



IPU Review

Issue Number 26

Winter 2006/7

Countries where MPs are persecuted



Ann Clwyd MP, Chair of the British Group, with the Speaker Michael Martin MP and Hilary Benn MP, Secretary of State for International Development, at the Group's Annual General Meeting

THE British Group has stepped up its drive to help end the persecution of MPs in many other countries including murder, violence and imprisonment.

Delegations of MPs and Peers on visits abroad are being briefed about human rights abuses of parliamentarians to put to the ministers they meet. And UK Government ministers travelling overseas are being pressed to do more to take up specific cases.

Ann Clwyd MP, Chair of the Group, told its AGM at Westminster: "We as British parliamentarians must take every opportunity to raise the profile of cases when we meet our counterparts in the countries concerned. And I include contact by ministers as well."

Speaker Michael Martin, who chaired the meeting, said: "We sometimes take things for granted here in the UK because we have a free Parliament. It is

good to know that where there is a struggle, we are involved in it to try and make other parliaments as free as our own."

The Speaker praised Ms Clwyd's "moving speech" in which she read out statements by two of the victims – senior MPs from Guinea and Malaysia – who had languished in jail for years.

They were freed after a long campaign by the IPU's international Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians which reported on 142 cases recently.

Ms Clwyd said that one of them was Mr Alpha Condé, a former presidential candidate of Guinea, who said: "I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to the IPU and salute the struggle for freedom it waged alongside us during all these years of suffering."

Another victim, Anwar

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Russia risks being culture vultured

A WARNING that Russia's rich cultural heritage was being hit by lack of funds was sounded by members of the Duma at a meeting in Westminster.

Many ancient monuments were deteriorating – and some had disappeared completely – and museums and libraries had difficulty in recruiting high calibre staff because of low salaries.

The cash famine also meant fewer cultural exchanges with other countries such as Britain.

Mr Iosif Kobzon, Chair of the Duma's Culture Committee of MPs, told the meeting organised by the British Group of the IPU:

"My deepest regret, I have to say, is that unfortunately culture in Russia, let's say, is not at its highest or appropriate level.

"Why? Because the state does



Nigel Evans MP, Treasurer of the British Group IPU with Iosif Kobzon, Chair of the Duma's Culture Committee

not budget for culture properly."

He said that the Government concentrated funds on four priority

sectors: construction, agriculture, health and education – and culture only benefited if there was money left over.

Mr Kobzon claimed that funds were provided to support only ten per cent of Russia's ancient and historic monuments.

"The remaining 90 per cent of monuments deteriorate every year – sometimes they just disappear and it's impossible to restore them," he said.

Mr Kobzon, who headed a four-strong delegation from Russia's Culture Committee, was speaking during round table talks with MPs and Peers chaired by John Whittingdale MP, Chair of the Commons' Culture, Media and Sport Committee.

Mr Whittingdale pointed out that Britain had managed to boost spending on culture by introducing the national lottery.

The delegation was also asked about the degree of state control in Russia over the mass media.

Mr Kobzon said he hoped the MPs and Peers were "as concerned as we are" about this and about the recent assassination of Anna Politkovskaya, a Russian journalist known for her critical coverage of the war in Chechnya.

Visitors from Venezuela and Indonesia



London's Mayor Ken Livingstone with a delegation from Venezuela - November 2006

Scotch mist in Venezuela - page 13



Tim Loughton MP with a delegation from Indonesia on the Terrace of the House of Commons in December 2006

One vote wins Twelve Plus

JOHN Austin MP has been elected Chair of the influential Twelve Plus geopolitical group of the IPU.

The former British Group Chair beat a candidate from France for the post by just one vote – by 38 to 37 – at a meeting in Geneva during the recent IPU Assembly.

Mr Austin will use the role particularly to focus on influencing plans to reform the IPU.

Parliamentarians from 43 countries out of the 148 in the IPU are members of the Twelve Plus. It is the largest of the six geopolitical groups in the organisation. The other five are: Africa, Arab, Asia-Pacific, Eurasia and Latin America.

The members of the Twelve Plus are: Albania, Andorra, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the Republic of Macedonia, Turkey and the United Kingdom

THE BRITISH GROUP IPU

THE articles in this publication reflect the personal views of the authors concerned and are not necessarily shared by the British Group as a whole.

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Circulation: Francesca Ingham

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Ibrahim, former Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, stated: "I was held in solitary confinement 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 for democracy and human rights had taken up my case."

Ms Clwyd, who recently stepped down as Chair of the IPU's Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, said that abuse of parliamentarians was often "just the tip of the iceberg."

"If those who are well known are abused then others are ill-treated as well," she said.

During the AGM, Hilary Benn, Secretary of State for International Development, praised the IPU for its commitment to peace, strengthening democracy and helping countries recovering from conflict.

"Without democratic politics we are not going to win the fight against global poverty – we are not going to build a better world," he said.

He pointed out that in a recent Gallup worldwide poll of 50,000 people in 65 countries, eight out of ten citizens said that despite all its problems democracy was the best system of government. In Africa, the figures were nine out of ten.

Shadow Minister Andrew Mitchell said that trying to ensure good governance and enable people to hold politicians to account was at the heart of the IPU's work.

"You only have to look at the visits the British Group of the IPU made past year – including Palestine, Thailand, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Algeria, Jordan and Azerbaijan. They are all places which benefit hugely from democratically-elected politicians meeting together to discuss the common problems which we all have to face."

In a statement in Switzerland, IPU President Mr Pier Fernando Casini said the work of the Human Rights Committee must be strengthened. "The battle for ensuring respect for the rights of persecuted members of parliament should be waged not only in Geneva but also by parliaments in the capitals of the world," he said.

Committee's 30th birthday - page 15

Plea for America to rejoin the IPU

THE British Group is renewing its efforts to persuade the United States to rejoin the IPU.

John Austin MP, a member of the IPU's Geneva-based international Executive Committee and Chair of the 12+ Group, is writing to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and to the Senate.

And at the British Group's recent AGM, Chair Ann Clwyd MP urged Government ministers to use their influence to persuade the US to reverse its decision six years ago to withdraw from the world-wide organisation which links 148 parliaments.

The move comes after last November's mid term Congressional elections.

Ms Clwyd told the British Group's AGM in November: "We are doing our best to get the Americans to rejoin us. It really is time."

She pointed out that last year, the Congress came very close to voting for a return to the fold. And turning to International Development Secretary Hilary Benn who attended the AGM, she said: "I expect Hilary will use some of his influence into pushing the Americans to come back on board.

"I keep saying to them that we are getting tired of defending you - the British Group do defend the Americans very often - but they really ought to be there to do it for themselves. The kind of meetings we have we think are important for the Americans to engage in as well."

