

INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

BRITISH GROUP

PALACE OF WESTMINSTER

LONDON SW1A 0AA

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

WEDNESDAY, 5 DECEMBER 2007

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, 5 December 2007. The Honorary President, the Rt Hon Michael Martin, MP, Mr Speaker, was in the chair until 5pm, following which the chair was taken by Nigel Evans MP.

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, which will follow the normal pattern.

You will see from the Annual Report that the British Group of the IPU has had another productive year of activity, about which we will hear more later. You are all invited to go next door to the ante-room for refreshments after the meeting. The ballot will remain open until 5.30, or 15 minutes after the meeting ends, whichever is the later. The prospect of a nice drink in the ante-room should not influence your vote, however.

Apologies for absence

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

THE SECRETARY: Mr Speaker, I have a list of 111 names.

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Wednesday, 29 November 2006

MR SPEAKER: We are now required to adopt the Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Wednesday, 29 November 2006. The Minutes are printed on pages 7 to 25 of the Annual Report. May I have a proposer and a seconder that the minutes be adopted as a true record of the previous meeting? *(Proposed by Sir Nicholas Winterton DL MP and seconded by Tim Loughton MP)*

Is it agreed that the Minutes are 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 the minutes?

THE SECRETARY: None have been notified.

Presentation of the Financial Statement for April 2006 to March 2007 and appointment of Auditors

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

NIGEL EVANS MP: Thank you, Mr Speaker. My Lords, ladies and gentlemen, I have pleasure in presenting the Financial Statement and Statement of Internal Control for the year ending 31 March 2007, copies of which have been placed on the seats in the room. Jonathan Downer is present from our auditors, KPMG; I thank him for coming.

Pages 1 to 3 of the Financial Statement contain the Statement of Internal Control, which bears my signature on page 3. Page 4 contains the Statement of the Executive Committee's responsibilities for preparation of the financial statements. Page 5 is the auditors' report, which states that the Financial Statement gives a true and fair view of the state of our affairs as at 31 March 2007. Our Audit Committee has additionally received a report from KPMG on our accounts and finance procedures, and was satisfied that there were no items of concern to report.

The income and expenditure account is on page 6. With the extra income for the Africa parliamentary seminar held in 2005 taken out of the equation, the income for the year ending 31 March 2007 is broadly similar to that of the previous year. Let me deal first with expenditure on conferences and outward delegations. Comparison with previous years must take account of the exceptional expenditure of some £195,000 on the October 2005 Africa seminar. If that figure is removed from the figures for 2006, the expenditure for the year ending 31 March 2007 is some £46,000 less than the previous year. The reasons are that there was one fewer conference this year, and that travel to other conferences was to slightly cheaper destinations.

Support to affiliated All-Party Groups almost doubled to just over £44,000, which was still less than the budgeted amount. Eleven groups received assistance from the support fund during the year. Staff costs increased by 5.6 per cent, owing partly to one internal promotion and partly to the House of Commons annual pay award. Sundry expenses include IT consumables, bank charges and office repairs, and as such vary from year to year. The Audit Committee has recommended that the balance of the stock value of giftware should be written off over three years, which explains the amortisation amount of nearly £3,500. In future years, stock will be written off in the year of purchase, and income from sales will be shown as additional income. As you can see, the Group had an overall surplus of £81,362 on the income and expenditure account for the year.

I now turn to the balance sheet. The value of stocks has decreased by the amount of the write-off that I just mentioned. The only other point to mention is the figure in relation to creditors, under the heading of current liabilities. Those who have already read the Annual Report will know that John Austin was last year elected for a two-year term to be the Chair of the 12-Plus Group, which is the European caucus of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Part of our responsibility is to look after that Group's finances. Accordingly, a fund of slightly more than £60,000 was transferred from the Canadian IPU Group at the beginning of this year and is entered as a liability on our accounts; the balance, net of subscription income and expenditure, will be handed on to the parliament or IPU Group of the next Chair when he or she is elected at the end of 2008.

That concludes my presentation on the Financial Statement. Are there any questions?

