

INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

BRITISH GROUP

PALACE OF WESTMINSTER

LONDON SW1A 0AA

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

WEDNESDAY 29 NOVEMBER 2006

THE ATTLEE SUITE

PORTCULLIS HOUSE

The Annual General Meeting of the British Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union was held in The Attlee Suite, Portcullis House, Westminster, on Wednesday, 29 November 2006. The Honorary President, the Rt Hon Michael Martin, MP, Mr Speaker, was in the chair.

Opening remarks by Mr Speaker

MR SPEAKER: My lords, ladies and gentlemen and dear friends, I extend a very warm welcome to you all at our Annual General Meeting.

Apologies for absence

MR SPEAKER: The first item on the agenda is apologies. Do we have any apologies for absence?

THE SECRETARY: Mr Speaker, we have a list of 144, 56 Members of Parliament, 28 Peers and 60 Associates.

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Tuesday, 29 November 2005

MR SPEAKER: We are now required to adopt the Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 29, November 2005. These are printed on pages 9 to 26 of the Annual Report. May I have a proposer and a seconder that the minutes are adopted as a true record of the previous meeting? (*Proposed by Lord Bilston and seconded by Sir Nicholas Winterton MP*)

Do you agree that this is a correct record? (*Agreed*) I will now sign the minutes as a true record of the meeting. (*Minutes signed*)

Matters arising from the Minutes

MR SPEAKER: Are there any matters arising from those minutes?

THE SECRETARY: None have been notified.

Presentation of the Financial Statement for April 2005 to March 2006 and appointment of Auditors

MR SPEAKER: I would like to invite Mr Nigel Evans MP, Treasurer of the Group, to present the Financial Statement.

MR NIGEL EVANS MP: Thank you, and thank you for my unanimous re-election as Treasurer for another year.

Mr Speaker, it is a pleasure to present the financial statements and statement of internal control for the year ending 31 March 2006. Copies have been placed on the seats and,

if anyone cannot find them, please, raise your hand and we will provide you with one. We have with us Jonathan Downer from our auditors KPMG. Jonathan, welcome; it is nice to see you here again.

Turning to the statements on pages 1 to 3, you will find our statement of internal control with my signature on it at the bottom on page 3.

On page 4 is the statement of the Executive Committee's responsibilities.

On page 5 is the report of our auditors, which states that the financial statements give a true and fair view of the state of our affairs as at 31 March 2006. Furthermore, I should add that our Audit Committee has received a report from KPMG on our accounts and finance procedures and were satisfied that there were no items of concern to report.

I will now turn to the numbers. The Income and Expenditure account is on page 6. Just over £1.1 million was received from Her Majesty's Treasury as grant in aid. As I reported last year, in the year ending March 2005, we received none as we had large reserves, which were used to finance that year's expenditure. There has been a proportionate decrease in our interest income for the year ending March 2006. You will also see within the income a figure for £140,000 of contributions for the Africa Seminar. In October 2005, together with the CPA UK branch, AWEPA, DfID and the British Council, we organised a parliamentary seminar on Africa, which was held in the British Museum. We handled the finances for this project, and therefore received financial contributions into a dedicated bank account for this purpose.

I will now turn to the Expenditure. The first item are the subscriptions payable to the IPU in Geneva and the 12-Plus geopolitical group. By far the largest is the payment to Geneva that is billed in Swiss currency in accordance with scales set by the IPU governing council. As in previous years, the UK has contributed 4.54 per cent of the IPU's budget, which in turn has grown by just under three per cent annually over the past two years. Over the next six years, the British Group's contribution will increase to 6.38 per cent of the IPU core budget which is in line with current UN scales and is a result of the rebalancing of the IPU's scale of assessments. The rather large figure for conferences and outward delegations includes slightly more than £195,000 in expenditure for the Africa Seminar, which I mentioned a moment ago. The remainder, £285,000, funded attendance at conferences in Manila, New York and Geneva and six outward delegations, five of which were to long-haul destinations. The expenditure on inward delegations is down compared to the previous year partly because of a reduction in numbers as a consequence of the General Election being held in May 2005.