Following in Grandfather's footsteps

HILARY Benn, Secretary of State for International Development, spoke of his family ties with the IPU at the British Group's AGM.

He said: "It is for me a special privilege to be invited to join you at this meeting because my grandfather, William, was elected for a decade as international President of the IPU. And frankly, he would be tickled pink that I am standing here before you."

Mr Benn's grandfather, Lord Stansgate was President of the IPU from 1947 until 1957. At the time that he took on this role, Lord Stansgate had been an MP for more than 30 years – and knew Randal Cremer, who co-founded the IPU in 1889.

Tony Benn, Hilary's father, disclaimed the title of Lord Stansgate in 1963 and remained in the Commons.



Hilary Benn, Secretary of State for International Development, brandishing copies of the IPU Review and the British Group's Annual Report at the AGM in the Attlee Suite, Portcullis House in November

New Executive Committee

FOUR new members of the British Group's Executive Committee were elected in a ballot at the Group's AGM: John Bercow MP, Jeremy Corbyn MP, Phyllis Starkey MP and Lord Dubs. The full team is:

Officers: Chair: Ann Clwyd MP; Vice-Chairs: Dr Roger Berry MP and Derek Conway MP; Treasurer: Nigel Evans MP

Members: Labour: Hugh Bayley MP, Jeremy Corbyn MP, Wayne David MP, Eric Illsley MP,

Bob Laxton MP, Ann Keen MP, Ann McKechnin MP, Gordon Prentice MP, Christine Russell MP, Phyllis Starkey MP, John Austin MP (co-opted), Lord Dubs and Lord Foulkes

Conservative: John Bercow MP, James Duddridge MP, Tim Loughton MP, Sir Nicholas Winterton MP and Lord Jopling

Liberal Democrat: Jenny Willott MP (co-opted), Lord Roper

Other Parties: Adam Price MP; Crossbencher: Baroness Boothroyd

Jordan's desert

East. He believed that the EU could be an important influence in the region, and could balance the role of the “great powers as well as the superpower.”

He also believed that regional integration was essential if Iran was not to dominate it.

The meetings were punctuated by two deeply contrasting excursions.

The first was to the Dead Sea, which became the focus of discussion with the Minister for Water and Irrigation. Water is ‘big politics’ in the Middle East, and ambitious plans to link the Red Sea with the Dead Sea are currently being negotiated between states surrounding the seas.

The aim is to restore the original level of the Dead Sea for environmental reasons and also to transport water from the Red Sea for desalination to improve supply for agriculture and for drinking.

The second was to the Hitteen Refugee Camp, which is the home to 45,000 Palestinians many of whom were displaced as a result of the conflict in 1967. The conditions, as one would expect, are poor but compared with camps in Gaza or the West Bank are probably better.

The United Nations is doing as much as possible with the help of the Jordanian government in the areas of education, health and welfare but there is more the international community could do.

My overall impression is that Jordan is changing quickly in a fast changing world. It is modernising at a pace and is an oasis of tolerance in a desert of intolerance - a force for good in the region.

The good relations that exist between the UK and Jordan should be maintained at all costs, because the political fall out from the war in Iraq has done so much to sully the UK's reputation in the region.

We really must start to win more friends and influence people, many of whom attribute the problems in the region to Britain's role in 1948 and its failure to honour properly the Balfour Declaration of 1917.



Delegates with the Prime Minister of Jordan Dr Marouf Bakhet



**By Mark Hendrick MP
Leader of the delegation**

THIS was my first visit to Jordan - but definitely not my last.

It commenced with a meeting with the Minister of Islamic Affairs, Mr Abdelfattah Salah. His ministry is responsible for over four thousand Mosques, a similar number of Imams, and 500 representatives in Jerusalem as well as the thousands throughout Jordan. It has direct contact to the 1.5 million people who attend Friday prayers, and has more of an impact than any of the mass media.

Mr Salah presented us with a copy of the *Amman Message*. This was compiled after a conference in Amman last year attended by Muslim scholars throughout the Islamic world.

It depicts a moderate and tolerant interpretation of Islam which permeates Jordan and has considerable influence outside. It has been translated into seven languages and provides a refreshing contrast to the more extreme forms of Islam so often depicted by the mass media as if it is the norm.

We also met the Speaker of the Lower House of Representatives, Mr Abdelhadi Majali, who discussed the structure and powers of the Jordanian Parliament, which as a first time visitor I believed (quite wrongly), had few powers in a system described as a constitutional monarchy.

Parliament has the power to reject legislative proposals from the King - although that power is recipro-

cated. However, the Jordanian system makes that unlikely, given the make-up of the wholly appointed Upper House (the Senate.)

The meeting with the Prime Minister, Dr Marouf Bakhet, was fascinating. He talked about reform of government and the political system, as well as Jordan's precarious geographical position in the Middle East and its equally precarious relations with neighbours such as Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq.

His job is definitely a ‘high wire’ act without a safety net, and he appeared more than qualified to do it given his previous experience as an ambassador serving in Israel and Lebanon. His depth of understanding of politics in the region, coupled with measured judgement and sensitivity to the motives of neighbours in the region, I found breathtaking.

He spoke of the “linkage” that is now accepted as a “reality” by most governments, and that what is happening in Lebanon and Iraq are just symptoms of the failure to solve the Palestine problem.

The Foreign Minister, Mr Abdul Ilah Khatib, used the example of the European Union as a model for economic integration that he would like to see pursued in the Middle



high wire act



Lord Fowler with a resident at the Hitteen refugee camp



By Lord Fowler

TWO snapshots reveal much about Jordan today. The first is of the Hitteen refugee camp on the outskirts of Amman. There are 1.4 million Palestinian refugees living in Jordan and 45,000 of them live here in a camp set up straight after the 1967 Middle East war.

The conditions of the camps in Jordan are better than those in Lebanon or Gaza but no one pretends that they are good.

The original tents may have been replaced over the years by concrete block buildings but Hitteen is still a slum. There may be brand new buildings only a few kilometres away but refugees still live in homes with leaky corrugated iron roofs.

Many children go hungry to school and all are taught in overcrowded classes. Male unemployment is estimated at approaching 50 per cent.

The refugee camps are a constant reminder of the political issue that both dominates Jordan and also holds back its progress. To most Jordanians, solving the Israel-Palestine question is the key not only to national advance but also to the stability of the region.

Reach agreement on this and much of the fundamentalists' cause will fall away – or so the theory goes. It may be an exaggeration but equally it is true that there will be little progress without an agreement.

The second snapshot is from the terrace of a luxury hotel overlooking the Dead Sea. It is almost

evening and lights are beginning to twinkle in the houses on the opposite West Bank. A crimson gold sunset gradually disappears behind the hills of what are now the occupied territories.

