are affiliated to one of the six geopolitical groups that are currently active in the IPU.

### The work of the IPU

1.4 While the major focus for the Australian delegation is participation in the twice-yearly assemblies, the IPU's work is more far reaching than providing a forum for parliamentary dialogue. 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.

### IPU Assemblies

1.5 The IPU meets twice each year, in October and April. The April assembly is usually hosted by a member country. The assemblies 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

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1 <http://www.ipu.org/english/membshp.htm>

Governing Council, and meetings of specialist committees, working groups and the six geopolitical groups.

1.6 The 127th IPU Assembly was held in Quebec City, Canada from 21 – 26 October 2012 and was attended by delegations from 127 member parliaments. The Assembly agenda included meetings of the following parts of the IPU:

- a plenary session of the assembly, attended by all delegates, which debated an emergency item, and held panel discussions on particular subjects;
- the Governing Council, which is the policy-making body of the IPU, and consists of two or three delegates from each member country;
- ad hoc committees established by the Governing Council (at present there are six of these); and
- three standing committees, which discussed chosen topics in preparation for debate of reports and draft resolutions at the 128<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly in Quito, Ecuador;

1.7 This report provides details of the meetings and activities in which the Australian parliamentary delegation to the IPU participated. The agenda and complete documents from the Assembly and related meetings are available online.<sup>2</sup> The delegation's program is available at Appendix 1.

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2 <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/127agnd.htm>

## Chapter 2

### 127<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

#### Inaugural ceremony and Opening of the Assembly

2.1 The inaugural ceremony of the 127th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) took place on 21 October 2012 at the Québec City Convention Centre, with Mr David Johnston, the Governor General of Canada, in attendance. Inaugural addresses were delivered by Mr Noël Kinsella, Speaker of the Canadian Senate, Ms Chris Charlton, speaking on behalf of the Speaker of Canada's House of Commons; Mr Peter Launsky-Tieffenthal, United Nations (UN) Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, on behalf of the UN Secretary-General, and Mr Abdelwahad Radi, IPU President (Morocco).

2.2 The opening ceremony concluded with a welcome from the Governor General of Canada, who declared the Assembly open by stating that:

Parliament is the place where democracy is enacted in the hard work of governing and of loyal opposition, and it serves as the ultimate symbol of our values of equality, fairness and justice ... In a sense, this Union can be viewed as the Parliament of parliaments, and your example as a forum for dialogue and cooperation continues to instruct and inspire.<sup>1</sup>

2.3 The Plenary session of the 127th Assembly opened at the Québec City Convention Centre on 22 October, with the election by acclamation of Mr Donald Oliver, Speaker pro tempore of the Canadian Senate and President of the Canadian Inter-Parliamentary Group, as President of the Assembly.

2.4 Mr Oliver said that it was a great honour for him to have been elected to preside over the Assembly's work, and that he was looking forward to rich and productive deliberations over the coming week. The theme of the Special Debate, *Citizenship, identity and linguistic and cultural diversity in a globalized world*, was one to which he was deeply attached, having spent a great part of his political career promoting those key values.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Special Debate - Citizenship, identity and linguistic and cultural diversity in a globalized world**

2.5 The Special Debate was conducted over four sittings. A total of 96 speakers from 89 delegations took part in the debate and explored various aspects of the theme under consideration.

2.6 At the first sitting, the Foreign Minister of Canada, Mr John Baird, delivered a keynote address on the protection of diversity as a global value. The second sitting was introduced by the Speaker of the Parliament of Ghana, Ms Joyce Bamford-Addo,

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1 Results of the 127<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly and related meetings, p 4, <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/127/results.pdf>

2 Ibid.

and featured a substantive message from the Director-General of UNESCO on the question of respecting diversity while building social cohesion.

2.7 The third sitting, on 23 October, was introduced by Mr Tau Henare, Chairman of the Committee on Maori Affairs in the Parliament of New Zealand, who spoke about the question of enhancing political participation by and representation of minorities and indigenous peoples.

2.8 At the last sitting, on 25 October, the participants explored best practices and innovative ideas for managing citizenship in a globalised and rapidly changing environment. The sitting was introduced by three high-level speakers: Mr Knut Vollebaek, High Commissioner on National Minorities of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (Netherlands), Grand Chief Edward John, President of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples (Canada), and Ms Meira Kumar, Speaker of the Lok Sabha (India).

2.9 Speaking during the second sitting, the Leader of the Australian Delegation, Mr Dick Adams MP, said that through waves of migration, Australia had become a more diverse and complex society, affected by and responsive to a more globalised and interconnected world. Sustaining a fair and inclusive multicultural society, as indigenous and multicultural communities seek greater representation in all levels of government, had therefore become a more sophisticated exercise. Mr Adams said that Australia was one of the longest, most continuous and stable democracies in the world. This suggested that political participation had been sufficiently strong and inclusive to enable its political system, and the government it produced, to enjoy legitimacy in the eyes of the people. Mr Adams' speech is reprinted in full at Appendix 2 to this report.

2.10 At its last sitting, the Assembly heard a presentation by the drafting committee on the outcome of the Special Debate and unanimously adopted the *Québec City Declaration on Citizenship, identity and linguistic and cultural diversity* in a globalised world. The resolution is available online.<sup>3</sup>

### **Emergency Item**

2.11 At each assembly a topic is selected for emergency consideration and a resolution is adopted on the topic. Any member country of the IPU may request the inclusion of an emergency item. The rules of the Assembly provide that only one emergency item may be included on the Assembly agenda. Where more than one topic is proposed the plenary session selects one of them either by consensus or vote.

2.12 Four requests for the inclusion of an emergency item were received:

- *The violence perpetrated by armed terrorist groups against Christians and other minorities in Syria and attempts to drive them out of Syria*, proposed by the Syrian Arab Republic;

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3 <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/127agnd.htm>



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- *The international role of parliamentarians in prohibiting the defamation of religions and the desecration of religious symbols and shrines by contributing to the conclusion of an international agreement on the criminalization of such acts and by recognizing respect for religions as a prerequisite for international peace, understanding and cooperation*, proposed by the United Arab Emirates;
  - *The security and humanitarian impacts of the crisis in Syria, including in neighbouring countries*, proposed by the United Kingdom; and
  - *The institutional and security situation in Mali*, proposed by Mali.

2.13 Following a roll-call vote, the item on Mali was adopted and added to the agenda. During the debate of the emergency item, speakers expressed their deep concern over the institutional and security crisis in Mali which, in the view of many, had extended beyond the confines of a regional crisis and threatened the stability not only of the Sahel but also of North Africa and beyond.

2.14 The resolution prepared by the drafting committee was adopted unanimously by the Assembly at its last sitting on 26 October 2012. The resolution is available online.<sup>4</sup>

### **Special Gender Partnership Session on Gender-sensitive Parliaments**

2.15 This Special Session was spearheaded by the IPU Gender Partnership Group. Ms Rebecca Kadaga (Uganda) told the session that in 2009, the IPU had carried out a global survey of parliaments on gender sensitivity. The report identified the level of gender sensitivity in parliaments and good practices that supported the promotion of women and gender equality in parliament.

2.16 The goal of the session was to identify objectives and strategies for the achievement of gender equality in parliament, which would result in a plan of action for gender-sensitive parliaments to be submitted to the Assembly for adoption.

2.17 The first sitting of the session began with a question and answer session with two Speakers of Parliament, Ms Anne Makinda, Speaker of the National Assembly of the United Republic of Tanzania, and Mr Patrick Burke, Speaker of Seanad Éireann, Ireland. Both Speakers referred to the difficulties members of their parliaments faced in striking a balance between parliamentary work and family life and made suggestions for addressing them.

2.18 Dr Sonia Palmieri gave a presentation on the IPU report she had authored: *Gender-Sensitive Parliaments: a global review of good practice*, after which 42 participants took the floor. With reference to the percentage of women in parliaments, speakers stressed the importance of affirmative action measures, such as amendments to electoral laws and constitutions and reserved seats for women.

2.19 Mr Harry Jenkins MP said that Australia had federated in 1901 and for the first 40 years of its existence had had no women's representation in parliament. By

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4 <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/127agnd.htm>

1980, the House of Representatives had only three per cent women's representation. Ten years ago it had reached 25 per cent and had remained static for the past four elections. He said Australia could not afford to be complacent; it needed to continue to meet the challenges that impeded the journey towards equity in representation.