Staff costs have increased by an average of six per cent. This is in line with the House of Commons pay scale increases for the year and the inclusion of death in service premiums as staff costs rather than insurance.

Publishing and public relations have increased above inflation mainly due to the extra costs of an additional issue of the *IPU Review* to feature the Africa Seminar.

The increase in the amount entered for audit fee compared to the previous year is largely explained by the inclusion of VAT in the figure for 2006 which was not done in 2005.

As I have just mentioned, our insurance costs do not include death in service premiums, which have now been moved to staff costs. Consequently, insurance shows a reduction this year compared to 2005.

The increase in the net cost of giftware purchased of about £4,000 is due to a bulk purchase to benefit from increased unit discounts. This will be largely offset by a reduced purchase in this current year.

As you can see, the Group had a surplus of £25,808 on the Income and Expenditure account for the year.

Turning now to the Balance Sheet on page 7, the increase in fixed assets is mainly computer equipment and software. Current assets are consistent with our activities during the year and with the previous year. There is however a significant decrease under creditors. The reason for this is that the grant in aid for the first quarter of 2005/2006 of £282,000 was received early and so appeared in the figures for the previous year within the creditors as deferred income.

That concludes my presentation on the financial statements for the Group.

MR SPEAKER: Are there any questions for Nigel? *(None)*

MR NIGEL EVANS MP: Mr Speaker, I propose the adoption of the financial statements for the year ending 31, March 2006 and the appointment of KPMG LLP as auditors for the year ending 31, March 2007.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Nigel, and thank you for giving us that statement. *(Applause)* Nigel has proposed the Financial Statement for the year ending 31, March 2006 and the appointment of KPMG to be the Group's auditors for the coming year. May I ask for a seconder? *(Proposed by Mr Nigel Evans MP and seconded by the Rt Hon Lord Foulkes of Cumnock)*

(Agreed)

Adoption of the Annual Report for 2006

MR SPEAKER: I would like to invite the Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP, Secretary of State for International Development, to propose the adoption of the Annual Report for 2006.

THE RT HON HILARY BENN MP: Mr Speaker, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, first of all may I say that it is a great privilege to have been invited to join you for this Annual General Meeting of the British Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and to move adoption of your 2006 Annual Report. I am delighted that I am joined by Andrew Mitchell who is going to second the motion. I have to say that it is for me a special privilege because my grandfather, William, was for a decade the International President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and, frankly, he would be tickled pink to think that I was standing here before you this evening.

I would like to begin by paying tribute to Sir Michael Marshall, a former Chair of this Group and President of the IPU who sadly died on 6 September. I would also like to express,

I am sure, everybody's thanks to you, Ann, as Chair of this Group. I know that you have come to the end of your five-year membership of the IPU's Committee on Human Rights of Parliamentarians. There is no more passionate advocate of human rights, I have to say, than you, Ann, and I want to congratulate John Austin who has just been elected to chair the IPU's European 12-Plus Group. (*Applause*)

We are all here today because we believe that politics and parliament matter and that politics actually changes things, and that, without democratic politics, we are not going to win the fight against global poverty and we are not going to build a better world. And that is why the work which the IPU has done over many years is so important. As I have looked at your Annual Report, it is very clear to me that you have achieved a great deal during this year because you reflected on what was achieved in 2005, in particular the commitments made on development at Gleneagles. You brought together, as we have just heard, at the British Museum, 120 parliamentarians from Africa, Europe and from North America to discuss how to implement those commitments. What really matters is that in the end we are held to account for what we have promised and that includes parliamentarians in Africa.