On either side of the hotel cranes loom up as a new resort begins to take shape. The hope is that tourists will fill the rooms being built attracted by the magnificent setting and the opportunity to visit outstanding historic sites like nearby Mount Nebo where according to the *Old Testament* Moses died.

New buildings like this symbolises what has been happening in Jordan over the last two or three years. From Amman to Aqaba, development is in progress as hotels, offices and houses spring up.

Not only has the economy developed but reform is in the air. In a nation where about half the population are under twenty, the government is making education a priority to create the skilled workforce that is needed. Women are being given new opportunities The press is being given more freedom.

Yet the sad irony is that as Jordan has developed the rest of the region has become more dangerous.

True, Egypt now lives in peace with Israel but all around new problems abound. Hezbollah – backed by Iran and Syria – threatens to overturn the Lebanese government while neighbouring Iraq descends further into bloody violence.

The American and British invasion of Iraq has very few friends in the Arab world; the reputation of the West has been seriously damaged.

Yet I met few Jordanians who

wanted a precipitate withdrawal and fewer still who wanted to see Iraq divided up. In the meantime, Jordan has to cope with some of the consequences.

There are probably over 400,000 Iraqis who have fled the conflict and are now living in Jordan. The government has been forced to introduce new immigration restrictions aimed above all at preventing any repetition of the bomb outrages in Amman and Aqaba over the last two years.

In the end, all political discussion returns to Palestine. The Prime Minister, Dr Marouf Bakhet, points to the 2002 agreement by Arab leaders (including Saddam Hussein) which he says would secure justice for the Palestinians and also ensure security for Israel.

But everyone understands that no progress on this or any other plan will be made without the United States exerting influence on Israel. Even after the *Baker Report*, there is no evidence of the political will to do this.

I first came to Jordan in 1967 as a newspaper reporter during the Middle East War. I watched as thousands of Palestinians fled or were expelled from their camps on the West Bank of the River Jordan. I attended the first press conference that King Hussein gave in the dark days after he had lost half his kingdom.

Returning to Jordan, it seems incredible that the world has made such little progress in settling the Palestine issue. Forty years on and we still seem as far from a solution as ever. The refugees still live in their inadequate camps; extremism continues to be nurtured.

We should beware we do not reap the whirlwind.



By Baroness Northover

THIS informative visit came at a critical moment - just as the *Iraq Survey Group* reported in Washington, Hezbollah demonstrations potentially de-stabilised Lebanon and continuing crisis gripped Gaza and the West Bank.

Jordan's leaders stressed that the country was a beacon of moderation in a volatile region. As the

Prime Minister put it: "I am sure no one will envy us our location."

They were anxious about potential chaos in Iraq spilling over into Jordan. They were keen that we take home with us a renewed commitment to engage in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process – and the message that nothing will be resolved without that. And they urged that the EU should not simply be a "payer, but a player".

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Bridging the gulf towards democracy



By Claire Curtis-Thomas MP the current problems in Palestine.

As I flew out to the Kingdom of Qatar's Annual Doha Conference on Emerging Democracies, it struck me as ironic that a conference on how to enable proper democratic governance could be held in a country with no electoral register and a ban on political parties, under the rule of a royal dynasty.

But this fact reflects that democratic governance has to start *somewhere*, and by the time I left Doha I was convinced that the country's hosting of the conference was indicative of the desire to reform the country's political system and begin a bottom up democratic power-shift.

It was the sheer number of attendants that gave this conference its most attractive aspect: 1000 representatives from 82 countries, 55 parliaments and 107 civil societies gathered in one place to discuss aspects of building democracies at the world level and with particular focus on the Arab world.

What is now almost par for the course, the agreement of Hamas and Fatah parliamentarians to attend meant that members of the Israeli Knesset automatically pulled out.

What impact could Israel then have on a conference with vital relevance to their own future without attending it themselves? It deeply troubled me that Israeli politicians would not attend under these circumstances.

Nevertheless, my three days in Qatar were immensely valuable. I met and spoke at great length with a vast number of representatives from a multitude of nations.

Of most value to me were in-depth discussions with the Fatah and Hamas politicians.

I have given the Israeli-Palestinian conflict a considerable degree of thought and time, and in the past I have always referred to the situation in Northern Ireland as a possible paradigm for solving

the current problems in Palestine. My conversations with those representatives have convinced me that the ongoing peace process in Northern Ireland is not applicable to the Arab-Israeli context.

Whilst Sinn Fein and the Unionists do need to finely balance their approach to the peace process in order not to lose grip on the wishes of their members, Hamas and Fatah face greater obstacles in this area: in particular the constant cycle of revenge attacks by Palestinian citizens/splinter groups and the response of the Israelis in return makes it difficult even to consider, let alone agree on, renunciation of violent struggle.

This does not bode well for the future well being of the Palestinian peoples.

To return, then, to the lessons of this conference. Building on the

A thousand representatives from 82 countries, 55 parliaments and 107 civil societies gathered in one place to discuss aspects of building democracies at the world level and with particular focus on the Arab world

work of the previous five meetings since 1988 on democracy, this conference outlined in its joint declaration a number of statements and intentions all of which can be accessed on: <http://www.icnrd6.com/outcome.php>

In short it focussed on five key areas:

- Ensuring parliaments were representative of the people and fair and inclusive
- Maintaining parliamentary accountability and a free press
- Encouraging parliament's availability to the electorate
- Enabling a parliamentary code of conduct
- Ensuring that parliaments are, above all, free from the executive, effective and properly resourced.

It was, to my mind, important to consider how the joint statement would have follow up mechanisms that ensured they were properly implemented.

Despite reservations from Russian and American officials regarding funding at the previous conference in Ulaanbaatar, Nasser

Abdul Aziz Al Nasr, Qatar's permanent representative to the UN, announced after the conference that Qatar would fund a secretariat and review panel with international representatives from all five continents to monitor and support the proposals in the statement.

It seems to me to be vital to have a review process in hand – separate from existing organisations such as the UN Democracy Fund - that can ensure further conferences are able to reflect critically on previous agreements and subsequent progress made, and I welcome the Qatari government's laudable involvement in this venture.

Given the unstable situation in the Middle East and the construction and establishment of a fledgling free and democratic nation of Iraq, I was left more than ever convinced by my time at the Doha conference of the vital work that the IPU has done, and has yet to do, in fostering good democratic governance in emerging and current democracies.

Now more than ever at this critical stage it is our duty as parliamentarians and citizens to reflect on what makes good democracy and how best to ensure its adoption and survival.

