



**Parliament of Australia**

**Parliamentary Delegation**

**to**

**142<sup>nd</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly**

**Virtual session**

**24-28 May 2021**

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## **Members of the Delegation**

### **Leader of the Delegation**

Ms Lucy Wicks MP  
Federal Member for Robertson, New South Wales  
Liberal Party of Australia

### **Delegates**

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

Senator the Hon Sarah Henderson  
Senator for Victoria  
Liberal Party of Australia

Mr Julian Hill MP  
Federal Member for Bruce, Victoria  
Australian Labor Party

### **Official**

Ms Sophie Dunstone  
Delegation Secretary

## 142<sup>nd</sup> IPU Assembly – Virtual session

Originally, the 142<sup>nd</sup> IPU Assembly was scheduled for Geneva Switzerland in April 2020. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Executive Committee decided that the 142<sup>nd</sup> IPU Assembly would be held during the week of 24 May 2021 in virtual format. In the weeks preceding the Assembly, there were meetings of the Standing Committees, the Forum of Women Parliamentarians and the Forum of Young Parliamentarians, and the other subsidiary bodies.

The overall theme of the Assembly was *Overcoming the pandemic today and building a better tomorrow: the role of parliaments*. The Assembly was attended by 1,073 delegates, 755 of whom were parliamentarians from 133 Member Parliaments. Of the 755 parliamentarians that attended, 288 were women (38.1%) and 193 were young MPs (25.6%). A total of 52 Presiding Officers and 38 Deputy Presiding Officers were in attendance. Five Associate Members and a number of observers were also represented.<sup>1</sup>

The Australian delegation was led by Ms Lucy Wicks MP, and included Senator the Hon Sarah Henderson, Senator Deborah O'Neill and Mr Julian Hill MP.

## Background

The IPU is the international organisation of parliaments of sovereign states. The IPU works with parliaments to promote democratic governance, institutions and values and aims to improve lives by building strong national parliaments that can deliver better outcomes for citizens. It does this by:

- equipping members of parliament and parliaments to make changes through their own work;
- building on the expertise of its members;
- encouraging dialogue and bringing together members of parliament from across the world; and
- considering questions of international interest and concern.

Founded in 1889, there are currently 179 parliaments that are members of the IPU and 13 associate members (mostly parliaments drawn from groups of nations, or similar bodies).<sup>2</sup> Most IPU members are affiliated with one of six geopolitical groups that are currently active in the IPU.

The IPU Strategy for 2017-2021 lists eight objectives:

- build strong, democratic parliaments
- advance gender equality and respect for women's rights
- protect and promote human rights
- contribute to peace building, conflict prevention and security
- promote inter-parliamentary dialogue and cooperation

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<sup>1</sup> A list of member states and observers is available in the *Results of the Proceedings of the 142<sup>nd</sup> Assembly* available at: <https://www.ipu.org/event/142nd-ipu-assembly#event-sub-page-23958/>

<sup>2</sup> A list of current members of the IPU is available on the IPU website: <https://www.ipu.org/about-us/members/>

- promote youth empowerment
- mobilise parliaments around the global development agenda
- bridge the democracy gap in international relations.<sup>3</sup>

The IPU Assembly is the principal statutory body of the IPU and brings together parliamentarians to consider international issues and make recommendations for action.

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

## Assembly

The 142<sup>nd</sup> Assembly was formally opened on Wednesday, 26 May 2021. The Assembly's agenda included the following items:

- General Debate on the theme *Overcoming the pandemic today and building a better tomorrow: the role of parliaments*;
- Parliamentary strategies to strengthen peace and security against threats and conflicts resulting from climate-related disasters and their consequences (Standing Committee on Peace and International Security);
- Mainstreaming digitalization and the circular economy to achieve the SDGs, particularly responsible consumption and production (Standing Committee on Sustainable Development);
- Reports of the Standing Committees; and
- Approval of the subject items for the Standing Committee on Peace and International Security and for the Standing Committee on Sustainable Development for the 144th Assembly and appointment of the Rapporteurs.<sup>4</sup>

In his opening address to the Assembly, IPU President, Mr. Duarte Pacheco of Portugal, highlighted the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic which has resulted in the loss of more than 3 million lives worldwide, an economic recession and the reversal of decades of progress in human development. He noted four areas which were discussed by the Standing Committees, the Forum of Women Parliamentarians and the Forum of Young Parliamentarians, on the central role parliaments could play in post-pandemic recovery areas. These four areas were:

1. global and equal access to vaccines;
2. parliamentarians' role in ensuring the integrity of public institutions. A need for a new social contract between people and governments;
3. promotion of representation of women and youth in the future of global politics'; and

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<sup>3</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Strategy 2017-2021*, available on the IPU website:

<https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/about-ipu/2017-01/strategy-2017-2021>

<sup>4</sup> A list of the agenda items for the 142<sup>nd</sup> IPU Assembly is available on the IPU website: <https://www.ipu.org/event/142nd-ipu-assembly#event-sub-page-23420/>

4. A sustainable economic recovery post COVID-19, underpinned by new initiatives in production, consumption and environmental preservation.<sup>5</sup>

The President encouraged parliamentarians to rethink the foundations of the pre-pandemic world to pave the way for a resilient, equitable, smart, green, inclusive, and fair future. The President reiterated the role of the global multilateral system, and the importance of strong and democratic national parliaments.