You have worked very hard to strengthen relations amongst parliamentarians internationally, contacts made with around 30 countries and a wide range of affiliated parliamentary groups from Vietnam to Afghanistan. Many of these countries are countries that are important for DfID too. I know, for example, that your Ethiopia Group has corresponded with DfID on aid and the way we should give it. I have met with the Sudan Group. When you think about Sudan and Darfur in particular, frankly, the problems there are only going to be solved by political leadership, and I think that British parliamentarians can play a really important role in showing that politics could work in changing things peacefully through negotiation, compromise and agreement rather than through killing each other.

You have achieved the first ever agreement between the Chinese National People's Congress for an exchange programme and you hosted a visit in June. China, as we know, is a country that has made real progress in recent years, not least in lifting around 400 million of its citizens out of absolute poverty. I think that gradually China will become more responsive to its people, and I think that the best way to encourage that process is by getting stuck in, by talking to people and encouraging the country to face more outwards, and you are helping to make this happen.

You have a growing group on Vietnam, and you are also developing plans to receive delegations in the near future. I was in Vietnam for a day in September. This is the country in the world, not known by many people, that has achieved the fastest reduction in poverty in human history from three-quarters of the population in the late 1980s to under one third in 2002. This is really quite extraordinary, Mr Speaker. The Government there is not democratic in the way in which we would think of it but the state is undoubtedly capable, and there are aspects of accountability that are really quite interesting. The National Assembly of Vietnam is now able to veto and amend the national budget. You only have to go back a few years to remember that the national budget was a state secret. It sacked ministers and rejected laws. That has not always been the case. They show parliamentary proceedings on television; there are very heated debates with hard-hitting questions, and I was told when I was there that it is actually one of the most widely watched TV programmes in Vietnam. I think that the BBC Parliament Channel would be very, very envious of the ratings.

I think, Mr Speaker, that the IPU is really a living expression of the truth that we can achieve much more if we do things together rather than alone, and much of your strength comes from the fact that you are part of a world-wide union. I welcome, looking at your global and strategic plan for 2007/10, the emphasis you are putting on peace and democracy and good governance, because what I have learned in this job is that those three things are absolutely fundamental, as you know, to making progress. Without peace, nothing is possible, and democratic politics is really essential to achieving all of this. It is what people want when given the chance and you ask them the question.

Last year, Gallup asked 50,000 people in 65 countries what they thought of democracy. Eight out of ten citizens said that, despite all its problems, democracy was the best system of government and, in Africa, it was nine out of ten people who answered the question in that way. All of our experience teaches us that, when people have the chance to have a say in how they are governed, they seize it with both hands. It is really what I think Amartya Sen was talking about when he said that liberation is not just about “freedom from” - freedom from hunger, from want, from fear - it is also about “freedom to” - to express a view, to have a say, to be heard. Therefore, the work that you are doing to try and share information to strengthen parliaments across the European Union and worldwide is so important. You are providing technical assistance, and you are planning to work to support parliaments in countries recovering from conflict. That really does matter because we know that post-conflict countries face a much greater risk of falling back into conflict within five years of the end of war, and it means that you have to work very, very hard to ensure that this does not happen.

You are providing more support to female candidates and female Members of Parliament. Getting more women into parliament is extremely important, and the truth is that we have a lot to learn from some other countries. In Rwanda, female representation in the Lower House is 50 per cent, in Afghanistan it is 25 per cent, and here it is about 20 per cent. Do we have something to learn from those countries? Boy, Mr Speaker, do we have something to learn from them!

You are also building links with countries of great importance to the United Kingdom and to regional and local stability, countries like Iran, Palestine and Bosnia, and you have held conferences and seminars on a very wide range of issues. May I highlight the work you have done on HIV and AIDS because Friday is *World Aids Day*, and it is really important that we continue with the fight to defeat this terrible disease which claimed the lives of three million of our fellow human beings last year.