Fact file: Qatar

Area: 11,435 sq. km
Population: 585,000
Capital City: Doha
People: Arab, Muslim majority
Languages: Arabic, English and Urdu
Religion: Islam
Currency: Qatari Riyal (QR); 1 QR = 100 Dirhams
Political parties: None
Government: Monarchy
Head of State: Amir, His Highness Shaikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani
Prime Minister: His Highness Shaikh Abdullah bin Khalifa Al-Thani



A taxing time for Macedonia



Foreign Office Minister of State Geoff Hoon with Mr Goran Misovski, leader of a delegation from the Republic of Macedonia

THE TINY Republic of Macedonia – with a population of just over two million – is taking a bold gamble to kickstart its economy and gain EU entry.

A delegation of the Balkan states' MPs told a meeting in Westminster that their new government is levying the lowest taxes in Europe – just 10 per cent - in a bid to attract investors and boost jobs.

They also vowed to do “their homework” by completing reforms – such as in policing, the military, the judiciary, civil service and combating corruption - by 2010. These are vital for EU membership.

The delegation said the country expected to be given a date in 2007 when negotiations could start. And their leader, Mr Goran Misovski, urged Britain to help fix a date for talks – and to back their bid.

“We are waiting to become a member of the EU family,” he said.

Recognition of the republic's progress from the brink of civil war came in December 2005 when EU leaders agreed it should become a candidate for membership.

Macedonia was spared the bitter inter-ethnic violence that raged elsewhere in the Balkans following the break up of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s.

But the Kosovo crisis in 1999 caused instability. The country received 300,000 refugees, and violence between ethnic Albanians and security forces broke out.

After months of skirmishes, EU and NATO support enabled a peace

deal to be struck. Insurgents laid down their arms in return for improved rights for ethnic Albanians.

The country's fourth election – last summer – led to a new Government under Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, a former amateur boxer and stage manager. The delegation's visit to the UK – organised by the British Group IPU – came just as his Government reached its first 100 days in office.

Mr Aleksandar Nikoloski MP – a member of one of the parties in the ruling coalition - admitted that the economy was in difficulty with unemployment as high as 35 per cent. He said that from the New Year, a flat rate of 12 per cent for both personal and corporate taxation - was being introduced. The aim is to reduce this to 10 per cent by next January.

He hoped that this would have a “snowball” effect on the economy by encouraging more investment. Gordon Prentice MP asked how crucial education reforms needed to get the skills to rebuild the economy could be financed at the same time as tax cuts against a background of high unemployment.

Mr Nikoloski said unemploy-



ment made the work force “cheaper and more attractive to investors”; there would also be savings and more money for education.

The delegation voiced fears that some countries in the EU may drag their heels on enlargement and decide against the countries of the Western Balkans becoming members. Mr Misovski warned: “I'm afraid that hopelessness may return in these states if we have that attitude – and hopelessness can have a retrograde processes and political conflicts.

“I hope and really expect bigger support from the British Parliament and the Government to put pressure on the members of the EU so the EU is not faced with a rigid choice on whether to have countries from the Western Balkans as full members or not,” he said. “Of course we believe we should be full members, especially Macedonia.”

Another potential stumbling block is the wrangle with Greece over the constitutional name for the country. There have been Greek fears that the country's title implied territorial ambitions on their northern region of Macedonia.

However, discussions under the UN to reach a solution are continuing. The delegates claimed that relations with Greece were good. One of them said: “Although there is a serious dispute – because for us this is an issue of identity – we have enough space to develop good relations.”

Former Defence Minister Mr Jovan Manasievski MP said the country co-operates militarily with Greece. It has links with NATO and troops serving in Afghanistan.

David Kemp

Fact file: Macedonia

Area: 25,333 sq km (9,928 sq mi)

Population: 2,071,210 (July 2004 est.)

Capital city: Skopje

People: (2002 Census) Macedonian 64%, Albanian 25%, Turkish 4%, Roma 3%, Serb 2%, Bosniaks 0.5%, Vlachs 0.5%, Others 1%

Languages: Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish, Serbian

Religion: Orthodox 67%, Muslim 30%

Currency: Macedonian Denar

Government: Parliamentary Democracy

Head of State: President Branko Crvenkovski

Prime Minister: Mr Nikola Gruevski

Open for Business:

Yet their conclusion was adamant: nations tolerate terrorism at their peril.

Politicians support the elected government in Iraq and believe that the presence of multinational forces there is preferable to the alternative.

They want to see a just two-state solution implemented in the Middle East although they choose not to have diplomatic relations with Israel; and whilst believing that Iran has a right to civil nuclear power, they accept the need to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weaponry in the region.

But it is perhaps in Darfur, that stain on the African political landscape, that Algeria may have most to offer to world peace. A key player within the African Union and one of the four richest nations in the continent, they may be able to access the ear of their Muslim brothers in Sudan better than most – and they appear willing to try.

By 2010 Algeria, the world's fourth largest producer of natural gas, will supply an eighth of Britain's needs.

Are they aware of the dangers of climate change? Indeed they are. Four-fifths of the country is in the Sahara desert, and they will shortly open the world's first full scale combined gas and solar power generator.

A major oil producer, too, they have renewable energy in profusion: the freshwater dams in the Atlas Mountains and the sirocco wind itself are plentiful supplies of clean energy. From 2012, they will be exporting electricity from renewable sources to southern Europe.

There is presently no English language guide book to Algeria despite an elegant Islamic history intertwined with that of the Romans, Ottomans and Berbers. 1000km of Mediterranean coast lie empty. Students of Camus can indulge their passions.

With 1200 companies currently being privatised and tens of billions of dollars of public investment planned, the British entrepreneur would be welcome to invest and prosper.

The risk is that others – especially the Chinese – will get there first. This is a good time to establish a British-Algerian Chamber of Commerce.

Three of the six parties active in the bicameral parliament support the President in a ruling coalition.

Whilst Islamic fundamentalism may not have entirely disappeared, it currently operates through democratic means of expression.

Algeria is keen to promote the English language: our two Parliaments have recently each established friendship groups with the other.

The country is looking to Britain for alliances, expertise and investment in open and positive partnerships. In return, we need to demonstrate to them that a healthy democracy in a stable and secure country can both deliver prosperity for ordinary people and keep terrorism and fanaticism at bay.

Opportunities exist for co-operation between UK and Algeria as never before and neither side can afford to ignore them.



Sir Stuart Bell MP (delegation leader), Tom Levitt MP and other members of the delegation at Algeria's Senate



By Tom Levitt MP

WHERE is Algeria? It is one of the richest countries in Africa as well as a member of the Arab League. Fifty years ago, it was part of France despite being eight times its size.

Algiers, its capital, is closer to London (just 2½ hours by air) than to the country's own southern border.

Most significantly, it is a young democracy with much to offer to the West both economically and politically.