## Debates at the Assembly and other activities

At past IPU Assembly's, there have been two debates in the plenary: the general debate and debate on an emergency item. At the 142<sup>nd</sup> IPU Assembly, only general debate was heard.

### General debate

The topic of the general debate was *Overcoming the pandemic today and building a better tomorrow: the role of parliaments*.

On 26 May 2021, on behalf of the delegation, Senator O'Neill contributed to the interactive general debate.

The outcome document from the general debate was endorsed by the 142<sup>nd</sup> Assembly on the 27 May 2021.

### Governing Council

The Governing Council (the Council) is the administrative and policy making body of the IPU and it ordinarily meets during the twice-yearly assemblies. During the 142<sup>nd</sup> Assembly, the 207<sup>th</sup> session of the Governing Council was held across three meetings. Within this session, the Governing Council formally adopted the [Special Rules of Procedure](#) to regulate the conduct of virtual sessions of the Assembly and its Standing Committees.

The Council took note of the activities of the new president, Mr Pacheco, since his election in November 2020. The Council noted the President's vision for a more inclusive IPU, consolidating principles for good governance, reinforcing the IPU's visibility in the international arena and strengthening democratic principles. The Council approved the creation of the Cremer-Passy Prize intended to recognise significant actions by parliamentarians in favour of their citizens.

The Council took note of the [Annual Impact Report](#) by the Secretary General on the activities of the IPU in 2020. The Council commended the resilience of the IPU and its secretariat despite the many constraints faced in 2020.

The Council conducted and finalised a number of elections for different IPU bodies. These included the Executive Committee, the Committee on Human Rights of Parliamentarians and the Committee on Middle Eastern Questions. The results of these elections can be found on the [IPU website](#).

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<sup>5</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, *142nd IPU Assembly and related meetings: Results and Proceedings*, p. 4, available on the IPU website: <https://www.ipu.org/event/142nd-ipu-assembly#event-sub-page-23958/>

The Governing Council received a report on the financial situation of the IPU as at December 2020. The Council approved the Secretary General's financial administration of the IPU and the financial results of 2020. However, it was noted that although voluntary contributions remained stable, the number of members in arrears has increased. There are currently twelve members at risk of potential suspension of their IPU rights as a result.

The Council endorsed the recommendations of the Executive Committee in regard to the following membership concerns:

- to recognise the Parliament of Seiyun as representative of Yemen;
- to postpone any decision on Venezuela's membership until the next IPU Assembly;
- to invite the Committee representing the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament of Myanmar) as an observer to the IPU; and
- to remove Thailand and Burundi from its lists of countries of concern.

## Meetings of geopolitical groups

The IPU has six geopolitical groups that meet immediately prior to and during the Assembly to consider IPU agenda items and, where possible, agree a group position. Candidatures for positions on IPU committees are also considered and submitted through the geopolitical groups. Most member countries are members of at least one geopolitical group. Australia is a member of two geopolitical groups—the Asia Pacific Group and the Twelve Plus Group.<sup>6</sup>

### Asia Pacific Group<sup>7</sup>

The Asia Pacific Group met virtually on 7 May 2021 and considered a report from the ASEAN +3 Group, and from representatives on the executive committee. The meeting also considered nominations for vacancies to be filled during the 142<sup>nd</sup> Assembly. Following a secret ballot, Senator O'Neill was nominated for the vacancy for the Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law, receiving 64% of the final vote. At the 142<sup>nd</sup> IPU Assembly, Senator O'Neil was appointed as member of the Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law.

### Twelve Plus Group<sup>8</sup>

The Twelve Plus group met virtually on 21 May 2021 ahead of the IPU Assembly. The group heard reports from the standing committees, discussed the general debate topic for the Assembly, considered resolutions of the IPU and endorsed the Special Rules of Procedure for the virtual sessions of the Assembly.

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<sup>6</sup> The IPU Statutes stipulate that members that belong to more than one geopolitical group should indicate which geopolitical Group they represent for the purposes of submitting candidatures for positions within the IPU. Australia usually exercises its voting rights through the Asia Pacific Group.