We are trying to play our part on all of these issues, too. It is why we put governments at the centre of DfID’s White Paper that was published in July, because capable, effective, accountable states with effective parliaments are fundamental to making progress. We are currently reflecting on the work that we and others do, including what the IPU is doing, to work with parliaments, because we want to do more in the future. We have submitted some ideas to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Africa which is currently undertaking an inquiry into parliaments, and we look forward to their report. We have been talking to the Westminster Foundation, and I am going to meet with John McFall who recently returned from Ghana where he talked to Ghanaian parliamentarians. We are creating this governance and transparency fund because, while we do a lot of work in DfID to help governments to build their capacity to deliver good governance, the IPU is really about building more capacity on the part of people and parliaments to demand good governance.

When those two things come together, societies are in a much, much stronger position to make progress. I think one of the challenges we will face in the coming year is to make sure that all of the work that we are doing fits together in order that it adds up to more than the sum of its parts. Therefore, I want to congratulate the IPU and all of you for the work that you have been undertaking.

Mr Speaker, if we did not have this belief in politics, then we would not actually have achieved in the course of last year the commitments that were agreed at Gleneagles. If it had not been for the belief of the 250,000 people who came to Edinburgh and marched, if the political leaders who arrived at Gleneagles could not be persuaded through the process we call politics to make those commitments, then we would not have made progress and the truth is that it is the history of our own country. That is how we transform the lives of our people in Britain, by the process of political, social and economic development. As we hope for a better tomorrow than what we have today, I think we have a duty to bring democracy to bear on the great challenges of the 21st century just as we have used the development of our own democracy to change our lives in the centuries that have gone by, because not for nothing do we say that democracy is the best and only hope that humankind has of moving forward down the course of this century.

All that remains for me is to once again thank you profoundly for having done me the honour of inviting me to join you here to propose the adoption of the Annual Report for 2006 - which I gladly do - and, on behalf of DfID, to wish you, the British Group, a really productive 2007. Thank you very much indeed. (*Applause*)

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Hilary. That was very much appreciated. I would now like to invite Andrew Mitchell, Shadow Secretary of State for International Development, to second the adoption of the Annual Report.

MR ANDREW MITCHELL MP: Mr Speaker, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, it is a great privilege for me to have the honour of seconding this Annual Report of the IPU, and also it is a great pleasure for me to follow Hilary. I follow Hilary around schools, debates, discussions, *Any Questions*, all sorts of different areas on international development, and, as everyone in this room will appreciate, if you are in my position shadowing a great Department of State, what you want in the Secretary of State whom you are shadowing is someone who is preferably incompetent, perhaps quite difficult, even a little unpleasant. Unfortunately, none of those three things are true of Hilary, and it makes my job in shadowing him very difficult indeed! (*Laughter*)

I would like to begin in seconding this Annual Report by echoing the comments Hilary made about our former colleague, Sir Michael Marshall, and also to echo his congratulations to Ann on the tremendous work she has done on the promotion of human rights, and to wish John every success in what he is doing in the 12+ Group.

The one point that I want to pick up that Hilary made in his excellent speech is the importance that all political parties attach to the work that DfID does in trying to enshrine good governance in developing countries, and to try and ensure that, through our efforts, we enable those people who live under those regimes to hold their governments more accurately to account. This is one of the most important spending elements that comes from DfID these days, in my view, to try and build up civic society and enable the growth of democracy and the ability of people to hold their politicians to account. That seems to me to be really at the

heart of the work that the IPU is doing. You only have to look at the visits that the IPU has made in the last year, look down the list of countries including Palestine, Thailand, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Algeria, Jordan and Azerbaijan – not Kazakhstan I notice, Mr Speaker – which are places which benefit hugely from democratically-elected politicians meeting together and discussing the common problems which we all have to face.

I wish to say what a very strong supporter of the IPU I am. I very much regret that I have not managed to do a visit with the IPU for over ten years. A part of the reason why not enough Tories are able to take part in some of these visits, Mr Speaker, is because we are spread rather thin on the ground, but I am very much hoping that we may be able to put that right after the next General Election!