2.20 He noted that there had been a change in culture in the way the Australian Parliament is run: the space that is now the day-care centre was once the Members' bar. Parliament now allowed nursing mothers to vote by proxy if they could not reach the chamber to vote. He said that there had been some indications that political parties would introduce quota systems as an incentive for women. Some political parties in Australia selected mentors to assist women candidates, which he considered to be a valuable notion. He concluded by saying that many of his role models and mentors when he first entered Parliament had been women. Today in Australia there was a woman Governor General, the current Prime Minister is a woman and the Speaker of the House of Representatives is a woman. He said the IPU had set the pace for gender representation.<sup>5</sup>



*Mr Harry Jenkins MP speaking during the Special Gender Partnership Session on Gender-sensitive Parliaments*

2.21 The final sitting of the session considered the question of parliamentary reforms required to achieve the goal of gender sensitivity. Briefings were provided on some of the successful assessments carried out by the Parliaments of Chile, Rwanda, Sweden and Uganda.

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5 Results of the 127<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly and related meetings, p 79, <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/127/results.pdf>

2.22 Following a presentation by the IPU Gender Partnership Group, the Assembly unanimously adopted the *Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments*. The Plan of Action is available online.<sup>6</sup>

### **Standing committees**

2.23 The IPU Assembly has three standing committees which discussed the following topics during the Assembly:

- *The responsibility to protect: The role of parliaments in safeguarding citizens' lives* (First Standing Committee on Peace and International Security).
- *Fair trade and innovative financing mechanisms for sustainable development* (Second Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade).
- *The use of media, including social media, to advance citizen engagement and democracy* (Third Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights).

2.24 Senator Sue Boyce represented Australia at the First Standing Committee, Mr Dick Adams MP and Mr Patrick Secker MP attended the Second Standing Committee and Senator Ursula Stephens attended the Third Standing Committee.

2.25 The panel discussions provided a good opportunity to share experiences and concerns among countries which would inform reports and draft resolutions to be prepared by the rapporteurs on each of these topics, which would form the basis of the Standing Committees' deliberations at the 128<sup>th</sup> Assembly in Quito, Ecuador, in March 2013.

#### ***First Standing Committee – Peace and International Security***

2.26 The panel discussion of the First Standing Committee opened with presentations from the co-Rapporteurs which focused on the concept of the responsibility to protect, how it had been applied, in particular during the recent events in the Middle East and North Africa, and the role that parliaments had to play. Introductory presentations were also delivered by Ms Tina Park, Co-Founder and Executive Director of the Canadian Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, and Mr Edward Luck, former Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General on the Responsibility to Protect.

2.27 Delegates from 28 parliaments and one regional parliamentary body took the floor during the debate. The participants acknowledged that parliaments should be more involved in ensuring application of the responsibility to protect, a concept that was constantly changing. They underscored that prevention was better than cure and that before any intervention the international community should exhaust all avenues for a peaceful settlement of disputes.

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6 <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/127agnd.htm>

### ***Second Standing Committee Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade***

2.28 The Second Standing Committee considered ways of achieving sustainable development objectives through fair international trade and increased reliance on innovative sources of development finance. The co-Rapporteurs presented a joint draft report which offered a broad overall framework for the debate while placing special emphasis on issues such as fair trade practices, the challenge of sustaining adequate levels of development finance at a time of economic and financial crisis, and the need to explore the potential of innovative financing mechanisms (private funds for the health sector, air ticket levy schemes, a tax on foreign exchange transactions and the use of guarantees and insurance).

2.29 Mr Patrick Secker MP said that he had some difficulty with the concept of free trade as he did not consider that it was free trade. He said that innovative financing for sustainable development should also support sustainable credit. He said that the answer was not to impose global taxes or seek to regulate markets as this would lead to increases in the cost of food. He said that he believed that it was more important to remove subsidies and non-tariff barriers as this would result in real free and fair trade.<sup>7</sup>

2.30 Mr Dick Adams MP noted the general support throughout the discussion for exploring new ways of financing sustainable development and progressing fair trade. He noted that the question of transparency in the supply chain had also been raised. He said that it was crucial to bring developing countries into supply chains and give them access to new technologies, better opportunities and greater skills. He said governance issues were also important and said that audits must become part of the process, ensuring that outcomes matched goals. He concluded by noting Australia's concerns about market distortion.<sup>8</sup>

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7 Results of the 127<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly and related meetings, p 102, <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/127/results.pdf>

8 Results of the 127<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly and related meetings, p 104, <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/127/results.pdf>



*Mr Patrick Secker MP speaking during the Second Standing Committee*

### ***Third Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights***

2.31 The discussion of the Third Standing Committee focused on the careful balance to be struck between the rights of people to freedom of expression and the need for mechanisms to hold the media and social media participants to account.

2.32 The panel discussion provided a good opportunity to share experiences among countries. In almost all countries, many people took part in the democratic and legislative process using social media and most parliaments used the Internet or social media to engage citizens in the parliamentary process.

2.33 Some participants raised questions of accountability, noting that social media had no mechanisms for ensuring that participants or the media were held to account. It was agreed that for social media to function democratically, mechanisms were needed to promote and oversee accountability in order to protect freedom of expression and other fundamental human rights. It was noted that funding for media was equally important, and care should be taken to avoid an overconcentration of the media in a few hands.



*Senator's Boyce and Stephens during the final sitting of the Third Standing Committee*

***Closing Session of the Assembly***

2.34 In closing the Assembly, both the President of the IPU and the President of the 127<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly underscored the success of the Assembly in terms of the quality of the deliberations, the high level of participation and the importance of the outcome documents that had been adopted.

## Chapter 3

### 191<sup>st</sup> Session of the Governing Council

3.1 The 191st Session of the Governing Council was held on 22 October 2012. The Governing Council is the plenary policy-making body of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). The committees and working groups of the IPU report to the Governing Council.

#### Membership of the IPU

3.2 At its sitting on 22 October, the Governing Council approved a request from the Parliament of Lesotho for its membership of the IPU to be held by both chambers of the Parliament.

#### Financial situation of the IPU

3.3 The IPU is funded by its members and associate members through annual assessed contributions and through voluntary funds provided by donors.

3.4 The Governing Council was presented with a comprehensive report on the financial situation of the IPU and an updated list of unpaid contributions as at 20 October 2012. The Council noted that on that date, only one Member had significant arrears and was subject to voting sanctions. The total amount of contributions in arrears was substantially reduced compared with previous years.

3.5 The Council took note of the Secretary-General's projected operating surplus of CHF 170,000 due to deferred expenditure on development of the IPU website, anticipated cost savings as well as cancelled and deferred staff positions resulting in savings in salaries. These savings would be partially offset by a reduction in staff assessment and an increase in tax payments to the French authorities. The first Assembly, the largest expense of the year to date, had been completed almost exactly within budget.

3.6 For the 2012 budget, the Secretary-General had set voluntary funding projections at CHF 1.2 million based on realistic expectations of known or obtainable funding rather than on total funding needs. The total amount of voluntary funds received by the end of 2012 was projected to reach CHF 1.9 million. The Governing Council was informed of the potential for increasing the level of voluntary contributions to fund IPU activities in the future.

#### Programme and budget for 2013

3.7 The Council received the consolidated budget proposal for 2013 and approved the 2013 budget of CHF 13,621,900. The approved budget and scale of contributions for 2013 are presented at pages 48 and 49 of the *Results of the 127<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly and related meetings*.<sup>1</sup>

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1 *Results of the 127<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly and related meetings*, <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/127/results.pdf>

3.8 Reporting on behalf of the Executive Committee, the Chairperson of the Sub-Committee on Finance, Mr K Örnfjäder (Sweden), stated that the Sub-Committee had guided the work of the Secretariat in the preparation of the budget. It was the first time the governing bodies had been so closely involved throughout the budget process.

3.9 The Governing Council heard that the budget was designed to cope with a freeze in assessed contributions at a time of economic hardship for many members. It reflected a reduction in the core expenditure budget for 2013 of CHF 400,000, which was partly compensated by a progressive increase in voluntary funding from external donors. The Council was advised that it was proposed to freeze additions to the reserve for major building repairs in 2013 and to transfer up to CHF 100,000 of the projected operational surplus for 2012 to the 2013 budget.

3.10 The Governing Council was informed that Japan, the biggest contributor to the IPU budget had asked the IPU to maintain its cost-cutting policy and had asked to have its contribution rate reviewed. The Governing Council asked the Sub-Committee on Finance to consider Japan's requests.