<sup>7</sup> The membership of the Asia Pacific Group is available on the IPU website: <https://www.ipu.org/about-us/members/geopolitical-groups/asia-pacific-group>.

<sup>8</sup> The membership of the Twelve Plus Group is available on the IPU website: <https://www.ipu.org/about-us/members/geopolitical-groups/twelve-plus-group>.

## **Forum of Women Parliamentarians**

The 31<sup>st</sup> session of the Forum of Women Parliamentarians took place over two sessions—one on 10 May 2021 and the other on 12 May 2021. The Forum included 78 participants, including 57 parliamentarians (53 women and 4 men) from 34 countries.

The participants contributed to the general debate on the overall theme of *overcoming the pandemic today and building a better tomorrow: the role of parliaments*. Participants discussed the gendered dimensions of the COVID-19 pandemic and a gendered responsive recovery.

Participants considered gendered perspectives of the two draft resolutions on the agenda of the 142<sup>nd</sup> Assembly, *Parliamentary strategies to strengthen peace and security against threats and conflicts resulting from climate-related disasters and their consequences* and *Mainstreaming digitalization and the circular economy to achieve the SDGs, particularly responsible consumption and production*. The Forum proposed to share its first preliminary gender considerations with the co-rapporteurs of the upcoming draft resolution. The Forum also held a panel discussion titled *Generation Equality in and through Parliaments* which focused on the role of parliaments in achieving gender equality.

## **Standing Committees**

There are four standing committees of the IPU. A summary of their activities during the 142<sup>nd</sup> Assembly follows.

### **Standing Committee on Peace and International Security**

The Standing Committee on Peace and International Security held two virtual meetings, one on 26 April 2021 and the other on 17 May 2021.

The participants contributed to the general debate on the overall theme of *overcoming the pandemic today and building a better tomorrow: the role of parliaments*.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the resolution on *Parliamentary strategies to strengthen peace and security against threats and conflict resulting from climate-related disasters and their consequences*, was finalised by a drafting committee in accordance with the Special Rules of Procedure. The drafting committee considered 130 proposals for amendments with 45 per cent of eligible amendments approved. Through a silence procedure, the resolution was adopted on 17 May 2021.

On 27 May 2021, the resolution was submitted to and adopted by the Assembly.

### **Standing Committee on Sustainable Development**

The Standing Committee on Sustainable Development met virtually on 27 April and 18 May 2021.

The sitting on 27 April was held jointly with the Standing Committee of United Nations Affairs and debated the overall theme of the Assembly.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the resolution on *Mainstreaming digitalization and the circular economy to achieve the SDGs, particularly responsible consumption and production* was finalised by



a drafting committee in accordance with the Special Rules of Procedure. The Committee considered 88 amendments submitted. The committee adopted the resolution on 18 May 2021 through a silence procedure.

The Committee held a debate on *How can the IPU resolution inspire and guide parliamentary work and action on digitalization and the circular economy?* The Committee approved the theme of the next resolution titled *Leveraging Information and Communication Technology as an enabler for the education sector, including in times of pandemic.*

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

The Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights held two sittings, one on 28 April and the other on 18 May 2021.

The Committee met to discuss the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on democracy and human rights, and on the functioning of parliaments. On 18 May 2021, the Committee held a preparatory debate on the theme of the next resolution *Legislation worldwide to combat online sexual child exploitation.*

### **Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs**

In addition to the joint sitting with the Standing Committee on Sustainable Development on 27 April, the Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs held a separate virtual meeting on 29 April 2021.

At the 29 April 2021 meeting, the Committee considered the implications of the declaration issued at the conclusion of the September 2020 High-level Meeting to Commemorate the Seventy-fifth Anniversary of the United Nations. Forty five member parliaments participated together with three prominent United Nations ambassadors and a representative of the UN Secretary-General.

### **Other Meetings**

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

- Forum of Young Parliamentarians of the IPU
- Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians
- Committee on Middle East Questions
- Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law
- Gender Partnership Group
- Advisory Group on Health
- Group of Facilitators for Cyprus
- High-Level Advisory Group on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism.

## **Concluding remarks**

The delegation appreciates the opportunity to continue Australia's longstanding commitment to and participation in IPU Assemblies and associated meetings. It provides the chance to develop and progress parliament-to-parliament relations, build on bilateral and multilateral relationships, and promote parliamentary democracy.

The delegation wishes to acknowledge the work of staff of the Parliamentary Library who provided briefing materials and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Canberra, who provided advice to the delegation. The delegation also likes to acknowledge the work of the Secretary.

*Ms Lucy Wicks MP*  
*Delegation Leader*