Its experience suggests that parliamentary democracy can survive in a country which is 99 per cent Muslim but where Christians and Jews worship freely.

It has oil, gas and minerals in profusion and great potential in other fields: tourism and alternative energy in particular.

But its greatest contribution to our future security could be the lessons we may learn from Algeria's recent history.

The 90s was a decade best forgotten in Algeria. Over 100,000 died as Islamic fundamentalist terrorists ran riot. Its government fell, replaced by military rule.

"Ten years ago, we could not have brought you here," said our guide to the warren-like network that is the 14th century Kasbah in Algiers, a world heritage site of vast proportions. "You would not have been safe."

In time, the violence and anarchy created by the foreign-funded insurgents was defeated but Algeria, despite its oil resources, had to manage this alone. The people believe that the heavy price they paid in civilian deaths, restricted civil rights and military rule was a price worth paying.

In 1999, the army installed a president, Bouteflika, to finish the job and restore civilised values; his landslide election in 2004 consolidated and legitimised the transition.

Everyone I met, during the first visit of a British Group IPU delegation to Algeria for 20 years, bore the scars of both recent history and the struggle for independence of a generation earlier.

This is a good time to establish a British-Algerian Chamber of Commerce

Make a date with Algeria



By Baroness Harris

ALGERIA is open for business - a phrase not usually acknowledged in the West as being a reality.

But after many years of isolation brought about by terrible internal strife, the country is undergoing a rapid and dynamic change brought about by the exploitation of their enormous quantities of natural resources of petroleum, natural gas, iron ore, phosphates, uranium, lead and zinc.

Algeria will meet 12 per cent of the UK's need for domestic gas by 2010, so it is a particularly important partner as well as being one of long standing, albeit with major breaks of diplomacy during the years of terror under which Algeria suffered.

Vast numbers of new jobs are being created — two million predicted by 2009 — the Chinese at the moment representing 85 per cent of foreign workers; evidence of their work being immediately apparent on arrival at the sparkling new airport in Algiers.

The majority of the population is Arab-Berber and they are almost exclusively Sunni Muslim which is the State religion.

An exotic mixture of Arab, African and Mediterranean, the Algerians are extremely friendly, hospitable and generous, desperately wanting to be understood by the West by whom they feel they are deeply misunderstood.

They have undergone desperate years of terrorism within their own country, fighting through many years for their freedom from France and subsequently extremism from radical elements when they felt the world ignored their sufferings. By opening their country to the world they hope to retrieve their good name and never to be known again as the exporter of terrorists to other countries.

They are hoping the UK will help them in their search for good business practice, governance and skills transfer. They recognise us as having particular strengths in financial services, education, health and delivery of the utilities, and they are very keen to progress the somewhat tenuous links with business in our country, which our visit was also helping to promote in its wider sense.

The setting up of the Friendship Group between our two countries is the beginning of a better understanding between us, and as the Algerians say, "You can get to know us as well as we know you".

Whatever perceptions we may have had in the past of Algeria, it is quite clear that a new dawn has broken, and it is in our interests as much as in theirs that we understand and work with them in a whole range of areas.

Our visit was to enable us to meet and get to know each other as Parliamentarians, and we met members of both the People's National Assembly (MPs) and



members of the Council of the Nations (Senate). We also visited a number of Ministries and a hospital.

There is no distinction politically between men and women in Algeria. The constitution doesn't differentiate between them; nevertheless, there is widespread recognition that more women are needed in both their Parliament and their Senate.

There appears, however, to be better representation within the professions and we were told of the diaspora of Algerians — many of whom live in France and some in the UK who the government hope will return and help build the country's growth.

Most of those living abroad are professional people, doctors, scientists, teachers, and they are needed

back in Algeria at this time of rapid growth and expansion.

There needs to be a concerted effort now to encourage British companies to invest in Algeria and to encourage Algeria to promote itself much more widely than it has done.

If they are really serious about promoting tourism and inward investment, then they must commit more energy to ensuring the world knows about them!

We were treated throughout our visit with the utmost kindness, generosity and friendship. Hopefully we can now build on this promising platform and have closer relations with this vibrant, exciting country just over the water from the coast of Spain which waits for the world to recognise it properly.

Algeria certainly is — open for business.

Fact file: Algeria

Area: 2,381,740 sq km

Population: 32 million

Capital City: Algiers

People: Arab-Berber (99%), European less than 1%

Languages: Arabic (official), French, Amazigh (national but not official language)

Religions: Sunni Muslim (99%), Christian and Jewish (1%)

Currency: 1 Algerian dinar (DA) = 100 centimes

Political parties: Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN), Rassemblement Nationale Democratique (RND), Front des Forces Socialistes (FFS), Rassemblement pour la Culture et la Democratie (RCD), Mouvement de la Societe pour la Paix (MSP), Mouvement de la Réforme Nationale (el-Islah) (MRN) and Parti des Travailleurs (PT).

Government: Republic/Presidential

Head of State: President Abdelaziz Bouteflika

Premier: Mr Abdelaziz Belkhadem

A MEMORIAL service for Sir Michael Marshall, former President of the IPU who died in September, was held at Arundel Cathedral in West Sussex in December.

Colleagues from politics and business joined family members and friends to pay tribute to Sir Michael, a Conservative MP for 23 years and Chairman of the British Group from 1987 to 1990.

Sir Michael's work for the IPU was also praised at the British Group's recent Annual General Meeting by MPs and Peers led by Group Chair Ann Clwyd, International Development Secretary Hilary Benn and Shadow Minister Andrew Mitchell.

In a letter to Ann Clwyd, Pier Casini, the President of the IPU, and Anders B Johnsson, the Geneva-based Secretary General, said: "It was a privilege to have known and worked with Sir Michael whom we will remember not only for his great qualities as a politician but also for his immense personal charm and warmth."

And delegates at the last IPU Assembly, in Geneva in October, observed a minute's silence in his memory.

Here Lord Anderson, former Chair of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, writes about Sir Michael's many achievements.

MICHAEL was my pair. We had many happy years of co-operation. We, and our wives, became firm friends. From this special Parliamentary perspective I came to admire him enormously.

All politicians need a hinterland and, ideally, a wife or husband in unqualified support. Michael was blessed in both respects. He was today's equivalent of a Renaissance man.

He was born in Sheffield, the son of a master printer and a music hall and cabaret artiste. He was educated at Bradfield before joining United Steel in 1951 and beginning a successful business career.

He was United Steel's Branch Manager in Calcutta from 1954 to 1958, received an MBA from Harvard in 1960 and became Managing Director, Bombay 1960 to 1964 before returning to Workington as Commercial Director from 1964 to 1966.