LORD JOPLING: Mr Speaker, the Treasurer will recall the Audit Committee meeting, of which I am a member, at which considerable reservations were expressed about the inaccurate Commentary on Financial Statements that was put before the Committee by the

auditors. Will the Committee of the IPU consider shortly holding a beauty parade, with a view to changing the auditors? I realise that there are currently some issues on changes to governance and funding of the group. However, if they do not happen, will the Treasurer consider a beauty parade with a view to changing the auditors?

NIGEL EVANS MP: I recall your comments at the time of the meeting, Lord Jopling. You are right that a whole group of new Officers will be elected shortly, and I believe that the matter you have mentioned should and will be discussed by the new Executive Committee and by the new Officers. Thank you for raising it.

There are two more matters that I wish to mention. For as far back as our records go, our annual grant in aid has been paid by Her Majesty's Treasury. In recent years, that has increasingly become an anomaly. As you are aware, Mr Speaker, this Group—together with our colleagues in the CPA, the British-American, and the British-Irish Groups—has made a submission to have funding direct from Parliament. I am pleased to say that progress has been made on that, and that we hope that all the points of detail will be agreed well in time for the start of the next financial year on 1 April 2008.

Finally, as this is the last occasion on which I appear before you as your Treasurer, I should like to thank the Secretariat—particularly June Hart—for all their support during the past three years. I wish my successor an enjoyable period in office.

I propose the adoption of the Financial Statement of the year ending 31 March 2007 and the appointment as auditors of KPMG LLP for the year ending 31 March 2008.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Nigel. Before I ask for a Secunder, it is best if I clarify one matter. Although the request has been made to allow the funding of the organisation and of the CPA and the British-American and British-Irish Groups to transfer from the responsibility of the Treasury to the House of Commons, that matter has not yet been decided. It is still a pending matter of consideration for the House of Commons Commission and, although the indications have so far been favourable, it is best if we do not count our chickens before they are hatched. The matter must yet go before the Commission, and the House must have a say in the matter, so it does not necessarily follow that everything will be wrapped up before the end of March. I just make that cautionary remark. I am not saying that it will not happen, but that we must not assume too much too early.

Having said that, may I ask for a Secunder for the proposed adoption of the Financial Statement and the appointment of auditors?

(Secunded by Mr John Bercow MP)

Unless I misunderstood Lord Jopling, I think that I heard what may have been a contrary view, so let me ask whether there is any dissent on the proposed appointment.

LORD JOPLING: Mr Speaker, I think I made clear my view that if, in the course of the next few months, there is no change in the funding arrangements, the Committee should consider holding a beauty parade. I am not objecting to the present proposal.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you for that clarification. There is therefore no one against the proposal, so is it agreed that we adopt the report and appoint KPMG as auditors? *(Agreed)* I thank Nigel Evans for his work as Treasurer. *(Applause)*

Adoption of the Annual Report for 2007

MR SPEAKER: I would now like to invite the Rt Hon Lord Malloch-Brown, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, to propose the adoption of the Annual Report for 2007.

LORD MALLOCH-BROWN: Mr Speaker, I am delighted to have been invited to join this Annual General Meeting and to propose the adoption of the 2007 Annual Report. I am pleased to be joined by my friend, Keith Simpson MP, Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs, who will second the Annual Report's adoption.

This AGM is particularly significant, because it marks the end of the three-year term of office of the Rt Hon Ann Clwyd MP as Chair of the British Group. She is a long-standing campaigner for human rights, and I have observed her vigour in that area from the United Nations and elsewhere. During her chairmanship, she has encouraged the Group to ensure that human rights were at the forefront of its activities at home and abroad, which has been a good fit with the priorities of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Alongside Ann Clwyd's duties as chair of the IPU, she has also completed a three-year chairmanship and five-year membership of the IPU's Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, and has done much to raise the awareness of the rights of parliamentarians who have been persecuted. Quite rightly, she has said that for dialogue between parliamentarians to be meaningful, the boundaries should be pushed a little, and she has certainly achieved that objective. She has pushed human rights to the forefront of the British Group's agenda, with excellent results. The AGM also marks the end of the periods of office of two other Officers—Vice-Chairs Roger Berry MP and Derek Conway MP, as well as that of the Treasurer, Nigel Evans MP.

As ever, the British Group has had a very busy year. It has welcomed delegations to Britain, and there have been several outward delegations from Britain. The visit programme for the past year has covered countries such as Burundi, Azerbaijan, and the Republic of Korea. The forward programme is equally diverse, and includes countries such as Japan, Ukraine and Nicaragua.

