

The Annual General Meeting of the British Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

Attlee Suite, Portcullis House, Westminster

Wednesday, 25 November 2009

Right Hon John Bercow MP (Mr Speaker): My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, I now call this Annual General Meeting to order. I extend a very warm welcome to everybody.

You will see from the Annual Report that the British Group of the IPU has had another productive year of activity and later we shall hear more about that. I know that the Minister has to go in half an hour, so I propose to move swiftly through the first part of the agenda, which you all have before you. As I will explain when we get to item 8, you will see that there is no Ballot for Officers or members of the Executive Committee.

I will now move on to Item 2. Do we have any apologies for absence?

Kenneth Courtenay (General Secretary, British Group IPU): We have a list of 62 members.

Right Hon John Bercow MP: I am grateful, and I shall be even more grateful for the agreement of the meeting that there is no requirement to read out the list of 62.

Item 3 is the adoption of the Minutes. We are now required to adopt the Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Wednesday 12 November 2008. These are printed on pages 8 to 21 of the Annual Report. May I have a Proposer and Secunder that the Minutes are adopted as a true record of the meeting?

Proposed by Gordon Prentice and Seconded by Lord Corbett.

All those in favour please raise your hand.

Any against?

No. The Minutes are unanimously passed.

I shall now sign the Minutes as a true record.

Item 4 is matters arising. Are there any matters arising from those Minutes?

Kenneth Courtenay: No.

Right Hon John Bercow MP: Item 5 is the Adoption of the Annual Report for 2009. I would now like to invite Mr. Ivan Lewis MP, Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Office, to propose the adoption of the Annual Report for 2009. Ivan, welcome, and we look forward to what you have to say.

Ivan Lewis MP (Proposer of the 2009 Annual Report): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Colleagues, I am delighted to be able to join the Annual General Meeting, and to propose the adoption of the 2009 Annual Report. I am pleased that David Lidington is here to demonstrate the all-party nature of this Group and to second the report.

It strikes me as particularly interesting that one of this group's primary objectives is to promote democracy around the world. We begin the meeting with an entirely uncontested set of elections. It was also interesting to receive the briefing in advance of this meeting, which described the Chair as being "very able", and by the name of "Robert" Berry, and referred to "the Shadow Minister Keith Hill." Unless Keith wants to share something with us that I was not aware of, I suspect that there were a couple of basic errors in my briefing, and not for the first time.

I want to make it clear that I told the Chair that I would be here for only half an hour, so as to help him get through the business quickly. Seriously, I want to say a couple of things about the Inter-Parliamentary Union. It is incredibly important in fostering international co-operation, and I genuinely want to pay tribute—as I am sure

everybody here will also want to—to Roger’s Chairmanship. By all accounts, he has done an excellent job—at least, that is what it said in my briefing.

It is important to note that this Group has a long tradition of putting aside party political difference to pursue common interests. That is an element of our Parliament that is not often spoken about and is not focused on. There are many instances where there is a British national interest in parties coming together and working together in the pursuit of common goals. There has never been a more important time in history for a group of this nature to be successful, active and to facilitate dialogue and communication.

Whatever differences people have, there can be no doubt that the biggest issues that we face at the beginning of the 21st century are connected to the inter-dependency of the world. That is the case for the current economic crisis that we face, the emergency of climate change, the threat of fundamentalist terrorism, the gross, scandalous inequality that still scars our universe—I would like to pay tribute to the work that the Speaker has done on that throughout his political career—and for the contentious and controversial issues of asylum and migration. All those issues require parliamentarians and Governments to work together in pursuit of better understanding and mutual tolerance, and increasingly, the pursuit of global solutions to global problems.

When my predecessor, Gillian Merron, spoke about the work of the IPU earlier this year, she talked about the shared aims between the Foreign Office and the IPU. Central among those aims was the wish for fruitful and meaningful dialogue between countries. She also made a commitment that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office would work in a more systematic way than it has done historically with IPU delegations. She made the point that more informal contacts between countries offer

value and change in a way that sometimes formal relationships cannot. As politicians, we all know that we are sometimes limited in what we can say publicly, either via our constituencies or because of the pressures that we have in terms of our parties. We can often speak more freely in informal environments, and we can support each other in some of the political challenges that we face, particularly in countries that one would frankly describe as relatively young democracies.

