



Parliament of Australia

Parliamentary Delegation

to

141st Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly

Belgrade, Serbia

13 – 17 October 2019

Commonwealth of Australia 2019

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Members of the Delegation

Leader of the Delegation

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

Delegates

Mr Andrew Wallace, MP
Federal Member for Fisher, Queensland
Liberal National Party of Queensland

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

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

Official

Ms Toni Matulick
Delegation Secretary

141st IPU Assembly – Belgrade

The 141st Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Assembly took place in Belgrade, Serbia from 13 to 17 October 2019. The Assembly was attended by 1,729 delegates, 739 of whom were parliamentarians from 149 member parliaments. Of the 739 parliamentarians that attended, 227 were women (30.7%) and 129 (21.5%) were young MPs. Sixty three presiding officers and 57 deputy presiding officers were in attendance. Nine associate members were represented, as were a number of observers.¹

The Australian Parliament's delegation to the 141st Assembly was led by Mrs Lucy Wicks MP, and included Mr Andrew Wallace MP, Senator Deborah O'Neill and Mr Julian Hill MP.



The Australian delegation to the IPU: Mr Andrew Wallace, Mrs Lucy Wicks, Senator Deborah O'Neill and Mr Julian Hill, with Serbian liaison officer Mr Ninaslav Orlic, and Australian diplomat, Ms Elizabeth Buchan

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
- considering questions of international interest and concern.

Founded in 1889, there are currently 179 parliaments that are members of the IPU and 12 associate members (mostly parliaments drawn from groups of nations, or similar bodies).² 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
- promote youth empowerment
- mobilize parliaments around the global development agenda
- bridge the democracy gap in international relations.

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.

¹ A list of member states and observers is available in the *Results of the Proceedings of the 141st Assembly* available at: <https://www.ipu.org/event/141st-assembly-and-related-meetings>, p. 5.

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

Assembly



Opening of the 141st Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly

The 141st Assembly was formally opened on Sunday 13th October 2019.³ The Assembly's agenda included the following items:

- Election of the President and Vice-Presidents of the Assembly
- Consideration of emergency items for inclusion in the agenda
- General Debate: *Strengthening international law: Parliamentary roles and mechanisms, and the contribution of regional cooperation*
- Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights: Achieving universal health coverage by 2030: The role of parliaments in ensuring the right to health
- Approval of the subject item for the Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights at the 143rd IPU Assembly and appointment of the Rapporteurs
- Amendments to the IPU Statutes and Rules.

The opening address of the Assembly, given by the IPU President, Ms Gabriela Cuevas Barron of Mexico, focused on promoting democracy through political empowerment of women and youth, both of which were key items on the Assembly agenda. The theme of

³ While the formal opening of the Assembly occurred on Sunday 13th October 2019, a number of meetings took place in preceding days.

the general debate, strengthening international law through parliamentary roles and mechanisms was also a focus of the address. The aim of the Assembly was to empower parliamentarians to address the key issues of our time, including the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism and violent extremism, trade, health, climate change and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The President also noted that members would be called upon to adopt a resolution on achieving universal health coverage by 2030. This would set in motion a parliamentary action plan that would give impetus to the vision recently articulated by the United Nations.⁴

Debates in the Assembly and other activities

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

The General Debate

The topic of the general debate was *Strengthening international law: Parliamentary roles and mechanisms, and the contribution of regional cooperation*.⁵

On behalf of the delegation, Mrs Lucy Wicks made a contribution to this debate and reiterated Australia's commitment to efforts to protect and strengthen the existing international rules based order.

Mrs Wicks' address focused on Australia's longstanding involvement in the international rules based order and Australia's ongoing contribution to their maintenance and modernisation. Mrs Wicks noted the vital role

⁴ *Results of the proceedings of the 141st Assembly* <https://www.ipu.org/event/141st-assembly-and-related-meetings>, p. 5.

⁵ The outcome document *Results of the proceedings of the 141st Assembly* is available at: <https://www.ipu.org/event/141st-assembly-and-related-meetings>

that International Law plays in providing a framework for peaceful resolution of disputes.⁶

The outcome document from the general debate was endorsed by the 141st Assembly on 17 October.