In all such visits, the British Group ensures that there is meaningful dialogue that focuses on issues as various as people trafficking, climate change and human rights, to name but a few. Promoting parliamentary democracy obviously remains a key focus too. All those areas enable the Group to make progress on important issues in ways that complement and enhance traditional Government-to-Government diplomacy. The Group has also shown that it is not afraid to tackle difficult issues. The bilateral meeting with Iran at the 116th IPU Assembly in Indonesia demonstrated that.

It remains only for me to thank the British Group for the excellent work that all of you have done during the past year. I particularly thank the outgoing Officers for their contributions—especially the outgoing Chair, for her tremendous work. I am aware that she will continue her involvement with the Group as a member. I take this opportunity to wish

well to the incoming Chair and to wish the Group a successful and fruitful 2008. I propose the adoption of the Annual Report for 2007 and I invite Mr Keith Simpson MP, Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs, to second the adoption of the report. *(Applause)*

KEITH SIMPSON MP: It is a great honour to be here to second the adoption of the Annual Report. I know that many people outside Parliament regard participation in the IPU and the CPA as one long jolly for parliamentarians. That might be superficially true, but those who read the report will know just how much hard work is undertaken, as will those who have participated in inward and outward delegations.

Like Lord Malloch-Brown, I express my thanks to Ann Clwyd MP as the Chair. She has done some outstanding work and has pushed the parameters of the IPU in a direction that her successor will no doubt wish to pursue.

As he is standing down as an Officer of the Group, I also wish to thank my colleague Derek Conway MP. He has worked very hard indeed for the IPU and has fought many a battle on our behalf with a knife and fork! He has sacrificed his waistline for us. Like Ann, he has been an outstanding ambassador and has done us all a great deal of credit. Like the CPA, the IPU shows parliamentarians at their best—working together, without party labels. As Lord Malloch-Brown said, there has been an enormous amount of activity, and we can all take credit for that.

I want to emphasise that it is very easy to take our own parliamentary freedoms for granted. It is nearly 400 years since parliamentarians in this country were threatened literally with the choice of life or death. It is a privilege, therefore, to meet parliamentarians who speak out at risk to their personal freedom and to their lives. Even if we sometimes think that what we are doing here or with them is superficial, their Governments often take notice of our activities, and that encourages and inspires those brave men and women. The challenge for the future for the IPU is to keep up support for fragile parliamentary democracies and encourage those countries that are only just beginning to establish parliamentary democracy.

Finally, I wish all that is best to both Roger Berry MP and Nigel Evans MP, who will come before the selector, perhaps in a few minutes. I hope that they will be able to progress the work that they have already been doing for the IPU. I am proud to second the motion. *(Applause)*

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Keith, and thank you, Lord Malloch-Brown. The Annual Report has now been proposed and seconded. Is it agreed that we adopt the Annual Report? *(Agreed)*

The Election of Officers and the Executive Committee for the period 2007/2008

MR SPEAKER: We now move on to the election of Officers and of the Executive Committee. As has already been explained, our Chair, Ann Clwyd MP, and the Opposition Vice-Chair, Derek Conway MP, will be standing down as Officers of the Group. I concur with what has already been said about Ann Clwyd. You are a credit to Parliament, Ann. Anyone who observes Parliament knows that you regularly stand up with conviction to speak up for countries where there is dictatorship. You are the voice here in the United Kingdom of those who desire democracy everywhere. You are not afraid to go to countries that are

dangerous for strangers. We wish you well, and we thank you for your support—past and future—for the IPU.

The same comments apply to our friend Derek Conway. He is always friendly, available and diplomatic. We thank him in his absence for his help and support.

There are also a number of other Committee members who are standing down from the Executive Committee—Ann Keen MP, Jenny Willott MP and Lord Foulkes, who is a very busy man north of the border. We wish them well, too.

A number of Officers and Executive Committee Members who are standing for election are unopposed. Their names have already been circulated to members and are on the voting papers, so I will not read them out. This year, we have five separate ballots for the following positions:

Government Vice-Chair
Treasurer
Labour MPs
Labour Peers
Conservative MPs

May I ask for two tellers for the ballot?
(Lord Montgomery and Roger Gale MP were appointed as tellers)

The results of the ballot will be sent by letter to those concerned, and the new list of Officers and Executive Committee members will be placed in the IPU Room, in the Noes Division Lobby and on the Group's website.