During the course of the debate, the former Minister Keith Hill—it does not say, “Senior eminent Back-Bencher Keith Hill”, but I have just changed it—said that MPs with specific knowledge and experience of issues such as mass migration, global finance and human rights, should be encouraged to share that knowledge with others. That is also true. There are many individual MPs who do not necessarily hold formal positions of responsibility, but who have accumulated a body of knowledge and expertise that is frequently not used to best effect. That plays into the debate about the role of parliamentarians. Somehow, the only way a parliamentarian can play a useful role is through holding ministerial office, shadow ministerial office or even chairing a Select Committee. Many Members of Parliament, whatever their formal title and status, have a body of knowledge and expertise that could be used in a far more effective way than perhaps has been done in the past.

The IPU’s role has never been more important than it is today. During the course of the past 12 months, the British Group has been very busy. There have been visits from the UAE, Georgia and the Philippines, and the group has sent delegations to Syria, Montenegro, Serbia, Nepal, Bolivia and Senegal. The Foreign Office would like to draw attention to two specific examples where we believe that the visits made a tremendous difference in terms of the relationship between ourselves and others. First, the Senegal visit in September and October of this year has been identified by

our Ambassador as an important visit made by British parliamentarians to what is historically a Francophone part of Africa. The delegation worked long days—well, it says that here, at least—to pack in 40 ministerial and parliamentary meetings, as well as meeting with others from civil society. Interestingly, the visit greatly facilitated the Ambassador's access to Ministers. Often, we forget that in some settings it can be quite difficult for our representatives to get to the highest level of Government. Parliamentarians can play an important role in facilitating that access, which can then form the bedrock or foundation behind strengthening relationships.

Secondly, the visit to Montenegro and Serbia in February helped to promote relations between the Belgrade Embassy and the Serbian National Assembly. In Montenegro, our Ambassador made it clear that our visit had helped to strengthen links with the Parliament in a way that has never been done before.

The work that the IPU does has not been sufficiently valued in the past. It has not been given the status that it deserves, and I feel that we need closer co-operation and collaboration when considering the objectives of foreign policy and the contribution that parliamentarians can make, which is complementary but distinct in terms of governmental to governmental relationships. I would like to see beyond this AGM and look at how we can strengthen the relationships between the Foreign Office and other relevant Government Departments and the IPU in the period ahead.

Mr Chairman, I would like to thank you once again for the invitation to address this Annual General Meeting, and I propose the adoption of the 2009 Annual Report. *[Applause]*

Right Hon John Bercow MP: Ivan, Thank you very much indeed. I would now like to invite Mr David Lidington MP, Shadow Minister for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, to second the adoption of the Annual Report for 2009.

David Lidington MP (Secunder of the 2009 Annual Report): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and let me start by saying that it is a pleasure to all of us that you have agreed to take on the traditional role of the Speaker as Honorary President of the IPU. I couple that by expressing our thanks to your predecessor, Michael Martin, who I know always took his duties very seriously when it came to meeting, entertaining and getting to know Speakers and leaders of delegations from parliaments around the world.

Like Ivan Lewis, I pay tribute to our Chairman for the indefatigable work that I know he carries out on behalf of us all. I hope that colleagues will understand if I also say a particular word of thanks to Sir Nicholas Winterton. Sir Nicholas has announced that he does not intend to stand for re-election at the general election, so this is likely to be the last Annual General Meeting in which he will be present as Treasurer. All of us who have been involved in work with voluntary organisations—whether political parties or organisations outside politics—know that the task of being Treasurer is always complicated and almost always completely thankless. The Treasurer is always the one who bears the brunt of any grumbles. I think that we owe a debt of thanks to Sir Nicholas for the work that he has done on behalf of the IPU.

I agree with what Ivan said: the work of the IPU is not always treated with the seriousness and the respect that it deserves. I should say in passing that I was intrigued by the Minister's briefing from the Foreign Office about the Members of the House of Commons who are active in the IPU. It suggested to me that things have not changed since a conversation I had some years ago with a now retired Permanent Secretary who said, "David, it probably is the case that here we regard the House of Commons as a medium-sized foreign power with rather uncertain intentions towards

us.” The Minister assures me that the briefing came not from his Department but from the IPU itself. That provides some reassurance about the quality of the advice that the Minister has been getting.