Thank you once again for the opportunity of seconding the Annual Report which I do with very great pleasure. *(Applause)*

MR SPEAKER: Andrew, thank you very much. The Annual Report has now been proposed and seconded. Is it agreed that we adopt the report? *(Agreed)*

The Election of Officers and the Executive Committee for the period 2006/2007

MR SPEAKER: Before I move on to this item, I have to announce that Rosemary McKenna CBE MP is standing down after five years on the Executive Committee. I would like to thank Rosemary for her commitment to the British Group of IPU, and I hope that we will continue to see her at IPU events. *(Hear, hear)*

There are a number of Officers and Executive Committee members who are standing for election unopposed. These names have already been circulated to members and are on the voting papers, so I will not read them out now.

This year, we have three separate ballots for the following positions:

- 4 Conservative MPs
- 2 Government Peers
- 1 Liberal Democrat Peer

May I ask for two tellers that are needed for the ballot. *(Two tellers were appointed)* The two tellers are Nigel Evans MP and Derek Conway MP. The ballot will close at 1800 hours or 15 minutes after this meeting has ended, whichever is the latest. Members must complete their ballot papers by this time. The results will be sent by letter to those concerned and placed in the IPU Room and in the Noes Division Lobby.

Proposed amendment to Rule 8 (2)

MR SPEAKER: I now come to item 8. I would like to invite Ken Courtenay, Secretary of the Group, to present the proposed amendment to Rule 8(2).

THE SECRETARY: Mr Speaker, currently Rule 8(2) states that the Lord Chancellor and the Speaker of the House of Commons shall be invited to be Honorary Presidents while they hold their offices. Following the establishment of the office of Lord Speaker, the Executive Committee proposes that the rule be amended to read as follows,

“The Speaker of the House of Commons and the Lord Speaker shall be invited to be Honorary Presidents while they hold their offices”.

MR SPEAKER: Is that agreed? (*Agreed*)

Any other business

MR SPEAKER: Do we have any other business?

THE SECRETARY: None has been notified, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: There is no other business. Therefore, we now come to the speech by our Chair. I would like to invite the Rt Hon Ann Clwyd MP to take the floor.

Speech by the Chair

THE RT HON ANN CLWYD MP: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, and thank you to Hilary and thank you to Andrew for your warm words. They are much appreciated. I can assure you that I am not going to keep you here very long although I think tea and cakes might be an idea for next year’s meeting – we might get more members here if we had tea and cakes. (*Hear, hear*)

This has been my second year as Chair of the Group, and I would like to thank my colleagues for allowing me to continue in the chair, and I would like to thank my fellow officers in particular for the support they have given me over the last year. Again, that has been very much appreciated and they are a great group of officers.

As you know, it has been a very busy year. The IPU is always busy, but I must say that I had not appreciated fully, until I became Chair of the Group, just how active it is, and I wish more people in Parliament realised just how much the IPU does, and I wish we had a lot more members and a lot more active members, because I can assure you that what the IPU does is really worthwhile, particularly when we have opportunities to meet fellow parliamentarians all over the world. We do have bilateral meetings during conferences in Geneva and elsewhere and sometimes we sigh when we hear that a certain country has asked for a bilateral meeting, but we usually find them quite valuable even if it tends to be a monologue from some countries, who think that a bilateral meeting means that they do all the talking and we do all the listening! Somehow, we do manage to get something out of even those quite difficult meetings. I will not name the countries; some of my colleagues will know exactly which ones they are.

The highlight of this year was the IPU’s 114th session held in Nairobi, and those of us who went thoroughly enjoyed that. There have been important outward delegations to Palestine, Iran, Guatemala, El Salvador and Thailand, and visits from parliamentarians from

as far afield as Colombia, Burundi and Iceland. Again, I would like to emphasise the importance of Backbench Members of Parliament meeting their fellow Members of Parliament.