### **Implementation of the IPU Strategy for 2012-2017**

3.11 The Governing Council endorsed a set of proposals to modify the format of IPU Assemblies, improve the functioning of the Standing Committees and their bureaux and place the Committee on United Nations Affairs on the same footing as the Standing Committees. The Executive Committee will present more detailed plans to the Governing Council at the 128<sup>th</sup> Assembly with a view to implementation of a new system early in 2014.<sup>2</sup>

3.12 The Governing Council approved a proposal to expand the mandate of the IPU Advisory Group on HIV/AIDS to include maternal, newborn and child health issues and to adopt new rules for the Group.<sup>3</sup>

### **Cooperation with the United Nations system - IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs**

3.13 The Governing Council took stock of recent developments in IPU-United Nations (UN) cooperation and was informed of a range of activities carried out in collaboration with or in support of the UN. It welcomed the new and far-reaching resolution on Interaction between the UN, national parliaments and the IPU that had been adopted by the UN General Assembly in May 2012.<sup>4</sup>

3.14 The Council heard a report from Mr M. Traoré (Burkina Faso), President of the Advisory Group to the Committee on United Nations Affairs, on a mission by the Advisory Group to Albania and Montenegro. The mission had been conducted as part

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2 *Results of the 127<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly and related meetings*, p. 56, <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/127/results.pdf>

3 *Results of the 127<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly and related meetings*, p. 58, <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/127/results.pdf>

4 *Resolution on Interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and the IPU*, <http://www.ipu.org/Un-e/a-66-261.pdf>



of the Advisory Group's mandate to take stock of progress in implementing One UN reform (Delivering as One) at the country level, aimed at achieving greater coherence of UN operations and enhanced aid effectiveness.<sup>5</sup>

3.15 The IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs met from 22 to 25 October. Its discussions were framed by the recently adopted UN General Assembly Resolution on interaction between the UN, national parliaments and the IPU and a number of recent UN processes.

***Roundtable discussion: Multilateralism and the role of parliamentary diplomacy***

3.16 The Committee's first session took the form of a round-table discussion on multilateralism and the role of parliamentary diplomacy. This event brought together representatives from regional parliamentary bodies involved in various ways in international efforts to promote national reconciliation, peace-building and conflict prevention.

3.17 Speaking during the discussion, Mr Harry Jenkins MP said that multilateral, regional and bilateral agreements existed side by side. He said that the danger was that, with such a proliferation of agreements made at different levels, the instruments might actually contradict each other.

3.18 He noted that Australia was a member of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the Asia-Pacific Forum and observers at the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. It thus played different roles within the different bodies.

3.19 He said it was a well-known fact that bilateral agreements were strong and powerful instruments often negotiated through parliamentary democracy. He had personally learned more about some issues meeting directly with parliamentarians than at any other forum. The messages conveyed in bilateral relations were often different from those sent in a multilateral setting.

3.20 Mr Jenkins said that one of the IPU's great advantages was its diverse membership. Being a gathering of parliamentarians, it brought together members of ruling, opposition and other parties. The importance of that diversity lay in the fact that, although governments changed, through the participation of parliaments in parliamentary democracy, some measure of continuity could be guaranteed. He commended the IPU for its commitment to ensure that opportunities for parliamentary democracy in many of the hot spots in the world had been opened, and in many places achieved.<sup>6</sup>

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5 *Parliamentary Field Mission to Albania and Montenegro focuses on United Nations Reform 1-14 September 2012*, <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/127/unc-3r1.pdf>.

6 Results of the 127<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly and related meetings, p 49, <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/127/results.pdf>



*Mr Harry Jenkins MP speaking during the Roundtable Discussion on Multilateralism*

### ***United Nations Day***

3.21 The Committee marked United Nations Day on 24 October with a debate on the question: *Does the United Nations take democracy seriously enough?* The session was chaired by the Hon Mr Joel Fitzgibbon MP. Participants considered a number of areas in which the UN and the IPU were working together, in particular the rule of law, integrity of elections and the promotion of good governance and greater transparency in the work of parliaments.

3.22 The Committee also marked United Nations Day with the launch of a new IPU Handbook for parliamentarians on Supporting Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament. The handbook, which is intended as a practical tool for legislators, was produced in cooperation with Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament and the World Future Council. It identifies good practices and model legislation.



*The Hon Mr Joel Fitzgibbon MP chairing the a session of the IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs*

### ***United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development – Rio+20***

3.23 The committee took stock of Rio+20 in a sitting entitled: *What prospects for sustainable development?*

3.24 The committee expressed disappointment that Rio+20 had broken no new ground and had led to very few new commitments. At the same time, the committee noted that Rio+20 had helped to return the sustainability agenda to the top of the international agenda. The committee concluded that what would count now was what all stakeholders are willing to do to implement the Rio outcome.

### ***UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Five Years On***

3.25 The committee's final sitting examined the progress made and obstacles encountered in the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, five years after its adoption in 2007. Participants noted positive developments, such as the adoption of a national plan of action for implementing the Declaration in the Congo and the Declaration's incorporation into Bolivian law.

3.26 In his remarks during the discussion, Mr Harry Jenkins MP said that when he had been Speaker, one of his proudest achievements was the fact that, at the commencement of each sitting day, members of parliament paid their respects to the traditional owners of the land and the elders. He said that it was important to realise that Australia was experiencing a healing process and that healing and reconciliation were very important steps. Mr Jenkins said that it was important that the Australian Government had now expressed its support for the Declaration. The Government had assumed the responsibility for trying to achieve the principle of the Declaration and bring indigenous peoples to the negotiating table. He said the Australian Government was offering active support for the World Conference and funding to groups wishing to participate. It was a journey they were now taking together. He said that beyond the

political process, there was now a common desire to ensure that journey continued hand in hand. He said that decisions should be made by the indigenous peoples themselves; that they should have ownership of their journey.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Advisory Group of the IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs***

3.27 The Advisory Group of the IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs met on 4 April 2012. Australia is formally represented on the Advisory Group by The Hon Mr Joel Fitzgibbon MP.

3.28 The Advisory Group discussed preparations, content and objectives for the 2012 Parliamentary Hearing at the UN scheduled for 6 to 7 December 2012 in New York. The Annual Parliamentary Hearings bring members of parliament to the United Nations headquarters in New York for an interactive discussion with high-ranking UN officials, representatives of Member States and experts drawn from think tanks and civil society organisations around a main theme. The theme for the 2012 Hearing was: *A road less travelled: parliamentary approaches to conflict prevention, reconciliation and peace building*.

3.29 The Advisory Group agreed to schedule a meeting to coincide with the Parliamentary Hearing to receive a briefing on the main issues of the UN agenda and opportunities for parliamentary input and to further discuss the future of the Advisory Group in light of a proposal to transform the IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs into a permanent committee.

3.30 Members of the Advisory Group also attended an informal briefing by the IPU and the United Nations Millennium Campaign, entitled: *Getting there: toward the millennium development goals (MDGs) and beyond 2015*. The briefing reviewed ongoing cooperation between the IPU and the Millennium Campaign to support the implementation of the MDGs.

### **Recent specialised conferences and meetings**

3.31 The Governing Council took note of the results of the following specialised conferences and meetings:

- Regional Seminar on Joining the initiatives and experiences of national parliaments for an effective campaign against child trafficking and labour (<http://www.ipu.org/splz-e/abuja12.htm>);
- Parliamentary Briefing at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) (<http://www.ipu.org/splz-e/rio+20.htm>);
- Regional Debate on Gender-Sensitive Parliaments (<http://www.ipu.org/splz-e/chile12.htm>);
- Parliamentary Meeting on the occasion of the XIX International AIDS Conference (<http://www.ipu.org/splz-e/aids12.htm>);

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7 Results of the 127<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly and related meetings, p 68, <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/127/results.pdf>

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- World e-Parliament Conference 2012 (<http://www.ipu.org/splz-e/eparl12.htm>);
  - Parliamentary Meeting on the occasion of the High-level Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on the Rule of Law (<http://www.ipu.org/splz-e/unbrief12.htm>); and
  - the Seventh Meeting of Women Speakers of Parliament (<http://www.ipu.org/splz-e/wmnspk12.htm>).

3.32 At its sitting on 24 October, the Governing Council took note of the reports on the activities of the following plenary bodies and specialised committees:

- Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians;
- Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians;
- Committee on Middle East Questions;
- Gender Partnership Group, the Advisory Group on HIV/AIDS; and
- Meeting of Young Parliamentarians.

3.33 A summary of these reports is available at pages 13 to 15 of *Results of the 127<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly and related meetings*.<sup>8</sup>

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8 *Results of the 127<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly and related meetings*, <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/127/results.pdf>



## Chapter 4

### **Geopolitical groups, bilateral meetings and other activities**

4.1 During the 127<sup>th</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly (IPU), a number of subsidiary committees met and the Australian delegation took the opportunity presented by the IPU Assembly to hold several bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the Assembly. This chapter provides a record of those meetings.