Mrs Wicks contributing to a debate in the Assembly

Emergency Item

The IPU Rules provide that any member country may propose a topic as an emergency item to be debated. The matter must relate to a major event of international concern on which it appears necessary for the IPU to express its opinion. The request must receive a two thirds majority of the votes cast in order to be accepted for debate.⁷

On Monday 14 October, the President informed the Assembly that four requests for an emergency item had been confirmed. The proposals are set out below:

- Resolution on addressing climate change (India);
- Protection of civilians and international security: Demanding an

⁶ The Australian delegation's contribution to the general debate is published online—see *List of Speakers* no.30: <https://www.ipu.org/event/141st-assembly-and-related-meetings>

⁷ Assembly Rule 11-2(a).

end to Turkey's offensive in Syria (France, United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland and Egypt);

- Double standards of Western countries in combatting terrorism, especially in resolving the conflict in Syria (Turkey);
- Urgent call for the restoration of representative democratic order and for respect for democratic principles in Peru (Peru).

Turkey expressed its opposition to the joint proposal from France, United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland and Egypt. France expressed its opposition to the proposal from Turkey. The Assembly proceeded with a roll-call vote on the four proposals, with the proposal relating to climate change proposed by India being selected.

Governing Council

The Governing Council is the administrative and policy making body of the IPU and it meets during the twice yearly assemblies. At its first sitting on 14 October, the Governing Council proposed that Ms Maja Gojković, Speaker of the National Assembly of Serbia, be elected President of the 141st IPU Assembly.

The Governing Council received a report on the financial situation of the IPU as at 30 June 2019 and an updated list of unpaid contributions. As at 12 October 2019, four Members (Comoros, Dominican Republic, Libya and Venezuela) and two Associate Members (Andean Parliament and Inter-Parliamentary Committee of the West African Economic and Monetary Union) had arrears of two full years and were subject to participation and/or voting sanctions.

The Governing Council endorsed the recommendation by the Executive Committee to grant a request for financial assistance

from the Parliamentary Solidarity Fund (PSF) from the Parliament of the Solomon Islands to attend a future IPU Assembly.

The Governing Council considered and approved the budget proposal for 2020 and adopted amendments submitted by the Gender Partnership Group which strengthened the existing sanctions for single-sex delegations and provided incentives to gender-balanced delegations.

The amendment submitted by the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians concerning the application of the quorum had not been accepted by Executive Committee and was therefore not presented to the Council for a decision.

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.⁸

Asia Pacific Group⁹

The Asia Pacific Group met once during the Assembly and considered a report from the ASEAN +3 Group, and from representatives on the executive committee. The meeting also

⁸ 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.

⁹ 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>.

considered nominations for vacancies to be filled during the 141st Assembly.

Twelve Plus Group¹⁰

The Twelve Plus Group met five times during the Assembly. The group considered proposed amendments to the IPU statutes and rules, heard reports from the standing committees, discussed debating topics, including the emergency item, and decided on candidates for vacancies to be filled during the Assembly.

Mr Wallace acted as scrutineer for Twelve Plus elections to fill vacancies on the Standing Committees, and Mr Hill was an active contributor to the Twelve Plus side event, led by Sweden, on parliamentary responses to protect LGBTIQ+ rights. Senator O'Neill also attended this event.



Mr Hill at the 12Plus Group side event, Leaving no-one behind - LGBTIQ+



Mr Wallace scrutineering the elections for the 12Plus Group

¹⁰ 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 30th session of the Forum of Women Parliamentarians took place on 13 October with 157 participants, including 82 parliamentarians (72 women and 10 men) from 76 countries.

Participants considered the draft resolution on the agenda of the 141st IPU Assembly, *Achieving universal health coverage by 2030: The role of parliaments in ensuring the right to health*. The Forum subsequently proposed amendments which the Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights incorporated into the draft resolution. The Forum also marked the 40th anniversary of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Mrs Wicks attended the Forum of Women Parliamentarians including the workshop on ensuring universal health coverage is responsive to the needs of women and girls.

Standing Committees

There are four standing committees of the IPU. A summary of their activities during the 141st Assembly is below.

Standing Committee on Peace and International Security

The Standing Committee on Peace and International Security held two sittings during the Assembly. At its sitting on 15 October, the committee examined two items: the follow-up of the implementation of the 2014 resolution *Towards a nuclear-weapon-free world: The contribution of parliaments*, and the theme of *Criminalization of money laundering*.