We are doing our best to get the Americans to rejoin us. As you know, Jesse Helms took the American element of the IPU out. Jesse Helms has been gone for some time and it really is time that the Americans rejoined us. (*Hear, hear*) We say that at every opportunity and it was very close last year, when they voted as to whether they should join us or not, and I expect Hilary to use some of his influence in pushing the Americans to come back on board because I keep saying to them, “We get tired of defending you” because the British Group do defend the Americans very often and they really ought to be there to do it themselves, because the kind of meetings that we have are important for the Americans to engage with as well and, dare I say it, we need their money in the IPU as well.

I know that the British Group IPU members do benefit a great deal from taking part in the exchanges, arranged by the IPU, both here in the UK and abroad, and I would like to encourage new parliamentarians, who perhaps have not yet cottoned on to the fact that the IPU is an important body and that they would benefit from being members. It is important that they engage and as soon as possible and make the effort to meet colleagues from other countries. Also, it is an opportunity, to raise what I can describe as more sensitive issues, issues which are central to the exercise of parliamentary democracy, issues like human rights, good governance and corruption.

I am sure you will not mind if I mention again the working of the IPU’s International Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians. I stepped down this year after five years on the Committee, three years as the Chair. I think that the work that the Human Rights Committee of the IPU does is extremely important. It was set up in 1976. It is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year, and I think it serves as a concrete and practical way for the IPU to protect the human rights of parliamentarians and thereby their communities. All of us are given a mandate to represent people in our countries and, to do our work effectively, we have to be able to carry out our mandates free from persecution, threats of violence and other human rights abuses. It is essential that we as parliamentarians who have those freedoms help others to protect those freedoms. I think that often the abuse of parliamentarians in other countries is simply the tip of the iceberg. If those who are well known and to a large extent are protected are abused, then others are often being ill treated as well and, by raising the position of MPs in those countries, the Committee also raises awareness of the position of people in the country in question. By actively and, very often publicly, defending parliamentarian colleagues, the Committee helps to foster in many of the relevant countries an arena for public and peaceful debate and dialogue. Once that parliamentary arena is secure, then that public forum can often be widened and greater protection be afforded to the countries’ citizens as well. By working on the cases of parliamentarians who have not been able to carry out their mandates, the Committee helps to foster good governance and a climate of respect for human rights more generally.

At the most recent IPU Assembly held last October in Geneva, the Governing Council was presented by my successor as Chairman of the Committee of Human Rights of Parliamentarians with resolutions on 142 cases from 19 countries – 142 cases in other parts of the world. There are many more that have not yet been made public.

We held for the first time a lively panel discussion amongst members of our Committee to celebrate the 30 years, and some of the people who have been the subject of cases handled by the Committee and owed their freedom, at least in part, to the IPU's efforts on their behalf were people like Alpha Condé, the former presidential candidate from Guinea. He was one of those on the Panel, and he was released from prison after a very long campaign on his behalf. He said to us, "I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to the IPU and salute the struggle for freedom being waged alongside us during all those years of suffering". In addition, I know first hand about the case of Anwar Ibrahim, the former Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, and he said, "I was held in solitary confinement in Malayan prisons for six years and, at the worst moment when my situation seemed desperate, I received a note from the IPU. It revived my hopes to know that someone in a far corner of the world who cared about democracy and human rights had taken up my case". After his release, he came to Geneva to thank the Committee of the IPU and the members of our Committee for their tireless campaign on his behalf.