#### **Meetings of geopolitical groups**

4.2 The IPU has six geopolitical groups that meet during the assemblies to discuss the operation and activities of the IPU. Geopolitical groups play an important role in the functioning of the IPU. Geopolitical groups 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.

4.3 Most member countries are members of at least one of these groups. Australia is a member of two geopolitical groups: the Asia-Pacific Group (APG) and the Twelve Plus Group. Pursuant to Article 25 of the Statutes of the Union, Australia has informed the Secretary-General that where it proposes to submit candidatures for positions within the IPU it will do so through the APG.

4.4 The Australian delegation participated in meetings of both of these geopolitical groups at the 127<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly.

#### ***Asia Pacific Geopolitical Group***

4.5 The APG met once during the 127<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly. It considered the following agenda items:

- report from Group representatives on the IPU Executive Committee;
- report of the ASEAN +3 meeting;
- consideration of proposals for the Emergency Item and nomination of representatives on the drafting Committee; and
- nominations for vacancies to be filled during the 127<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly.

4.6 The Group also considered a proposal from the Bangladeshi delegation that time should be set aside within future meetings of the Group to consider more substantive issues such as climate change. The Group agreed to adopt this approach from its next meeting.

#### ***Twelve Plus Group***

4.7 The Twelve Plus Group met on four occasions during the 127<sup>th</sup> Assembly and considered a number of matters on the Assembly agenda in detail. The Twelve Plus Group paid particular attention to the following matters:

- a report on the Group's Steering Committee meeting, held in Paris on Monday 17 September 2012;

- a report from Group representatives on the work of the Sub-committee on Finance and the Executive Committee noting: the number of outstanding yearly contributions; positive outcomes in securing voluntary contributions and the role IPU Members could play in supporting these efforts; and progress toward IPU compliance with International Public Sector Accounting Standards;
- nominations for vacancies to be filled;
- Emergency Item proposals;
- themes to be discussed by the three Standing Committees; and
- Applications for membership of the Group received from the Parliaments of Ukraine and Azerbaijan, agreeing to defer consideration of the application from the Ukrainian Parliament until the 128<sup>th</sup> Assembly in Quito (after the Ukraine elections in October 2012) and voting to reject the application from the Parliament of Azerbaijan.

4.8 The group also considered the Chairmanship of the Group. The current Chairman, Mr Robert-Denis del Picchia advised the Group that he wished to apply for another, final, term as Chair of the Group. Mr del Picchia was elected for a further term by acclamation.



*Mr Dick Adams MP and Senator Ursula Stephens at the luncheon for members of the Twelve Plus Geopolitical Group*

## **Bilateral meetings**

### ***Meeting with Irish Delegation***

4.9 The delegation's meeting with the delegation from the Irish Parliament, led by the Irish Speaker, Mr Patrick Burke, provided an opportunity to discuss Ireland's efforts to address its current economic situation. In the 15 years to 2007 Ireland experienced the fastest growing GDP growth in the OECD. However, from 2008 the



Irish economy contracted significantly. In 2010, the Irish Government reached an agreement with the European Union (EU) and the International Monetary Fund on a financial stabilisation package which required robust action on Ireland's part to reduce its budget deficit and implement austerity measures and financial and structural reforms.



*The Australian and Irish Delegations*

4.10 Mr Burke spoke frankly about Ireland's efforts to seek recognition from the EU of Ireland's status as a "special case" distinct from Spain, Portugal and Greece. He also provided an overview of the Irish Government's plans to strengthen the Irish economy through a strategy that focuses on promoting Irish culture and business abroad. Through a range of initiatives the Irish government hopes both to develop Ireland's business and trade relations and promote Ireland's international reputation.

4.11 Mr Burke outlined the Irish Government's interest in the economic possibilities of greater engagement with the Irish diaspora (estimated to number 70 million worldwide). In particular, the tourism-led initiative referred to as *The Gathering*, aims to mobilise the Irish diaspora to return to Ireland during 2013 to be part of specially organised local gatherings and events during the year. The concept for *The Gathering* grew out of the 2009 Global Irish Economic Forum. It is seen as an opportunity to develop more strategic relationships with Irish descendants living overseas and to provide a platform for them to contribute to the Republic's economic recovery.

4.12 In this context, the discussions turned to the approximately 80,000 holders of Irish passports who are permanent residents in Australia and over 2 million Australians with Irish ancestry. Both delegations noted the strong relationship between Australia and Ireland supported by strong people to people links and a number of bilateral agreements covering areas such as taxation, social security, medical treatment for travellers and working holidays for young people.

### *Meeting with Serbian Speaker*

4.13 The delegation's bilateral meeting with the Speaker of the Serbian Parliament, Mr Nebojša Stefanović, focussed on the committee systems of the two Parliaments. Mr Stefanović said that the Serbian Parliament was new and still developing its structures and he provided an outline of key changes he would like to facilitate within the Parliament, including changes to the committee system, to Parliament's rules and to the electoral laws. Mr Stefanović said that he considered a robust committee system to have a significant role to play in strengthening the Parliament and democracy. He said that he was very interested in the Australian Parliament's committee system as a model the Serbian Parliament could examine and draw lessons from.

4.14 The delegation provided an overview of the Australian Parliament's committee system and answered specific questions on committee reports and the extent to which Australian committee work could be considered parliamentary or political, the role of committee's in influencing legislative change, the use of Joint committees to consider overarching issues of national interest and the role of Senate Legislation committees in holding the Government to account through their examination of the Appropriation Bills during Senate Estimates hearings.

4.15 The meeting also provided an opportunity to discuss the critical role played by whips in the day-to-day operation of the Australian Parliament. Mr Joel Fitzgibbon MP said that the Australian Parliament's Whips had decided to address the issue of training and development for parliamentarians to hold such positions. He said that they were pleased to be able to use the opportunity provided by the IPU Assembly to explore the establishment of an international parliamentary network of whips and others with a similar range of organisational responsibilities within Parliaments.



*The Australian delegation with the Speaker of the Serbian Parliament,  
Mr Nebojša Stefanović*

### ***Luncheon with delegations from Pacific Island Parliaments***

4.16 As part of an ongoing commitment to supporting the participation of Pacific Island Parliaments at the IPU, the Australian and New Zealand delegations convened a luncheon with the delegations from the Federated States of Micronesia and Timor-Leste, and with Mr Siosifa Tu'utafiava, a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Tonga. Mr Tu'utafiava attended the Assembly in Québec as an observer with a view to Tonga's possible future affiliation.

4.17 Australia and New Zealand share a strong commitment to supporting the ongoing development of Pacific parliaments through the Pacific Parliaments Network and would like to see greater engagement of the IPU in the Pacific region.

4.18 The luncheon provided an informal opportunity to strengthen parliamentary relations between the five Parliaments, discuss a range of issues of relevance to Pacific Island Parliaments and allowed delegation members to share their impressions and experiences of the IPU Assembly.



*The Leader of the Australian Delegation met informally with Mr Siosifa Tu'utafiava, Member of the Legislative Assembly of Tonga*

### **Other meetings**

#### ***Informal meeting for the International Whips Network***

4.19 The Chief Government Whip, Mr Joel Fitzgibbon MP, initiated an informal meeting during the 127<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly to discuss the formation of an international network of whips and others with organisational responsibilities within the Parliament.

4.20 The meeting was chaired by Mr Fitzgibbon, and was attended by the Opposition Whip, Mr Patrick Secker MP, Mr Harry Jenkins MP and delegates from 12 parliaments. Mr Fitzgibbon outlined the background to consideration of a network

of members of parliament who perform duties as parliamentary whips or have similar roles within their parliaments. He referred to a workshop that had been held in Australia in July 2010 which had explored the issue of providing support for parliamentarians who held such roles.

4.21 Mr Fitzgibbon said that he saw the objectives of the network as being:

- to promote the professional development of parliamentary whips (and those with similar duties) for the benefit of parliaments, particularly those in emerging parliaments;
- to allow and encourage information sharing; and
- to allow and encourage whips (and their equivalents) to promote the work and objectives of the IPU.