On 16 October, the committee held an expert hearing on the theme *Parliamentary strategies to strengthen peace and security against threats and conflicts resulting from climate-related disasters and their consequences*—the topic of a resolution to be adopted by the 142nd IPU Assembly.

Mr Wallace attended meetings and participated in the debates of the Standing Committee on Peace and International Security and also attended a side event on chemical weapons.

Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade

The Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade held two sittings. The committee discussed the subject item of the next resolution to be debated at the 142nd Assembly—*Mainstreaming digitalization and the circular economy to achieve the SDGs, particularly responsible consumption and production*. The theme and key issues for consideration and discussion were introduced by experts on the circular economy and digitalization. The co-rapporteurs stressed the need to exchange good practices and experiences and that they would incorporate the inputs provided during the debate into the draft resolution.

The committee also held a panel discussion on the 2014 IPU resolution, *Towards risk-resilient development: Taking into consideration demographic trends and natural constraints*.

The Committee was informed about the Executive Committee's decision to rename it the Standing Committee on Sustainable Development. This decision followed a consultation process to which the Committee Bureau had contributed.

Mr Hill attended the Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade's segment on preparations for the Parliamentary Meeting at the *United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 25)* in December 2019, and the debate on *Mainstreaming digitalization and the circular economy to achieve the SDGs, particularly responsible consumption and production*.

Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights

The committee held two sittings and considered the draft resolution, which was on the topic of *Achieving universal health coverage by 2030: The role of parliaments in ensuring the right to health*. The resolution focused on promoting health and preventing disease through coordinated action across every sector. The revised draft resolution was adopted by consensus at the final sitting by the committee. A reservation was expressed by the delegation of India.

The Committee approved the proposal put forward by the Netherlands entitled *Legislation worldwide to combat online sexual child exploitation* as the subject of its next resolution. A preparatory debate will take place at the 142nd Assembly and the resolution will be finalised at the 143rd Assembly in October 2020.

The committee approved a recommendation to hold a panel discussion at the 142nd Assembly on the theme *The influence of the Internet on democracy* with a focus on challenges relating to elections, disinformation and hate speech.

The Committee also endorsed a Declaration to mark the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Assembly endorsed the declaration and viewed a video of a field visit organized with UNICEF to a child care facility in Belgrade that took place on 14 October. The facility caters

for children whose parents are unable to care for them, including children with profound disabilities. Mr Wallace participated in this field visit.

Senator O'Neill and Mr Hill participated in the debate on the draft resolution *Achieving universal health coverage by 2030: The role of parliaments in ensuring the right to health*. Senator O'Neill also participated where the proposal by the Netherlands to consider cybersecurity resolution was agreed with the Russian delegation calling for a vote on the resolution.

Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs

The committee held one sitting which consisted of two panels: the first on respect for international law in keeping with the UN Charter and other relevant resolutions, and the second on the 2019 IPU survey on the relationship between parliaments and the United Nations.

Mr Wallace participated in the debate of the Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs.

Other meetings



Bilateral meeting with Vietnamese delegation

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.



Mr Wallace and Senator O'Neill with Ms Maja Gojković, Speaker of the National Assembly of Serbia and the Australian Ambassador to Serbia HE Ruth Stewart

Bilateral and multilateral meetings complement the Australian delegation's attendance at statutory assemblies. During the 141st Assembly, meetings were held with delegations from Vietnam and North Macedonia, Canada, the United Kingdom and New Zealand. In place of the usual meeting co-convened by Australia and New Zealand with Pacific Island nations, Australia's Ambassador to Serbia hosted a reception. Delegates and staff from Fiji, Tonga, Timor-Leste, the Federated States of Micronesia, New Zealand and Australia attended. Speakers from Tonga, Fiji and Micronesia were present at the reception which provided an opportunity to discuss issues of relevance in the region.

During the meetings with Vietnam and North Macedonia, the delegation discussed matters of mutual interest and concern. The delegation received a briefing from the Australian Ambassador in relation to the use of sanctions, and the emergency item on climate change. All delegates attended a briefing on Brexit offered by the delegation from the United Kingdom.