If we look through the Annual Report, various important roles for the IPU stand out. They are all about strengthening relationships between this country and nations around the world, some of which are long-standing friends, and others with which we have had difficult relationships over the years. The work of the IPU is not to be underestimated as a factor in increasing the influence of the United Kingdom in those countries, which will have a beneficial spin-off in other areas of activity. When we read through the accounts of the various inward and outward delegations, we find that the IPU has had contact with countries such as the United Arab Emirates and Uruguay, which have long-standing and important commercial and political relationships with the United Kingdom.

We find an important series of meetings with parliaments from Eastern Europe—from Ukraine, Serbia, Montenegro and Georgia. Any of us who have over the last 20 years in British politics met with political leaders from central and Eastern Europe as they have broken free from decades of tyranny and totalitarian government to discover what a free society and multiparty democracy is like, know that those political leaders really value the experience and the shared knowledge of potential challenges and difficulties, as well as the solutions to make democratic politics work. They want to probe our experiences and see what they can usefully apply to themselves. From the point of view of a British politician, it is sometimes humbling to talk to people who have had to struggle for the democratic freedoms that we in this country too often take for granted.

Other countries are listed which are not in the headlines, such as Kyrgyzstan, Bolivia and Mongolia. Each has its own challenges and, most importantly, our Parliament understands what is going on in those parts of the world. Even a country such as Madagascar, where there is no resident British Ambassador or diplomatic post, was visited by an all-party group delegation. I see the work of the IPU not as an alternative to Britain's official representation, but as very much complementary to the work that is done by the Foreign Office and DFID.

In that spirit, and in applauding and welcoming the work that the IPU has done over the past year, it gives me great pleasure to second the motion before us.

[Applause]

Right Hon John Bercow MP: The Annual Report has now been proposed and seconded. Is it agreed that we adopt the Report?

The Report is duly adopted.

Before we move on to the rest of the agenda, I would like to take this opportunity to say that I firmly believe that face-to-face contact with parliamentarians, both here in Westminster and abroad, is an important part of parliamentary business. I sincerely hope that the main political parties can co-operate in the coming months to do two things. First, to reassure their members that participation in this important parliamentary activity is not going to end their political advancement, and secondly to come to sensible arrangements to enable members of our various delegations to represent us, as they do, without the fear of recall for no good reason. I am keen to talk about that in some detail, and my Office is arranging a meeting with the Lord Speaker, and the Chairs of the IPU, CPA and others, which I hope will take place soon.

Item 6 is the presentation of the financial statement for April 2008 to March 2009. I invite Sir Nicholas Winterton, DL MP, Treasurer of the Group, to present the Financial Statement.

Sir Nicholas Winterton DL MP (Treasurer, British Group IPU): Mr. Speaker, my Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, first I thank David Lidington for his generous remarks. I must also give you an assurance that I do not own a bank, and neither do I have any vested interest in the Turks and Caicos Islands.

I have the pleasure to present the Financial Statement and Statement of Internal Control for the year ending 31 March 2009. As a change from our previous practice, these are reproduced at the back of our Annual Report, and you should all have access to a copy. They are found on pages 139 to 150.

On page 145 is the report of our auditors, which states that the financial statements give a true and fair view of the state of our affairs, in accordance with UK Generally Accepted Accounting Practice as at 31 March 2009. Our Audit Committee received a report from KPMG on our accounts and finance procedures on 25 June, and was assured that there was nothing in the audit that might cause concern. The Executive Committee approved the Financial Statement at its meeting on 15 July.

I will now turn to the numbers. The income and expenditure account is on page 146. Income from grant in aid was up compared to the previous year, partly offset by decreases in subscriptions and, inevitably, bank interest. 70% of our grant in aid is paid by the House of Commons, and 30% by the House of Lords.

I will now turn to expenditure. Subscription expenditure is up considerably compared with the previous year. Most of it, £307,499, is the payment of our annual

subscription to the IPU in Geneva, as determined by the IPU Governing Council. The increase is made up of three parts: first there is an annual 3% inflation built in, and second is the continuation of a process agreed by the Governing Council to adjust the subscription scales to protect the smaller countries of the IPU. That means, inevitably, that the middle countries such as the UK have to pay more. However the biggest factor has been the adverse effect of exchange rate movements against the Swiss Franc from 2.1263 to the pound in the previous year, to 1.7184—a decrease of 19.2%. The remainder of the subscriptions total is paid to our geopolitical group in the IPU, and I can tell you with satisfaction that that has not changed for several years.