4.22 Several matters arose from the meeting, including:

- the need to adopt a name for the network that reflects the diversity of the member parliaments;
- the benefit of holding a further meeting to coincide with the 128<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly in Quito, Ecuador in 2013;
- the desirability of the Australian Parliament establishing a proto-type website to be launched/displayed at the meeting in Ecuador;
- the possibility of holding a workshop in 2014 with a strategic focus on parliaments from developing countries; and
- the desirability of establishing the network as a pilot program for a period of 18 months, followed by an assessment to determine if the network has reached its goals of:
  - promoting the professional development of whips and equivalents;
  - allowing and encouraging information sharing;
  - allowing and encouraging whips and their equivalents to promote the work and objectives of the IPU; and
  - allowing cross-nation work in developing parliaments.

4.23 Mr Fitzgibbon closed the meeting by expressing the Australian Parliament's gratitude to the IPU for its support of the concept of the network and for its commitment of practical support in facilitating informal meetings through the provision of meeting rooms and interpreters and through the distribution and copying of support documents.

### ***Launch of handbook on Supporting Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament***

4.24 On 24 October 2012, Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament (PNND) and the IPU launched a parliamentary handbook entitled Supporting Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament.

4.25 The Chair of the session and co-Chair of the PNND, Mr Saber Chowdhury (Bangladesh) said that in 2009, the IPU had adopted an important consensus

resolution entitled: *Advancing nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament and securing the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty: the role of parliamentarians*. In 2011, the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General had followed up his five-point proposal and written to parliaments highlighting the key role parliamentarians could play in advancing the cause of a nuclear-weapon-free world. Mr Chowdhury said that the handbook illustrated important steps and provided practical tips to assist parliamentarians in taking up this role.

#### ***Workshop on new tools to promote nuclear disarmament***

4.26 Following the launch of the Handbook: Supporting Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, the IPU, together with PNND, the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Organisation (CTBTO), and the World Future Council, held a workshop for parliamentarians on how best to use the IPU Handbook. The purpose of the workshop was to familiarise participants with a range of online tools to assist parliamentarians in advancing nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. The Workshop was chaired by Mr Alyn Ware, Global Coordinator of PNND and was opened by Mr Harry Jenkins MP.



*Mr Harry Jenkins MP and Mr Alyn Ware, Global Coordinator of PNND at the workshop on new tools to promote nuclear disarmament*

4.27 Mr Jenkins offered a personal perspective on the IPU's involvement on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament issues which he said had paralleled his own involvement with the IPU. He said that the journey to the handbook and this workshop had begun with a bilateral meeting in the margins of the 116<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly in Nusa Dua, Bali, which led to the Australian delegation, with the support of Japan, the United Kingdom and Zambia, lodging a proposal at the 118<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly in Cape Town, South Africa, that the IPU consider the theme of *Advancing nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, and securing the entry into force of the*

*Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty: the role of Parliaments* at the 120<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. At the 120<sup>th</sup> Assembly in 2009 the IPU unanimously adopted the resolution that flowed from the debate of that theme. At the 125<sup>th</sup> Assembly in Bern, Switzerland, the IPU had convened an expert panel to continue the discussion on *Nuclear weapons – The road to zero* which he had been privileged to chair.

4.28 Mr Jenkins stressed that the goal of a nuclear free world posed a significant challenge and that the role to be played by parliaments and parliamentarians was an important one. He said that whether formally through legislatures or informally through opportunities such as this workshop at the IPU and the recent PNND Assembly in Astana, Kazakhstan, parliamentarians could engage with their colleagues to discuss practical steps toward nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament and that the handbook would assist them to do this. He said that through concerted cooperative action parliaments could work toward ensuring a nuclear-weapon-free future and that nothing was more important than this.

4.29 Speakers at the workshop included Mr Saber Chowdhury, the Executive Secretary of the CTBTO, Mr Tibor Tóth, Mr Randy Rydell, Senior Political Affairs Officer, UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, Ms H  l  ne Laverdi  re MP, Member and Co-Chair PNND Canada, and Mr Rob van Riet, World Future Council and co-author of the Handbook.

4.30 Prior to the workshop, Mr Harry Jenkins attended a private lunch with the co-Presidents of the PNND: Mr Saber Chowdhury, and Mr Mani Shankar Aiyar, Chair of the Rajiv Gandhi Action Plan Group, and the Speaker of the Parliament of Kazakhstan and Host of the 2012 PNND Assembly in Astana, Mr Nurlan Nigmatulin.

# **Chapter 5**

## **Meetings of the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments**

### **Introduction**

5.1 Mr David Elder, Deputy Clerk, House of Representatives, attended the meetings of the Association of Secretaries General of Parliament (ASGP) held in conjunction with the 127th Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Assembly in Québec City. The meetings of the ASGP were held from 22-25 October. In addition, on 26 October there was a joint IPU-ASGP conference, held in partnership with the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions section of Parliamentary Libraries and Research Services and the Global Centre for Information and Communication Technologies in Parliament, on ‘Parliamentary representation and communication, and the role of social media’.

### **Presentation on the parliamentary system in Canada**

5.2 The conference proceedings opened with a presentation on the Canadian parliamentary system, presented by Mr Gary O’Brien, Clerk of the Senate of Canada, and Ms Audrey O’Brien, Clerk of the Canadian House of Commons. The session set the scene well for the subsequent discussions.

### **Consideration of parliamentary matters**

#### *General debates*

5.3 The meetings of the ASGP continued the format of selected general thematic debate. One of the subjects for general debate was ‘The protection of witnesses who appear before parliamentary committees’. The debate, led by the Clerk of the National Assembly of Zambia, explored the experience of different jurisdictions with the powers to protect witnesses before parliamentary committees, and the particular place of public servants appearing as witnesses.

5.4 The other subject for general debate, ‘Personnel management for effective parliamentary services’, was conducted in an experimental format of informal discussion groups. It was agreed that the experimental format was a great success, allowing general discussion of the topic by more of the attendees. It is likely that a similar format will be followed at future meetings for issues of debate.

#### *Communications*

5.5 There were also presentations on specific parliamentary topics:

- The situation of the Parliament during a prolonged period of political crisis;
- Open Parliament: the experience of the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies;
- Foreign relations of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey and strengthening inter-parliamentary cooperation;
- Parliamentary diplomacy: diplomacy with a democratic mandate;

- Roadmap 2014: ongoing work to develop the Riksdag Administration;
- Relations between the two Houses of Parliament;
- Role of the Swiss Parliament in evaluating the effectiveness of public policy;
- Enhancing parliamentary oversight: the South Africa experience; and
- Petitions/representations: an inherent right of the people.

### **Briefing by the IPU**

5.6 Delegates were briefed on PARLINE, the IPU's database on national parliaments. It contains information, provided by member parliaments, on the structure and working methods of every national parliament. PARLINE is organised on the basis of the individual parliamentary chamber, with each having a separate entry (267 chambers in 190 countries where a national legislature exists).

5.7 PARLINE has up to eight information modules for each chamber with information about:

- general information such as the official name and senior parliamentary figures;
- electoral system;
- last elections;
- election archives;
- presidency of the parliament;
- parliamentary mandate;
- parliament oversight; and
- specialised bodies.

5.8 PARLINE is updated by a correspondent from the relevant parliament, and delegates were urged to ensure that latest information for their Parliament was available on PARLINE and invited to provide advice on the data being collected. PARLINE can be found at <http://www.ipu.org/parline>.

### **Parliamentary representation and communication, and the role of the media**

5.9 As noted earlier, there was a workshop held on 26 October on the topic of 'Parliamentary representatives and communication, and the role of social media'. The workshop included:

- presentations by members of a number of different parliaments on social media and parliamentarians, the risks and benefits for representation;
- a practical session on using social media;
- a discussion of the issue of social media and citizens: are parliaments ready?;
- a demonstration from some parliaments of innovations in the use of social media; and



- a discussion of draft guidelines for members on the use of social media, prepared by the IPU in partnership with the ASGP, IFLA and the Global Centre for ICT. The draft guidelines can be found at <http://www.ipu.org/splz-e/asgp12.htm>.

## **Administrative matters**

### *New members*

5.10 A number of new members were admitted to the ASGP.

### *Next meeting*

5.11 A draft agenda for the next session, to be held in Quito, Ecuador in March 2013, was circulated. When further developed it will be placed on the ASPG website at <http://www.asgp.info/en/home>.



# Chapter 6

## Visit to Argentina

### Introduction

6.1 The delegation's visit to Argentina provided an opportunity for the Australian Parliament to lend support to efforts to raise Australia's profile in Argentina and highlight the potential for greater cooperation between Argentina and Australia.

6.2 The visit underscored the many similarities between the two countries. Both are large market-oriented economies with relatively small populations and strong resource bases. Australia is a relatively minor investor in Argentina. However, Argentina's international competitiveness in mining and agribusiness means it is a relatively attractive investment environment.