He then moved to Head Wrightson Export as

The IPU pays tribute to



Michael Marshall, President of the IPU from 1991 to 1994 and Chairman of the British Group from 1987 to 1990

Managing Director until 1969 before moving to Urwick Orr as a Management Consultant until his election as an MP in 1974. He led an active business life after his retirement from Parliament in 1997.

Michael was a sport and theatre enthusiast. He



Michael Marshall (right) with Donald Anderson and the then Deputy Prime Minister Sir Geoffrey Howe and Lady Howe at an IPU reception following the state Opening of Parliament in June 1987

Sir Michael Marshall

loved golf and motor sport. He was a formidable driver.

My wife and I experienced his rally competence on various IPU post-conference adventures we enjoyed together – but cricket was his first love. He played for Harvard and Nepal and captained the Lords and Commons Cricket XI.

HE was a cricket commentator for the BBC and All India Radio. He wrote, *Gentlemen and Players* (1987) part of, *A celebration of Lords and Commons Cricket* (1989) and *My Lords* (1990), *Cricket at the Castle* (1995) and *More Sussex Seams* (1999).

Michael was a life member of Equity and BAFTA, President of the Chichester Festival Theatre Trust, and a member of the Garrick and the Beefsteak.

He wrote five television plays and several leading biographies, *Top Hat and Tails* (1974) a biography of Jack Buchanan, and edited two volumes of Stanley Holloway monologues (1979, 1980) and a book of comic and dramatic monologues. He even lectured on these subjects on the Queen Elizabeth II liner.

He became parliamentary adviser to a number of theatre related groups. It was natural for him to form the All Party Theatre Parliamentary Group in 1978 making contacts which he used for the benefit of the IPU. I recall when once staying at his home that a resident there was Paul Eddington, then playing at Chichester.

He had unsuccessfully fought Hartlepool in 1970, was adopted for the new seat of Arundel in 1972 and elected in 1974. He even inspired his researcher at the time, Michael Brown, the distinguished journalist, to serve as an MP.

His experience of the steel industry was relevant to his work on the Select Committee on Nationalised Industries in the 1970s.

In 1979, he became Parliamentary Under Secretary at the Department of Industry specialising in steel, aerospace, telecoms and information technology before returning to the backbenches in 1981, perhaps a mutual recognition that he was not wholly “one of us”.

He used his interest and experience in those fields to the benefit of Parliament when serving for example on the Defence Select Committee and became a passionate advocate of the adoption of new technologies – hence he wrote *The Timetable of Technology* (1982) and, *No end of jobs* (1984).

AMONG many other activities he became Chairman of the Parliamentary Space Committee, Chairman of Pitcom and Adviser to BAe Space and Communications division and to Cable and Wireless.

His major parliamentary contribution, however, was to the IPU. He became Vice-Chairman of our Parliamentary’s Branch in 1985 and Chairman in 1987.

It was his initiative in 1984, which led to the IPU’s



Sir Michael Marshall MP, President of the IPU’s Centenary Conference in London, with Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Pierre Cornillon, Secretary General of the IPU - September 1989

invitation to a Russian parliamentarian, named Gorbachov, to visit the UK before he became ever more famous.

He presided over the highly successful Centenary Conference in London in 1989 before rising to be International IPU President from 1991 to 1994.

It was a fascinating time after the fall of the Berlin Wall. He helped make the resulting new democratic parliamentarians feel at home and advanced parliamentary diplomacy generally.

He much regretted that he was only partially successful in forging closer links between the IPU and the UN. He was knighted in 1990 for his services to international parliamentary relations.

In all his work, Caroline, his wife, was a tremendous support. The marriage to this brilliant redhead took place some two months after his selection – she happened incidentally to chair the local Conservative Association.

With her two daughters, they were a very happy family and supportive when he was diagnosed with cancer eight years ago.

At one level, Michael was reserved, but quietly effective. Yet, he had a great gift for friendship and zest for life.

The attendance at his funeral at the local Roman Catholic Church in Slindon eloquently showed that he was very highly respected both in West Sussex, where he was a Deputy Lieutenant, and far beyond.

He was a man of international stature with an enormous breadth of interests.

Such breadth may possibly have been an impediment to higher Government advancement, but made him a very happy and fulfilled man.



Brian Jenkins MP and other members of the delegation with the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev



**By Brian Jenkins MP
Leader of the delegation**

ACOUNTRY no longer at the crossroads, Azerbaijan has decided to become a European-style democracy.

The Azeris looked at other countries around them, with Iran an Islamic Republic to the south, and decided that was not the route for them. They looked north to Russia, well, they have been there before and do not want to return to a Soviet-style control economy and democracy again.

Deciding where they wanted to be was relatively easy; working out how they get to that destination has been far more problematic.

If one in eight of your population is a refugee or internally-displaced because of years of turmoil in the region, how do you first house them, feed them and absorb them into productive work and earning?

They have made efforts and are now building new settlements for them. The official Government line is that all people want is to go home as soon as possible.

However, some would say that with nearly one million voters in this position, the Government would be in no hurry to see them go back home.

But underneath there is a growing feeling, especially amongst the young, that they do not want to go back to a poorer way of life in

the village. They prefer the life style of the city, hence the recent major improvements in the living conditions of this group.

If the only economic model you have is the Soviet style, with little management or entrepreneurial experience, how do you release the energies of your people while also avoiding the Russian scenario of creating a few billionaires with the

If one in eight of your population is a refugee, how do you house, feed and absorb them into productive work and earning?

privatisation of industries?

Another legacy of the Soviet style are some very poor buildings in need of major repair after 30 years, along with pollution and environmental abuse on a massive scale.

On the plus side, they have oil and gas, and can expect a lot of money to flow in over the next twenty years or so. A further plus is that the Government has agreed to put funds into a transparent account, so that everyone can see where the money comes and goes.

This is a major step in the right direction. The economy seems to be doing well with major construction projects in Baku, while the number of Mercedes cars, and traffic jams, tell of a newly developing middle class.

Everyone we met was friendly

and open about their situation, even to the point of, "I can't tell you the answer because we have yet to work that one out ourselves", which showed a level of openness that would not have been there a few years ago. This is a sign of growing confidence and maybe a recognition that we are there as a critical friend.

The list of people we met was impressive:

The President – Ilham Aliyev, who gave a very clear and pragmatic presentation of his country's problems, as well as their aspirations for the future. This included information about what Azerbaijan perceives its role to be in the region and its attitude to possible integration with Europe at a future date.

The Deputy Prime Minister – Mr Ali Hasanov who also acts as the Chairman of the State Committee for Refugees. He informed us of the number of internally displaced persons, as well as asylum seekers from Iraq, Chechnya and Palestine.