Proposed amendment to Rule 17 paragraphs (1), (2) and (3) relating to Affiliated All-Party Groups¹

MR SPEAKER: I invite Mr Kenneth Courtenay, Secretary of the Group, to present the proposed amendment to Rule 17 paragraphs (1), (2) and (3).

MR KENNETH COURTENAY: The proposed amendment to Rule 17 (1), which is on the penultimate line of the paragraph, simply takes account of the role that the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards has had for some time now—that of being the authority to register All-Party Groups. The amended rule 17 (2) would allow the Executive Committee to authorise financial assistance to affiliated All-Party Country Groups to assist them to carry out bilateral activities with their respective countries. There are many examples of those activities in this year's Annual Report as well as in previous Annual Reports. Amended rule 17 (3) would require us, the British Group of the IPU, to consult affiliated All-Party Country Groups when we contemplate activities concerning their respective countries of interest. Current paragraphs (3) and (4) of Rule 17 would be renumbered as paragraphs (4) and (5).

¹ The proposed amended paragraphs are reproduced at the end of the Minutes

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Kenneth. Is it agreed that we adopt the amendment?
(Agreed)

Any other business

MR SPEAKER: Unfortunately, I must attend a very pressing meeting at 5 pm, so if the meeting is agreeable, I intend to ask Nigel Evans to take the chair for the rest of the meeting. I wish the Group every success for the following year. It goes without saying that you will have every co-operation from me not only from Speaker's House but in welcoming foreign delegations here at Westminster.

(Nigel Evans MP took the chair of the Meeting)

NIGEL EVANS MP: Is there any other business?

(The Secretary reported that no notice of such business had been given under Rule 15 (4).)

Speech by the Rt Hon Ann Clwyd MP, Chair

NIGEL EVANS MP: We now come to the speech by our Chair. I am delighted to say that I have worked closely with Ann during the past three years. She deserves the accolades that she has already received in the meeting—indeed, she deserves more. Ann, you have been superb, and you have shown great commitment to your duties.

ANN CLWYD MP: I was going to start by thanking the Speaker, because praise from him is rare indeed—I should like to put that on the record despite his departure from the meeting. I thank Mark Malloch-Brown and Keith Simpson for proposing and seconding the adoption of the Annual Report.

As you know, I have been your Chair for the past three years and shall be handing over to my successor, Roger Berry MP, who has been elected unopposed, and whom I congratulate. I hope that his time in the Chair will be as rewarding as mine.

I thank my fellow Officers, Derek Conway, who like me is retiring, and Nigel Evans, who will take over unopposed as Vice-Chair. It has been a pleasure working with them and I thank them and Roger Berry, the previous Vice-Chair, for their hard work and commitment.

I also thank John Austin, who is not present, for his work on the IPU International Executive Committee—work that has likewise come to an end—and for his work for another year as Chair of 12-Plus.

I am grateful for the detailed and onerous work that is being undertaken by two of our British Group members, Andrew Dismore, who is present, and Lord Morris of Aberavon, who have been appointed rapporteurs for their respective Committees. They ensure that the IPU is addressing timely and important topics, and spend long hours in drafting Committees that none of the rest of us volunteer for regularly.

I thank all my colleagues on the Executive Committee. It has been a pleasure to work with you and with other fellow parliamentarians who have taken part in inward and outward delegations. I am also extremely grateful for the diligent work of the Group Secretariat, without whom we could not function: Ken Courtenay, the General Secretary, Dominique Rees, Penny Vagg, Suzanne Hayes, Francesca Ingham, Chintan Makwana, June Hart, and David Kemp, who are all present. (*Applause*) In his absence, I also thank the Speaker once more for his work and support in the past year as honorary President.

I am sure that I speak for all IPU members in noting with sadness the death in May this year of Bernard, Lord Weatherill. He was a former honorary President as well as Speaker, and continued to play a very active role in IPU activities as one of our honorary Vice-Presidents.