6.3 While the economic relationship between Australian and Argentina is good, it is relatively static. Through its meetings the delegation was able to discuss some of the challenges to further Australian investment, often in a more informal and candid way than formal bilateral meetings might otherwise allow.

### Parliament-to-parliament contact

6.4 Australia has strong parliamentary links with Argentina, established through a regular program of visits. The former Speaker, Mr Harry Jenkins MP visited Argentina in April 2011 and prior to that an Argentine Congressional delegation visited Australia in October 2010. The delegation received a very warm welcome at the Argentine Parliament and its meetings reaffirmed the importance of the relationship for both Australia and Argentina.



*The delegation with the Provisional President of the Senate,  
Senator Beatriz Roikés de Alperovich*

### ***Meeting with Provisional President of the Senate***

6.5 The delegation was privileged to meet with the Provisional President of the Senate, Senator Beatriz Roikés de Alperovich. The titular President of the Senate is the Vice President of Argentina. The Provisional President provides day to day leadership of the Senate. Senator Alperovich is the first woman to hold this key post in the Argentine Parliament.

6.6 Senator Alperovich said that the delegation was visiting the Argentine Senate at an important time as the Senate was discussing the federal budget, an interesting set of reforms to the Argentine Civil Code to lower the voting age to 16 and allow foreign-born non-citizens to vote. Senator Alperovich said that some claim that the bill is merely a political tactic to bolster support for the President, while others claim the bill will strengthen democracy by allowing politically active youth and foreign non-citizens to be involved in politics.

6.7 The delegation said that Australia was also considering a set of interesting reforms in the form of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The delegation explained that the NDIS, which aims to improve access and support for people with disabilities, would have important flow on effects for economic productivity through greater engagement of carers and people with disabilities.

6.8 Following this meeting, the delegation was given a tour of the Senate and received a protocol greeting in the Senate Chamber.

### ***Meeting with Foreign Affairs Committees and Argentine-Australian Friendship Group***

6.9 The delegation's meeting with members of the Foreign Affairs Committees of the National Congress and the Argentine-Australian Parliamentary Friendship Group of the National Senate revealed a strong interest in increased Australian involvement in Argentina, particularly in mining.

6.10 The meeting allowed for a frank discussion of the impact of mining on the environment. Committee members told the delegation that there is strong opposition to mining in some parts of Argentina and that half of Argentina's provinces have banned mining due to environmental and community protests. Such protests centre on concerns that international companies are not as compliant with international environmental standards in the developing world as they are domestically. The delegation was able to discuss Australia's approach to managing the environmental impacts of mining under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. The delegation explained that before companies take any action that could have a significant impact on the environment, they must satisfy certain environmental assessment requirements.

### ***Meeting with Ministry of Foreign Affairs***

6.11 The delegation's meeting with the Under Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador José Alberto Vitar, provided an opportunity to discuss the relationship between Australia and Argentina as both competitors seeking to export the same products into the same markets and as partners in support of trade liberalisation and in a number of key areas of research and development. Australia and Argentina share

common interests in international peacekeeping, nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, Antarctica, international environment policy, trade liberalisation and economic cooperation policies. Both countries are active in the G20 forum addressing the global financial crisis and identifying reforms to the global financial system. Argentina's role as an interlocutor on the World Trade Organisation Doha Round negotiations and in the Cairns Group is important to Australia. As major wine-producing countries, Australia and Argentina work together through the World Wine Trade Group to advance favourable international trade conditions in relation to wine.

6.12 Australia participates in the CER-Mercosur Dialogue, which brings together Australia, New Zealand and Mercosur member countries with the aim of strengthening cooperation on global trade policy issues and promoting inter-regional trade and investment. The delegation appreciated the opportunity to gain a clearer understanding of the relationships between the individual members of Mercosur.

6.13 Mr Vitar used the example of discussions within Mercosur around sugar production to illustrate the value of parliament-to-parliament relations in brokering agreement in difficult areas. In the case of the sugar industry, he explained that moves toward greater integration of the Brazilian and Argentinian sugar industries raised concerns for Argentina with regard to the viability of its sugar mills. He said that this had been the source of protracted bilateral discussion until an Argentinian parliamentary delegation had travelled to Brasilia to meet with members of the Brazilian Parliament. Within a short space of time an agreement was reached regarding a transitional approach to integration.



*The delegation and HE Ambassador Patricia Holmes with members of the Foreign Affairs Committees and Argentine-Australian Friendship Group*

## **Opportunities for Australian business in Argentina**

6.14 There are currently over 30 subsidiaries of Australian companies operating in Argentina in the mining, agribusiness and services sectors. The delegation observed a somewhat contradictory attitude to Australian commercial engagement within Argentina. On the one hand, the delegation noted a consistent message of strong interest in further Australian investment. The Argentine Government has previously expressed interest in developing commercial engagement with Australia and has signed several agreements with Australia to promote this. These agreements include an investment protection agreement, a double taxation agreement and Memoranda of Understanding covering scientific and technological cooperation, air services, education and training and the development of Argentina's rail infrastructure.

6.15 At the same time, the delegation noted that further expansion of Australia's commercial links with Argentina is hampered by current policy and administrative settings which make Argentina a less attractive destination for international investors compared with other economies in the region.

6.16 The delegation is grateful to HE Ambassador Patricia Holmes for enabling the delegation to gain a firsthand understanding of the business opportunities and challenges for Australian business in Argentina. The reception she hosted in the Delegation's honour underscored the positive light in which Australia is held in Argentina and provided a valuable opportunity to gain a closer understanding of the social, environmental and economic context with which Australian companies would need to engage.

## **Visit to San Juan**

6.17 The delegation is indebted to the Argentine Parliament and the Governor of San Juan Province, Mr Jose Luis Gioja, for facilitating a visit to San Juan. The delegation was impressed by the proactive and pragmatic approach the government of San Juan has adopted to economic development in the Province. The comprehensive briefing provided by Governor Gioja on the Province's plans for future development, demonstrated a significant commitment to capitalising on San Juan's natural resources. The Governor said that he was honoured to host the delegation and said that the visit was a positive step toward enhancing ties between San Juan Province and Australia which would build on the already positive relationship established with Australia's Ambassador to Argentina.

6.18 Governor Gioja noted the many similarities between Australia and San Juan, including climate, terrain and mineral wealth. As in Australia, mining has made a significant contribution to the economy of the Province. He also described San Juan's achievements in clean energies, particularly solar energy, and said that the government was seeking to establish a technical hub in San Juan. The ultimate aim is to produce all elements of San Juan's solar plants in the Province.

6.19 Governor Gioja said that there are many ways in which Australia could assist San Juan to achieve its development goals. He said that San Juan has a keen interest in developing a sustainable and responsible mining industry and noted that Australia could contribute significantly to this through its experience and expertise in mining

safety and health, managing environmental impacts and working with local and indigenous communities.

6.20 The delegation was impressed by plans to construct a tunnel to connect San Juan with Chile. The planned tunnel is a key component of the 'Bioceanic Corridor' that would connect the Chilean port city of Coquimbo on the Pacific to the southern Brazilian city of Porto Alegre, near the Atlantic. Governor Gioja said that the construction of the tunnel could be very valuable for the Province enabling dramatic savings in the time and cost of transporting San Juan's exports, with flow on impacts for the province's balance of trade.



*The delegation and HE Ambassador Patricia Holmes with the Governor of San Juan Province, Mr Jose Luis Gioja*

### ***Visit to Ullúm Dam and EPSE solar facility at Ullúm***

6.21 During its visit to San Juan the delegation was able to inspect two clean energy projects established by, San Juan's energy company, Energia Provincial Sociedad del Estado (EPSE).

6.22 The President of EPSE, Mr Victor Manuel Dona told the delegation that EPSE exemplifies Argentina's interest in renewable energy. EPSE manages a range of hydro, solar, wind and geothermal projects in San Juan. Lake Ullum Dam feeds a hydroelectric power station and provides the means of irrigating 800 square kilometres of arable land in the Tulum Valley.

6.23 Through EPSE, San Juan actively promotes solar energy. Several photo voltaic systems have been installed in the province to date. The Pilot Photovoltaic Generation Plant 'San Juan I' is Argentina's first solar electrical generation plant. The delegation received a comprehensive briefing and tour of the plant. The delegation heard that the plant is expected to have a production capacity of at least 70 megawatts per annum for domestic and industrial use.

6.24 The San Juan Government plans to begin vertically integrated photo voltaic production by the end of 2014. Using components from Germany and China the government plans to produce everything from crystalline silicon ingots to modules. In the second phase of the project, the government expects that the production plant would begin manufacturing its own polysilicon. In the first phase of the project, solar grade silicon for ingot production is to be provided by local San Juan company Electrometalúrgica Andina.