The Foreign Minister – Mr Elmar Mammadyarov, who spoke about Azerbaijan's attitude towards the EU and reiterated his President's views on the country's role in the region. He also gave us his take on Russian, Georgian and Armenian policy in the region.

The Speaker – Mr Ogtay Asadov, who expressed his disgust at the French, who had just passed through their Assembly a law that makes it an offence to deny the Armenian genocide. This was a very sensitive point for Mr Asadov.

The Chief Imam - Sheikh Allashukur Pashazade, who is a strong believer in the separation of powers between the Church and the State. He stated he was against the use of Islam for political means.

We met representatives from NGOs. Most were engaged with community action or conflict resolution and peace-building (with particular reference to the frozen conflict in Ngorno-Karabakh)

They seemed to have the ability to come and go with reasonable ease to the conflict area – though Caucasus-wide projects run in a

a long Soviet legacy

third party country such as Georgia appeared to be most successful.

There was broad agreement that the electoral process was not producing fair outcomes and no confidence that the general population will benefit from the oil fund – with some research/polling appearing to bear this out.

There were some contrary views as to the potential for and evidence of the spread of radical Islam.

All politicians were perceived to be from the business elite and the opposition deemed to be ineffective.

It seemed to be widely believed that the internally displaced persons issue was being manipulated by politicians for their own ends, although reference was also made to internally displaced people having refused to be conscripted for military and health services.

We met members of the opposition who spent most of their time informing us of the unfair way the elections were run and the oppressive nature of the Government.

These complaints are largely accepted by the international monitors who were present at the time of the last election and were critical of the number of apparent irregularities that occurred during the electoral process.

The opposition groups, however, are beginning to give the appearance of being able to work together on an agreed alternative programme to the Government. The main point is to attack the level of corruption within the country.

One example of the extent of corruption is in education. Azerbaijan has a lot of teachers, who do not get paid very well. So if pupils want to get their work marked they pay the teacher. The more they pay, the higher the grade.

This goes on even in universities, so that it is not possible to tell if a student has achieved his or her grade through hard work or simply by paying for it.

Freedom of the press was also a big issue with opposition groups, as well as the way in which the Government influence the main media outlets, such as television. There have been instances where



the law has been used to shut papers for defaming Ministers.

As a result of this trip, we have a better understanding of the problems facing the country - and the Government's goals.

Scotching Venezuelan bureaucracy

A DELEGATION of politicians from Venezuela promised to press for action to unravel red tape which is hampering Scotch whisky exports to their country.

Scotch is one of the most popular spirits in the South American state which is the 7th most important market worldwide and the number one in Latin America.

But in a letter to members of the British Group attending pre-Christmas talks with the delegation, the Scotch Whisky Association complained that exports had hit a bureaucratic snag. They revealed that the Venezuelan Ministry of Industry and Commerce was failing to issue the necessary foreign exchange certificates.

"It's an important issue that we hope that you will be able to communicate back to Caracas particularly in the run up to the festive season," said one MP.

Deputy Ulises Daal pledged that the delegation would take up the issue. "We do feel that this is a situation that can be overcome," he said. "We want to make sure it is resolved quickly."

The MPs also pressed the delegation about their Government's attitude towards the USA.

At one meeting, Mike Gapes MP, Chair of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, asked them if

Fact file: Azerbaijan

Area: 86,600 sq km

Population: 8.3 million

Capital City: Baku

People: Predominantly Turkic Azeri, Russian (8%), Armenian (6% mostly fled as a result of the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh)

Languages: Azeri 89%, Russian 3%, Armenian 2%, other 6%

Religions: Muslim 93.4%, Russian Orthodox 2.5%, Armenian Orthodox 2.3%, other 1.8%

Currency: Manat

Political parties: New Azerbaijan Party, Azerbaijan Democratic Party, Popular Front Party (Reformists), Musavat, Liberal Party and Azerbaijan National Independence Party.

Government: Republic

Head of State: President Ilham Aliyev

Prime Minister: Artur Rasizade

they thought it was in the country's interest to have provocative relations with the USA. And at another, former Government Minister Lord Jopling asked: "What is it that irritates you about the US and what could they and Venezuela do to improve relations?"

One delegate said: "Venezuela is not irritated by the US. We should ask what is it that irritates the US Government about Venezuela.

"Why have we become an international issue? Firstly, because we have got huge reserves of oil – we are soon going to be classified as the country with the biggest reserves. If we did not have these huge reserves of oil would we have such importance?"

"We are going to be classified soon as the country having the biggest reserves of water. We are also important because we are concerned about certain world issues, and we have said clearly that the only thing we are doing is recovering our national dignity to return to the country what the country deserves in terms of its riches."

He said that relations had been good during President Clinton's administration which coincided with President Chavez's earlier term in office.

"We have problems now with the Bush administration," he admitted. "And it will be interesting to find out exactly who it is has problems with whom."

Foreign Secretary welcomes IPU contact with Iran



IPU visits of "merit and value" - Foreign Secretary Mrs Margaret Beckett

FOREIGN Secretary Margaret Beckett has highlighted the role the IPU can play in improving relations with Iran.

She said that parliamentary exchanges like the rare visit by an all party British Group delegation to Tehran in June could be "of merit and value."

Mrs Beckett was replying in the Commons during Foreign Affairs questions in October to Sir Nicholas Winterton MP.

Sir Nicholas – a member of the British Group's executive committee – said: "Like you, I believe that Iran is the linchpin of a peaceful settlement in the Middle East.

"What can be done by our Government, and the House through the IPU, to improve our relationship with Iran and its current leadership?"

Mrs Beckett said the question was "one of the most difficult in present day foreign policy and one that everyone is mulling over in their minds.

"How is it possible to improve a relationship with a country that, on the one hand, says that it wishes for that improved relationship, but, on the other hand, does



Iran is the "linchpin" of the Middle East - Sir Nicholas Winterton MP

not engage, even in the most favourable circumstances, in constructive dialogue with the rest of the international community?

"For example, we continue to offer Iran a way out of the dispute over the nuclear file.

"The door remains open on those negotiations, and we would be willing to undo any steps that were taken, if Iran were to come to compliance with the International Atomic Energy Agency advice."

She added: "With regard to the role played by organisations such as the IPU, I share your view that that kind of parliamentarian-to-parliamentarian relationship can be of merit and value, and I would welcome any steps taken in that regard."

Shadow Foreign Secretary William Hague asked Mrs Beckett to redouble the Government's



"United resolve" over Iran - Shadow Foreign Secretary William Hague

efforts to ensure that a strong UN Security Council resolution on weapons programmes, arms sales, visa bans and asset freezes will be agreed. He urged that "the united resolve that has been shown over North Korea can also be shown over Iran."