The delegation attended a function hosted by the government of Serbia and a cultural evening. Mrs Wicks also attended a dinner for heads of delegations.



The Australian Delegation with Ms Buchan from the Australian Embassy in Belgrade

Concluding remarks

The delegation appreciates the opportunity to continue Australia's longstanding commitment to attend 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 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Canberra and in Belgrade, who provided advice and briefing materials. The committee appreciated the work of Her Excellency Ms Ruth Stewart, Mr Leo Zeng, Ms Elizabeth Buchan and Ms Ana Redzic who supported the delegation at the Assembly.

The delegation was also pleased to have the assistance of Serbian liaison officer, Mr Ninaslav Orlic, to provide advice on local issues.

Once again, the delegation was able to rely on excellent briefing materials prepared by the Parliamentary Library and acknowledges the work of Ms Cat Barker and her colleagues. The delegation also thanks Mr Raymond Knight and colleagues from the International and Parliamentary Relations Office who arranged travel and accommodation.

*Mrs Lucy Wicks MP
Delegation Leader*

Attendance at the 141st IPU Assembly

Friday 11 October

Delegation arrives in Belgrade

Informal dinner and briefing on the state of the geopolitical situation in the region with Australia's Ambassador to Serbia, HE Ms Ruth Stewart and Deputy Head of Mission, Mr Leo Zeng

Saturday 12 October

Welcome lunch Twelve Plus Group

First meeting of Twelve Plus Group

Sunday 13 October

Meeting of Advisers and Secretaries to delegations

Bilateral meeting between Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom

Forum of Women Parliamentarians

Break out Group of the Forum of Women Parliamentarians

Forum of Women Parliamentarians parity debate: *ensuring that all children enjoy their rights and grow up protected from violence*

Meeting of Asia Pacific Group

Inaugural Ceremony, hosted by the Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, Ms. Maja Gojković

Monday 14 October

Meeting of Twelve Plus Group

Governing Council

Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights

Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade

Assembly: General Debate on the theme *strengthening international law: Parliamentary roles and mechanisms, and the contribution of regional cooperation*

Assembly: Decision on emergency item

Reception in Honour of Heads of Delegations, host: Ms Maja Gojkovic, Speaker of the National Assembly of Serbia (Mrs Wicks)

Tuesday 15 October

Meeting of Twelve Plus Group

Assembly: debate on the emergency item, continuation of the General Debate and special segment to mark the 130th Anniversary of the IPU

Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights

Workshop on *Leaving no one behind in political representation: Gender and youth quotas*

Standing Committee on Peace and International Security

Workshop on the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, achievements and challenges: parliamentary perspectives on the way forward*

Reception, Australia, New Zealand, Pacific nations – Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Timor Leste and Tonga

Wednesday 16 October

Meeting of Twelve Plus Group

Bilateral meeting with Vietnam and North Macedonia

Parity debate on the theme *#Not In My Parliament: national and regional strategies - policies and practices that have been implemented in parliaments to call attention to the prohibited nature of sexism, sexual harassment and violence and to prevent or stop and sanction these acts*

Assembly: continuation of the general debate

Workshop on *SDG 8: achieving full and productive employment and decent work for all: The economic challenge of our time*

Field visit to The Centre for Protection of Infants, Children and Youth, Belgrade Zvecanska Children's Home

Standing Committee on Peace and International Security: expert hearing *parliamentary strategies to strengthen peace and security against threats and conflicts resulting from climate-related disasters and their consequences*

Open session of the Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law, *placing humanity first: the Geneva Conventions – protecting people in armed conflict for 70 years*

Side event on the theme *Reaching the hard-to-reach: how to make UHC a reality for all?*

Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade

Assembly: adoption of the resolution on the emergency item, special segment: *Future Policy Award 2019 on Youth Empowerment*, conclusion of the General Debate

Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs

Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights

Cultural evening

Thursday 17 October

Meeting of Twelve Plus Group

Governing Council: decisions on the human rights of MPs, and reports of specialized meetings

Joint IPU-ASGP: Preliminary consultation on the 2021 Global Parliamentary Report: *Parliament in a changing world*

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

Mr Hill departed Belgrade

Friday 18 October

Departure of remaining delegation members from Belgrade