6.25 EPSE is also investigating the use of solar panels on homes and business premises with the option to return energy to the grid. Consideration is also being given to developing regulations to manage the price structure. The delegation noted that energy costs attract a 25 per cent subsidy in Argentina and initiated a discussion around the importance of price signals in driving efficiencies in the use of energy.



*The delegation and HE Ambassador Patricia Holmes toured the Pilot Photovoltaic Generation Plant 'San Juan I'*

### ***Meeting with Mining Ministers***

6.26 The delegation received a comprehensive briefing on San Juan's economy and mining industry from San Juan's Minister for Production and Economic Development, Mr Marcelo Alós, and Minister for Mining, Mr Felipe Saavedra. The delegation noted that the strategic focus for development within the province is focused on maximising San Juan's mineral and agricultural resources. The key focus is on agribusiness, stock breeding, tourism and particularly mining, given the Province's significant mineral resources.

6.27 Minister Alós said that San Juan Province is determined to create an environment of legal and economic stability and security to attract both national and foreign private investment. He said that the Province has also developed an



environmental policy aimed at facilitating the maintenance of healthy ecosystems and a socially responsible mining industry through community participation and the active commitment of mining companies.

6.28 The Ministerial briefing was attended by representatives from a number of Australian companies with interests in San Juan's mining and agribusiness industries, including Troy Resources Limited, Xstrata Copper, Argentina Mining Limited . A number of these representatives remarked that they had been attracted to San Juan by the clear leadership and vision of its administration, which they emphasised was not typical of all provinces in Argentina.

6.29 The committee noted that there was significant support for the proposed tunnel as it would open the way for San Juan's participation in additional markets by providing shorter transport distances which would have a direct impact on the viability of projects. Business representatives emphasised the significant transport costs associated with export and supply routes.

### **Clean energy – nuclear power**

6.30 The delegation's visit to Argentina's National Atomic Energy Commission's (CNEA) facility Centro Atómico Constituyentes was a significant reminder of the strong basis for cooperation between Argentina and Australia. In 2001, Australia signed a Nuclear Cooperation and Safeguards Agreement with Argentina which provides a broad framework for cooperation in nuclear science and technology. This agreement followed the signing of a contract between the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO) and an Argentine company INVAP for the design and construction of the OPAL reactor in Sydney.

6.31 CNEA is the Government agency responsible for nuclear research and development in Argentina. It was established in 1950, under the government of Juan Perón, with the aim of developing nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. The commission's facilities include three major atomic research centres, each including a research reactor: the Centro Atómico Constituyentes and Ezeiza in Buenos Aires Province and San Carlos de Bariloche in the southern province of Rio Negro. In all, five research reactors are operating in Argentina and another is planned, similar to Australia's OPAL reactor.

6.32 Centro Atómico Constituyentes has pioneered the construction of research reactors in Argentina, and has research groups in metallurgy, physics and chemistry. The delegation received a comprehensive briefing and tour of CNEA's facilities on the outskirts of Buenos Aires hosted by The President of CNEA, Ms Norma Boero and the Manager of Environmental Protection and Safety, Mr Enrique Cinat. The tour included a visit to the nuclear research reactor RA-1, the Particle Accelerator (Tandar Project) and to the Fuel Elements Plant.

6.33 Argentina currently has two nuclear power plants in operation: a 335Mw plant built by German company Siemens and a 600MW facility built by Canada's CANDU. The delegation heard that long-delayed work on a third plant had recommenced under the current government and that plans had been announced for a fourth plant.

## Visit to Marcos Paz



*The delegation with the Mayor of Marcos Paz*

6.34 The delegation's visit to Marcos Paz provided it with an opportunity to gain an understanding of some of the challenges facing a province with an agriculture based economy. Marcos Paz is located 48 kilometres west of Buenos Aires. The delegation met with the Mayor of Marcos Paz, Mr Ricardo Curutchet.

6.35 The delegation also visited an agricultural high school. The delegation heard that the school had been established in what was originally a country estate that had not been farmed for some time. The main purpose of the school is to enable its students to transition into employment in agribusiness and as such, it offers courses tailored to the needs of the local area. The courses seek to foster a culture of sustainable production for export.

### **El Honero**

6.36 The delegation was privileged to visit El Honero, located in the outer suburb of Lomas de Zamora in Buenos Aires, to hear about a Direct Aid Project (DAP) funded through the Australian Embassy. The delegation met with the project's coordinators, Ms Betiana Caceras and Ms Melisa Leach and a number of the young people involved in the project.

6.37 The aim of the project, 'Young People for Health and Life' is to establish networks within the local community to assist with the dissemination of health education and the promotion of greater understanding of sexual health and reproductive rights. The program uses peer networks to disseminate information and has established five youth groups in Buenos Aires. The delegation heard that by using a range of activities, including workshops focused on music and art, the project has been able to reach out to young people aged between 15 and 24. The delegation heard that beyond providing means of disseminating health information, the youth groups were also providing an opportunity for young people to develop new skills and confidence.



*The delegation with coordinators and participants in the Direct Aid Project El Honero*

6.38 The delegation was pleased to note that the project was seeking to continue its work beyond the term of the DAP funding arrangements by drawing on the skills and initiative of the young people themselves. The delegation welcomed this opportunity to see firsthand the significant impact that small amounts of Australian aid can have within a community.

### **Human rights**

6.39 Argentina continues to deal with the lingering consequences of wholesale human rights abuses committed by the military regime that ruled the country from 1976-1983. President Christina Fernandez, like her predecessor, the late Nestor Kichner has prioritised the bringing to justice of the human rights offenders of the late 1970s/early 80s as a policy objective.

6.40 This has resulted in a good working relationship between the government and most major Argentine human rights NGOs, including the Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo. Despite this, some ongoing human rights issues are yet to be effectively addressed in Argentina, notably in relation to policing methods and prison conditions.

6.41 The delegation's visit to the Memory Museum provided a sobering reminder of Argentina's recent history under the military junta. Commonly referred to as 'El Proceso' or the dirty war, approximately 9,000 people were murdered or disappeared during this period.

6.42 The Memory Museum was established in 2004 on the site of the former Navy School of Mechanics which had been used as a clandestine detention and interrogation (torture) centre during the 1976-83 regime. It was one of the largest of many such centres dotted around Buenos Aires and elsewhere in Argentina at the time. According

to NGO estimates, some 5000 political detainees were held there under the regime. Many of them were subsequently murdered.

### **Acknowledgements**

6.43 The delegation is grateful to the Argentine Parliament and to the Australian Embassy in Buenos Aires for arranging such an informative and interesting program for this visit. The delegation's meetings with the Argentine Parliament underscored the key role that parliament-to-parliament relationships can play in assisting the bilateral relationship between Australia and Argentina. Such relationships provide an environment of understanding and trust that can enable frank discussion of sensitive issues, and can influence subsequent discussion of policy and legislation in parliament and in formal bilateral negotiations.

6.44 The delegation noted a consistently high level of interest in Australia establishing a stronger economic presence in Argentina. Parliamentarians, business leaders and NGOs all stressed the many advantages to greater Australian investment in Argentina. Australian business representatives operating in a range of sectors within Argentina spoke positively about the prospects for growth and their long term commitment to Argentina. The delegation's visit to San Juan underscored the opportunities that can flow to Australia from the development in that Province under the proactive leadership of Governor Gioja.

6.45 The delegation wishes to express its sincere thanks to the Argentine Parliament for the time and resources it devoted to the delegation's visit, and to the many individuals and groups who made time available to meet with the delegation during its time in Argentina. The delegation would particularly like to recognise the time and support lent to the visit by Senator Sonia Escudero, President of the Australia/Argentina Parliamentary Friendship Group. The assistance and briefings provided by Senator Escudero and her staff greatly enhanced the delegation's experience of Argentina.

6.46 The delegation is grateful to HE Ambassador Patricia Holmes, and other staff of the Australian Embassy in Buenos Aires for arranging a varied and informative program and for providing the delegation with briefing and support throughout its visit. Their thoughtfulness and attention to detail contributed significantly to the success of the visit.