The decrease in the cost of conferences and outward delegations is largely accounted for by the higher than normal cost of attending the Assembly held in Indonesia in the previous year, together with the smaller than anticipated number of small conferences attended in the year ending March 2009. As you will appreciate, the venue for the main IPU Assembly of the year is a decision taken by the IPU Governing Council, not by the British Group. Applications for support from affiliated all-party country groups were half those in the previous year.

Staff costs rose by 21.4% to £384,175, from £316,344 in the previous year. That was mainly due to the impact of two members of staff being on maternity leave. The increase in the average number of employees from seven to eight in the financial year 2008-09, is a consequence of employing temporary replacements during this period. A pay increase was awarded to staff in line with the House of Commons annual pay review, effective from April 2008. The final item of note in expenditure is the cost of giftware. We purchased—quite reasonably I think—a stock of 150 fine English bone china presentation plates, which should last for at least eight years. In

summary, as you can see at the foot of the columns, our overall expenditure was just over £30,000 less than the previous year, and the surplus for the year was offset against our bid for grant in aid for the current year.

I will briefly turn to the balance sheet on page 147. Our cash holdings amounted to just over £1.2 million. Included in that figure is the fund of £73,113, which as you can see at the foot of page 149, is held on behalf of the Twelve Plus geopolitical group of the IPU. A broadly similar figure—less bank interest accrued—appears in Creditors at the top of page 150. That amount will be handed on when the group relinquishes its responsibility for running the Twelve Plus secretariat sometime next year. Back to page 147, you see that the general fund stood at £1,497,394 at the end of the financial year, together with my signature. That concludes my presentation on the financial statements for the group. Do members present have any questions?

Right Hon John Bercow MP: Are there any questions? No. In that case, I should like to thank Sir Nicholas for his presentation, and the characteristic vim with which he invested it. We welcome all that he said in his report, with particular reference to and appreciation of the pay award given to members of staff, and the availability of maternity leave for expectant mothers. I feel sure that that subject is dear to all of our hearts, above all to that of Sir Nicholas. It was an excellent report and we are most grateful for it.

Item 7 is the appointment of auditors. Sir Nicholas, free of questions, is now able to propose the formal appointment of our auditors for the year 2009-10.

Sir Nicholas Winterton MP: At the AGM held on 7 December 2007, it was agreed that our external audit arrangements would be reviewed once the ongoing changes to our funding arrangements, and the terms of our relationship with both

Houses of Parliament, were settled. Accordingly, in June this year, the Audit Committee examined proposals from five prospective auditors, including KPMG, our existing auditors at the time. It received presentations in person from four of those firms. The Committee recommended FW Stephens to the Executive Committee for the quality of its presentation and its written bid, the care taken to focus on the Group's requirements, and its competitive proposed fees. At its meeting on 15 July, the Executive Committee endorsed the recommendation of the Audit Committee.

Mr Speaker, I propose to members present at this AGM that F W Stephens be appointed as the Group's auditors for the year 2009-10.

Right Hon John Bercow MP: Can we have a Secunder? Mr Nigel Evans.

All those in favour please raise your hands. Is anybody against? No—thank you. That is agreed. Item 8 is the election of officers and the Executive Committee for the period 2009-10. I stood down from the Committee when I was elected as the Speaker. In addition, I have to announce that Baroness Boothroyd, Eric Illsley MP and Adam Price MP are not seeking re-election for the coming year. I know from my personal experience how valuable their contributions to the work of the Committee have been over the past year. I am sure that the meeting will agree to record its appreciation for all that they have done for the British Group and the IPU itself, and hope that they will continue to take part in the Group's activities.

All the candidates for the posts of Officers and Executive Committee members who are standing for election are unopposed. The names have already been circulated to members in a letter dated 11 November 2009. Since then, Anthony Steen MP has withdrawn his nomination, and consequently the number of Conservative MPs remaining in the ballot now matches the number of vacancies.

The new list of officers and Executive Committee members will be placed in the IPU Room, the Noes Division Lobby and on the Group's website.