Mr Speaker, in my foreword to this year's Annual Report, I make the point that we as British parliamentarians must all take every opportunity to raise the profile of cases when we meet our counterparts from the countries concerned and I include contacts by ministers in this as well. Our Secretariat now makes a point of providing our delegations visiting countries overseas with details of current human rights cases, particularly involving parliamentarians, and I think that the same should apply and must apply to all-party groups as well. As you will see from our Annual Report, we have continued to help those groups in their contacts and, when they apply for assistance, we will draw to their attention cases concerning their countries, the countries that they are visiting, the countries where they are officers of the All Party Group and hope that they will raise them when they meet their counterparts. We look forward to receiving details of those lobbies in the reports they submit to us when they return.

Public information from the Committee for Human Rights of Parliamentarians is available to everyone from the IPU website and Members of both Houses are also encouraged to contact the Secretariat directly, if they need more information or if they would like to submit a case for consideration. I know that a number of you have already submitted cases yourselves concerning the rights of parliamentarians in some of those countries, and I must say that the House of Lords have been particularly good in putting forward some of those cases.

Mr Speaker, on behalf of all members of the Group, I congratulate our friend and colleague, John Austin, on being elected Chair of the 12-Plus geopolitical group in the IPU. This is a group of European countries with Australia, Canada and New Zealand. This gives us a great opportunity to exert a positive influence on the reform of the IPU, some reforms that you would like to see very much indeed, and no doubt John will be pushing this hard. This of course will involve extra work for the Secretariat as it takes on the administration of the Group.

Mr Speaker, it was, as you said, with great sadness that we learnt of the death of Sir Michael Marshall in September. We especially remember him as a congenial colleague and a very distinguished member of the IPU. He was the Member for Arundel from 1974 to 1997 and the Chairman of the British Group of the IPU from 1987 to 1990. He presided over the IPU's Centenary Conference held here in London in 1989 and was President of the IPU

itself from 1991 to 1994. The recent IPU Assembly in Geneva did in fact observe a minute's silence in his memory. There will be a memorial service in Arundel on 8 December.

We also recorded in the *IPU Review* the death of a distinguished political journalist, George Clark. George was a former member of the Commons Press Gallery and the Parliamentary Lobby. When he retired from *The Times* in 1987, he became a part-time media adviser to the British Group of the IPU for many years.

Mr Speaker, before closing, I would like to thank you very warmly for your support as Honorary President over the past year. I would also like to record my thanks to all Members of both Houses who have supported our activities both as members of our outward delegations and, just as important, here at Westminster. Again, to my colleagues on the Executive Committee and to our Secretariat team, thank you very much indeed.

As Hilary is here, I would like to mention that one of my predecessors in my constituency, one of George Foulkes's predecessors, was Keir Hardie, and your mother wrote a book on Keir Hardie, a very good book indeed, and, on Saturday, in my constituency, we are unveiling a memorial to Keir Hardie. We have copied the bust that is in George's constituency and also in the Lobby here in the House of Commons, and we have obtained the base of the bust from India because Keir Hardie, as George knows and certainly as Hilary knows, was a great supporter of Indian independence as he was also of freedom in Africa. The base which will hold the bust of Keir Hardie has been given by the Indian High Commission and is being brought by boat from India – it is a piece of granite which was too expensive for us to buy, and the Indians have donated it. I am very pleased about that because to be able to link up with one of my predecessors and to link up on an international note because they said of him, as they say of George and they say of me in the constituencies that we have inherited, "We never see them, they're always away". (*Laughter*) I think that we are away for a good cause, and it is certainly to promote our international links with many, many countries in the world. Thank you. (*Applause*)

MR SPEAKER: Ann, thank you very much for a very moving speech. We sometimes take things for granted here in the United Kingdom because we have a free parliament. It is good to know that where there is a struggle, we are involved in it trying to make other parliamentarians as free as our own. Thank you very much, Ann.

Closure of meeting

MR SPEAKER: We now come to the good part, the closing of the meeting. I understand that the ballot remains open until 6 pm this evening, 1800 hours. At 6.15, there is a reception in the IPU Room for Associate Members and Honorary Members and you are all very welcome indeed.

I now declare the meeting closed. Thank you very much.