# Appendix 1

## Visit Programs

### **127<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly – Quebec City, Canada**

#### ***Sunday, 21 October 2012***

- Twelve Plus Geopolitical Group Meeting
- Asia-Pacific Geopolitical Group Meeting
- Twelve Plus Geopolitical Group Luncheon
- Meeting of Advisers and Secretaries to delegations
- Inaugural Ceremony of the 125th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union
- Reception for all Delegates courtesy of the Host Parliament at the Federal Parliament

#### ***Monday, 22 October 2012***

- Twelve Plus Geopolitical Group Meeting
- Governing Council: membership, reports; finance; presentation of the budget
- Third Standing Committee Panel Discussion
- Assembly: Opening sitting: key note address and Special debate on *Citizenship, identity and linguistic and cultural diversity in a globalised world*; adoption and debate of emergency items
- Assembly: Debate on the emergency item
- IPU Committee on UN Affairs: Round table discussion on *Multilateralism and the role of parliamentary diplomacy*

#### ***Tuesday, 23 October 2012***

- Assembly: Key note address and continuation of Special Debate on Citizenship
- Special Gender Partnership Session: Gender sensitive parliaments
- International Whips Network Meeting
- First Standing Committee Panel Discussion: *Enforcing the responsibility to protect: The role of parliament in safeguarding civilians' lives*
- Reception for all Assembly participants

***Wednesday, 24 October 2012***

- Twelve Plus Geopolitical Group Meeting
- Assembly: IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs Special Session: Does the UN take 'Democracy' seriously enough?
- Launch of Handbook for Parliamentarians: *Supporting Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament*
- Panel Session: *Creating opportunities for youth in today's global economy*
- Workshop: *New tools to promote nuclear disarmament*
- Governing Council: debate, presentation of reports and adoption of decisions
- Panel Session: *Building peace after conflict*
- Advisory Group of the IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs
- Reception for all participants – National Assembly of Québec

***Thursday, 25 October 2012***

- Assembly: Key note address and conclusion of Special Debate
- IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs: Rio+20 in perspective: what hope for sustainable development?
- Panel Session: Parliamentary immunity: benefit or burden?
- Special Gender Partnership Session: Gender-sensitive Parliaments
- Informal Panel on Parliamentary and Political Law

***Friday, 25 October 2012***

- Twelve Plus Geopolitical Group Meeting
- Special Gender Partnership Session: Gender-sensitive Parliaments, break out groups and presentation of plan of action
- Joint IPU-ASGP Session: Parliamentary representation and communication, and the role of social media
- Closing session of Assembly

## **Bilateral visit to Argentina**

### ***Saturday, 13 October 2012***

- Arrival in Buenos Aires

### ***Sunday, 14 October 2012***

- Embassy briefing

### ***Monday, 15 October 2012***

- Visit to Atomic Centre
- Visit to rural Estancia in Ciudad de Marcos Paz
- Reception with government, congressional, business and NGO representatives hosted by HE Ambassador Patricia Holmes

### ***Tuesday, 16 October 2012***

- Visit to DAP project El Honero
- Guided tour of Argentine Congress
- Meeting with Foreign Relations Committees of the Senate and Lower House and the Argentina-Australia Parliamentary Friendship Group
- Dinner and Tango Show hosted by Argentine Parliament

### ***Wednesday, 17 October 2012***

- Meeting with Ambassador Jose Alberto Vitar, Foreign Ministry
- Meeting with Provision President of the Senate
- Lunch hosted by Argentine Senate
- Visit and Protocol Greeting in Senate sitting
- Depart for San Juan Province

### ***Thursday, 18 October 2012***

- Meeting with Governor of San Juan
- Visit to San Juan Pilot Photovoltaic Generation Plant
- Lunch hosted by San Juan Governor
- Meeting with Minister of Production and Economic Development and Minister of Mining

***Friday, 19 October 2012***

- Visit to Museum for Memory and for the Promotion of Defense of Human Rights
- Depart Argentina for Québec City



## **Appendix 2**

### **Speech delivered by Mr Dick Adams MP, Leader of the Australian Delegation to the 127th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Quebec City, Quebec, Canada**

#### **Enhancing political participation and representation of minority groups in the parliamentary processes**

As the leader of the Australian delegation, I would firstly like to take this opportunity to thank the IPU, Quebec city and Canada for hosting this event – and in particular, thank the IPU Committee for their work over the last few days in having everything running smoothly. I am sure it will prove to be a very successful conference.

Australia is a modern multicultural society that has been successful because of its stable, democratic system and strong economic development. This has been greatly assisted by diversity being recognized and celebrated. It is understood that it is important to ensure that everyone is empowered to participate fully in the processes of Government.

At the heart of Australia's diversity are its indigenous people.

It has now been recognized that our indigenous people were the first people in Australia and the very much more recent European arrivals have no greater rights.

This was acknowledged fully by the apology of the Australian people through Parliament that recognized the many wrongs that took place from early settlement to the present.

Engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, our indigenous Australians, continues to be a challenge, because they have been isolated by the vast distances and lack of means of communication until recently.

These barriers have led to limited enrolment and participation in the political process of all minority groups, but are heightened in the case of indigenous people, who have the added disadvantage of lower than average, literacy levels, and difficulty in accessing health, housing, jobs and education services.

But now a number of programs including a strong emphasis on more inclusive education programs, as well as outreach services and workers, are addressing this issue.

We still have a way to go.

As indigenous and migrant communities have become more enfranchised, they have been more involved in looking for representation in all levels of government.

I believe we have a relaxed open society with a strong feeling and insistence on giving people a 'fair go' – something I suspect that comes from our convict beginnings and the reliance on mateship!

Through waves of migration, we have become a more diverse and complex society, affected by and responsive to, a more globalized connected world. Sustaining a fair and inclusive multicultural society has therefore become a more sophisticated exercise.

We have to ensure that our population feels engaged in their country in all ways; they need to feel that they are able to make a contribution, and that they enjoy the regard and respect of their fellow citizens.

As we have seen so sadly around the world, when groups are alienated or disconnected, it can be divisive and destructive to democratic processes.

None of us has the perfect answer, but in the short time I have available, I would like to share with you some of what I believe are Australia's critical initiatives to sustain a successful and democratic society.

Firstly, Australia is one of the longest-lived, continuous stable democracies of the world. This suggests that political participation has been sufficiently strong and inclusive to enable Australia's political system and the government it produces, to enjoy legitimacy in the eyes of the people.

Various commentators put this down to the fact that voting is compulsory and that there are strong campaigns operating annually to ensure that people enrol to vote once eligible at 18.

Therefore I believe that our extensive free education system has been a major plank in building our democracy.

Through this, we have been able to increase the knowledge of democratic and electoral processes; increase levels of enrolment; increase levels of participation in electoral processes; and to decrease levels of informal voting.

Our open election process which allows any Australian citizen to seek public office allows that feeling that "anyone can be a Prime Minister" if they can gain the trust of the people through their political Party or grouping. We have many nationalities and ethnic backgrounds making up our three levels of Government – and we are improving on the numbers of our Aboriginal Members.

Political parties play a role – and a strong Government is enhanced by a strong opposition where each can be "free" to comment and criticize the others policies.

Another means by which Australians can become involved in political participation is through community action groups via representative organisations or peak bodies.

Unions, Migrant Centres, lobby groups of specific interests in areas such as health, housing, indigenous affairs, environmental groups and many others have all given an opportunity for citizens to make their points of view clear to their political leaders. There is also of course the social media that has been the subject of other debates here.

They always say there is strength in numbers, so it's not just at the ballot box that Australians in groups can sway political directions. Encouraging people to work together for a particular end is all part of that political process.

These groups can contribute to the broader political debate and help refine policy making and governance issues.

For example Muslim organisations have been prominent in engaging with governments and agencies to help resolve political tensions caused by wider global conflicts. Many State and Local Government agencies have established formal consultative mechanisms through which minorities may contribute their views and aspirations to decision makers and service providers.

The Australian Government encourages migrants to become citizens and conducts regular formal ceremonies to celebrate the taking up of citizenship and offers grants to community organisations to inform and support migrants as they adjust to Australian social and political norms.

All school children have access to lessons in civics and citizenship as part of a national curriculum aimed at developing active and informed citizens. Yet there is still some complacency in Australia about citizenship programs, as we tend to take our stable democracy for granted.

As an individual who left school without the basics in reading and writing, I know that there are many in our society with English as a first language, who have been disconnected from the main stream, simply because they did not benefit greatly from education. There are still gaps in our system, but Australia is working very hard to ensure those gaps are being filled.

No country can afford to leave their people in ignorance as their young are the bright future.

So I reiterate that it is critical that there is an inclusive, effective and relevant education system to ensure we engage our diverse community, particularly our young people, in our democracy.

As Kofi Annan said:

"No-one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth. A society that cuts off from its youth severs its lifeline."

I thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak to you on these matters.