The British Group has a very important role to play in strengthening ties with fellow parliamentarians from around the world and in supporting the institution of parliamentary democracy. I address that remark to Whips from all parts of the House, because one of our problems during the past year has been obtaining permission for delegations of members to leave the country. Those trips are not jollies, they are important.

During my time in office, British MPs and Peers have met either as hosts or as guests with their counterparts from all four corners of the globe—from Albania to Azerbaijan, Brazil to Burundi, Korea to Kyrgyzstan, and Madagascar to Mexico. The boundaries should continue to be pushed, however. If we want to engage meaningfully with our counterparts all over the world, we have to raise the more difficult and challenging issues.

We have the ability to ask for a meeting with a delegation from a certain country, and some of our most important meetings have taken place during Assemblies. Lord Malloch-Brown mentioned Iran. There was an interesting meeting with the Iranian delegation in one of our last visits, when we discussed among other issues the crackdown on dress codes in Iran. We pointed out that an item had appeared on British television news a few days previously, in which Iranian women were seen being bundled into a car because they were uncovered. The Iranians looked totally blank and said that they had no knowledge of the incident, but fortunately Nigel Evans had his ever-handly laptop with him and we were able to play back the relevant section from the BBC news item.

If we want to help parliamentary colleagues whose mandates are being challenged and whose lives are at risk, we must champion their cases. Freedom of expression, association and assembly and related rights are all important. We have the platform to help with them and we should use it at every opportunity. I hope that the good work continues and that we keep human rights at the forefront of the agenda.

This year's Geneva assembly in October resulted in the adoption of a hard-hitting resolution against Burma, and that was in no small part because of the work of the British IPU Group and because we dropped our own emergency resolution in favour of a resolution on Burma. We did a lot of work beforehand with ASEAN countries so that they tabled that resolution, and an interesting debate resulted. If the IPU is to mean something, we must express our concern and demonstrate our commitment to tackling gross human rights violations and humanitarian crises.

I hope that we shall continue to have an annual Adjournment Debate on the work of the IPU and the British Group. As I have said before, that should not be on a Thursday afternoon, nor in Westminster Hall if it can be avoided, but on the floor of the House of Commons so that all our colleagues can fully understand our work. We need to remind the Government that parliamentarians undertake important work on the international stage and must be valued for the important contacts that they make. I am grateful to all colleagues who participated in this year's debate. I think everybody is agreed that it was good.

It is an important innovation that we are now informed about specific human rights matters raised by the All-Party Parliamentary Groups whose visits and related activities are funded by the British Group.

I trust that we shall keep reform of the international IPU on the radar. It is needed so that our impact is even greater. We should also strengthen the mechanisms already in place: the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, the Committee on Middle East Questions, and the three Standing Committees. We should continue to press the International IPU Secretariat on the need for greater accountability and transparency.

After three years in the Chair, I think that I made my priorities fairly clear. I hope that I shall be able to continue working with the British Group as a member of the Executive Committee.

It was my idea to provide refreshments on the occasion of the AGM, so I shall not hold them up any longer. I invite you all to participate. (*Applause*)

Closure of meeting

NIGEL EVANS MP: Thank you, Ann.

I have been with Ann on some of the bilateral meetings that she mentioned. Iran was particularly memorable, and Burma was another important issue. We raised Zimbabwe when we met South Africa. Ann has shown great diplomacy, together with the directness that is essential to our being effective. Thank you, Ann.

I have spent the past five days in Russia monitoring their elections. The polls at the back of our room here close at 5.30. Members must complete their ballot papers by that time. Unlike in Russia, the outcome is not a foregone conclusion. You are all invited to go next door to the ante-room for refreshments, especially our Associate and Honorary Members. I now declare this meeting closed.

Proposed New Paragraphs (1), (2) and (3) of Rule 17

Affiliated Groups

(1) The British Group shall accept affiliation from Groups organised for the purpose of forming an association of British Members of Parliament and those of one or more particular countries, in accordance with Article 1 of the Statutes of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, provided that they are properly registered as All-Party Groups with the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards and adopt the following additional rules:

(2) The British Group shall give every assistance in its power to Affiliated Groups. At the discretion of the Executive Committee financial assistance may be given to enable delegations from Affiliated Groups to visit their associated countries or to receive inward visits to Westminster.

(3) The British Group shall consult with Affiliated Groups when activities affecting the country or group of countries concerned are under consideration.