Is there any other business? I am advised that none has been notified.

Item 10 is the speech by the Chair. I know the relief and enthusiasm with which it will be received when I make it clear that the speech is not by this Chair, but by that Chair—Dr Roger Berry.

Dr Roger Berry MP (Chair, British Group IPU): I start with a few words of thanks to some very important people. First, Mr Speaker, thank you for chairing our AGM, and for the two and a half years in which you served as a very active member of the Executive Committee. You understand well the work of the group, and we welcome you to your new post as Honorary President.

I also thank the other Honorary President, the Lord Speaker for her support for the Group, which is equally invaluable. I thank Ivan and David—it is always good to see consensus breaking out. Let us hope that we can retain it for the rest of the afternoon. I would like to thank all my colleagues on the Executive Committee, both those who are standing down and those who have had the courage to stand again. Thank you to all colleagues who have participated in our outward or inward delegations, our seminars, or any of our other activities over the past 12 months. Thank you to our General Secretary, and to all our colleagues, some of whom are at the back of the room. We are blessed with fantastic staff, and it is obvious that we could not operate as parliamentarians and as members of the British Group of the IPU in the way that we have over the past 12 months, without the fantastic work of all our staff.

Let me say thank you very much to the Secretariat, and to all Government Departments, but particularly the Foreign Office and DFID. They do an enormous amount to facilitate our outward delegations and to help us host inward delegations. I am particularly grateful to those Ministers who agreed to meet with inward delegations. You were saying, Ivan, that when outward delegations go from here to another country, they can often get access to Ministers, senior parliamentarians and officials, or even Prime Ministers and Presidents. It is therefore gratifying that when delegations come to the UK, our fellow parliamentarians from other countries have the opportunity of meeting with senior members of our own Government. Long may that continue.

I am delighted that everybody has said so much in praise of the IPU. It is a remarkable organisation. It was set up 120 years ago in 1889 by two Back-Benchers—one British and one French. That was before the League of Nations and obviously before the UN. The purpose was to promote peaceful co-operation and dialogue between parliamentarians, as that was judged to be the right direction in which world discourse ought to go. The IPU has now become a very substantial international organisation for parliamentarians, working for peace and co-operation and seeking to address international problems that can be addressed only by parliamentarians, by Governments, by NGOs, and by everyone from each country working together.

We all know the problems that individual nation states cannot satisfactorily address on their own, such as climate change, poverty, the global economic crisis and world poverty. All those issues are extremely important to all of us, but no individual country is in a position to adequately address them. We need international dialogue

and co-operation, to learn from each other and share ideas—it is important for parliamentarians to do that as well as Government Ministers on a Government to Government basis.

The IPU is also deeply committed to strengthening human rights. As many people know, today is the international day for the elimination of violence against women. That is just one of the days that the IPU and other organisations put human rights back on the agenda where they should always be.

When I look back at our two founders—they happen to be two founding fathers, but it would be different now—I see them as true internationalists who believe deeply and passionately in the importance of what we do. In that sense, it is clear to me that what the IPU does today is not just something else that parliamentarians might want to do, but it is something that parliamentarians must and should do. It is an important part of our role as parliamentarians, and I am delighted that that is generally accepted.

I return briefly to a point that I made a last year's AGM, to which Mr Speaker has kindly referred. If it is the case that Parliament, Government and the Opposition want parliamentarians to engage in this work, it should be regarded as an important duty that some of us have to perform. As I said last year, it is not beyond the wit of Parliament to have arrangements whereby it is possible to have outward delegations without disruption.

Let me be blunt. We have just had the October Geneva Assembly, and arrangements were made with the Whip's Offices to attend. Two thirds of the way through, I was summoned back to vote. Naturally, after a little discussion, I agreed to come back to vote, and I duly pointed out that our Opposition Vice-Chair, Nigel

Evans, would take over the leadership of the delegation. Within a few hours, Nigel Evans was also on an aeroplane coming back from Geneva. We lost 40% of our delegation, and the outcome of the votes in this place was exactly the same as it would have been if we had both stayed in Geneva. This is not rocket science; it is not difficult to arrange if we all agree that the activity is important. I have privately expressed a view about who was to blame for all of that, but I will not express it here. However, if the Opposition, the Government, and Parliament want delegations to function sensibly, we must find a way around that. With trust and respect, I am sure that it can be done, and I hope that such a situation does not happen again.

On a much happier note, we have had some successful outward and inward delegations this year. I will not go through the list again. Ivan kindly identified them, and David referred to them. It has been a very good year in terms of the range of countries with which we have had bilateral contact. Of course, we have also funded a number of visits organised by our affiliated all-party groups. We sent delegations to specialist conferences—there was one in May on the global economic crisis. I am also pleased to report that there is consensus. Nigel and I agree absolutely on the fundamental role of Government in addressing the global economic crisis. Consensus is breaking out.

The economic crisis has caused enormous damage in our constituencies and it has caused immeasurable harm in the poorest countries and communities of our planet. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the IPU has spent a lot of time at assemblies and specialist conferences addressing that issue. The lack of a peace process in the Middle East and climate change are two other issues that dominated our

two assemblies and our bilateral discussions, both when we were hosts and when we were guests.

In February this year, the British Group hosted a two-day seminar on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities—I do not like that name myself; we in the UK tend to say disabled people, but elsewhere it is persons with disabilities. It was the first human rights treaty of the 21st century, and we had a good two-day seminar. The people who had drafted the Convention were present and there were disability organisations and parliamentarians from throughout Europe. It was a very successful event. We are looking at organising further seminars on international issues, and in the New Year we hope to address the issue of human trafficking. I hope that colleagues will participate in that.

John Austin MP, who unfortunately had to send his apologies as he is speaking in a debate, is Chair of our geopolitical group in the IPU, the so-called Twelve Plus group. It is Twelve Plus because we could not count beyond 12. It is made up of Europeans and some members of the Commonwealth. John chairs that group, and I think that we should thank him for the work that he does, and acknowledge that it has made additional work for Ken and the Secretariat in servicing that very important role. It is extremely worthwhile and in all our interests.

In conclusion, we have had a successful year, notwithstanding the odd hiccup. I urge you to continue to actively participate in the work of the British Group, and I encourage our other colleagues to do so. We are always keen to have a good choice of candidates when we select outward delegations, so please encourage other colleagues to apply. I thank you for your attendance this afternoon and for your support for the British Group. *[Applause]*

Right Hon John Bercow MP: Colleagues, this is not in the script, but I will say it anyway. Earlier, I referred, perhaps rather elliptically, to the importance of head-to-head engagement with other parliamentarians, both here and around the world. I said that I would be looking to discuss further how suitable arrangements could be made. For the avoidance of doubt, I would like to underline what Roger has said about the importance of this work, not merely its legitimacy, but its importance and the benefits that flow from it.

While there is an obligation on us while organising our affairs to be—and to be seen to be—immune to criticism or adverse comment, we should not in any way be defensive about or apologetic for the work of the IPU. It is important. I am conscious that Members of the House of Lords are present, a good many of whom I recognise as people of great distinction, long service and expertise. They will forgive me if I do not dwell on that, but as there are rather a small number of people here, and I know them all, I would like to underline my belief, or rather knowledge, that the parliamentarians from my House are extremely committed both in relation to international affairs and overwhelmingly to domestic affairs as well.

I am looking at the people involved in the IPU. Roger is here as Chair, Sir Nicholas Winterton is on my right. Nigel Evans, Gordon Prentice, Andrew Dismore, Keith Hill, Brian Jenkins, Brian Iddon, Ann Clwyd, Christine Russell, Sir John Stanley, Doug Naysmith, Jeremy Corbyn, Alun Michael, Jeff Ennis and Alan Meale. I know them all, and they are all hugely committed parliamentarians. Let us hold our heads high, despite all the difficulties that the House has had this year, and the necessary changes that we have to make in order to gain permission to be heard by the media and the electorate. There is no reason whatsoever to be apologetic about our

work, or to give the impression that it is something we rather enjoy but which we should keep fairly hushed about. Absolutely not—it is good work, and although the people who engage in it no doubt derive pleasure and fulfilment from it, they are also performing an important public service, not always in the warmest or happiest of climes, and often in difficult parts of the world with which British parliamentarians should never mess, and they certainly get engaged.

I would like to thank you for what you do, and with your agreement, I will close the meeting and underline to people, especially our associate and honorary members, that they are invited to go next door to the anteroom for refreshments.

I now declare this meeting closed.