Mrs Beckett said that the Government wished to proceed "incrementally" to ratchet up pressure - and reduce it if Iran made a move in the right direction.

"No one wants to implement sanctions," she said. "We want to get into negotiations on the basis of Iranian agreement."

But she pledged: "We will keep up the pressure."

Tim Loughton MP pointed out

to Mrs Beckett that he had been a member of the IPU delegation to Iran where he had been able "to eyeball parliamentarians".

"Are you aware that the Iranian economy is in a fragile state and is haemorrhaging money in order to subsidise basic supplies to keep the masses placated?" he asked.

He said that until recently Iran's Guardian

Council had consistently vetoed legislation on money laundering in a country "through which the bulk of the heroin trade passes and which has given large sums of money to terrorist organisations."

He said the USA had taken steps to isolate the Iranian regime financially by blocking the access of Iranian banks.

And he wanted to know what action the British Government was taking to encourage UK financial institutions to follow suit and to work with European governments to isolate the Ahmadinejad regime financially and in terms of trade.

Mrs Beckett claimed the Government had "led the way" in trying to persuade people to help to counteract money laundering.

They were in close contact with EU governments on the most effective way to deal with the position in Iran.

"We are anxious to try to maintain the balance between exerting firm and clear pressure on Iran to come to the negotiating table and not giving those who want to call off the negotiations the excuse to do so," Mrs Beckett added.



"Eyeballing" parliamentarians in Iran - Tim Loughton MP

Plea to free - or charge - 35 palestinian parliamentarians

A DEMAND by the IPU for Israel to release – or charge – over 30 elected Palestinian parliamentarians was raised in the House of Commons in October.

Richard Burden MP pointed out that the IPU Assembly in Geneva last autumn had expressed “deep concern” at their “continuing detention.” He said that one of the important building blocks of any durable peace was that the democratic rights of all people in the region were respected and upheld.

Mr Burden asked Foreign Office Minister for the Middle East, Dr Kim Howells, if he had made representations to the Israeli Government about the Palestinian parliamentarians being either released or charged.

Dr Howells said that the detention “didn’t help the peace process in any way whatsoever, nor does it set

a good example of how democracy should be treated.”

“We might not agree with the Hamas Government – we certainly disagree with them about many things – but those parliamentarians have been elected by the Palestinian people, and they should be released.”

He said that at the European General Affairs and External Relations Council meeting in July the Government continued to support the EU position that the parliamentarians should be freed.

Ann Clwyd MP – Chair of the British Group and former Chair of the IPU’s international Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians – said that the 35 MPs were “properly elected by the



Detention does not “help the peace process” - Foreign Office Minister for the Middle East Dr Kim Howells

Palestinian people.” Among them was the Deputy Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council.

“There can be no excuse for keeping those people in prison,” she said. And she asked the minister to make every attempt to get them either released or properly charged with a criminal offence.

Dr Howell replied: “I agree with you and I know that you have done a great deal of work to try to bring that about. I hope that you continue that work, as there are few MPs who have such a reputation in the Middle East, as well as in the House. We rely very much on your analysis of such extremely difficult situations.

“This, however, is a relatively simple question. Those imprisoned are important parliamentarians, with whom we may not agree - we may be vociferously opposed to what they stand for - but who have nevertheless been elected by the Palestinian people and must be able to speak on their behalf.”

Michael Ancram MP said that in any two-state solution there could be no stable Palestinian state

without the exclusively democratic participation of Hamas, and no secure peaceful Israel without an agreed and permanent ceasefire from Hezbollah.



No peace “without an agreed and permanent ceasefire” from Hezbollah - Michael Ancram MP

Human rights team’s 30th birthday

THE IPU’s Committee on the Human Rights of MPs - which number 40,000 world-wide - celebrated its 30th anniversary last autumn.

Since it was established in 1976, it has helped resolve over 500 cases in 104 countries including murder and imprisonment.

The Committee, headed by Ann Clwyd MP until this year, is now chaired by Mr Franklin Drilon, President of the Senate of the Philippines. This summer it probed 30 cases concerning 112 parliamentarians in Bangladesh, Belarus, Burundi, Cambodia, Colombia, Ecuador, Eritrea, Honduras, Palestine/Israel, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Turkey and Zimbabwe.

These include the case of Shah Ams Kibria from Bangladesh, a former finance minister, who was killed in a grenade attack in January 2005. The Committee was very concerned that the investigation into the crime was closed although the masterminds of the murder have not been identified because the authorities failed to examine certain questions.

It also probed the case of 11 former MPs in Eritrea who have been detained incommunicado for five years accused of conspiracy and attempting to overthrow the government.



“Deep concern” at detention - Richard Burden MP



“No excuse” - Ann Clwyd MP, Chair of the British Group IPU



John Austin MP and Laurence Robertson MP with Ethiopia's Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in Addis Ababa

John Austin MP, Chair of the all party Ethiopia Group, and Laurence Robertson MP, Secretary, visited Ethiopia in November at the invitation of the state's Parliament. Here they reflect on the visit which was sponsored by the British Group of the IPU.

THERE is no doubt that, despite climatic disasters, Ethiopia has made significant progress in recent years in food security and water conservation.

There has been international concern, however, about the apparent backward steps in the progress to full democracy and human rights following the last general election.

In our meetings with Prime Minister Meles and other ministers, we raised the issue of last year's disturbances and particularly the police's response.

The Prime Minister said that it was regrettable. He felt that, had the police been better trained and more appropriately armed it might not have happened.

We also raised the issue of the freedom of the media. The Prime Minister accepted that progress had to be made and was discussing the way forward with the Opposition. He felt, however, that journalists were inciting violence through their publications and that that wasn't acceptable.

On the issue of imprisoned MPs, we welcomed the fact that those parliamentarians who had not been charged with criminal

offences have been released and the fact that the Ethiopian Government has allowed independent observers and an international jurist to attend the trials. But we did express concerns to the Justice Minister, Assefa Kessito, about the nature of some of the charges.

Again, we raised the issue of the disturbances with him, and said that we were concerned by the degree of the charges which we had heard might be being made, in particular that of genocide.

Ethiopia's definition of genocide appears to be different from that which is generally understood by the term, but the Minister said that such a charge wouldn't be made. We were told by the British

Ethiopia faces enormous problems: climatic disasters, troublesome neighbours and dissent, often violent from within

Embassy, however, that charges of attempted genocide are being considered which carries the same sentence.

The Justice Minister said he felt it unlikely that life imprisonment or the death penalty would be handed down. He also felt that the trials would be completed by the end of the year.

Throughout, Mr Kessito insisted that the courts were separate from the government and that justice would take its process.

Whilst expressing concern that perhaps the government's response was not proportionate, there is no doubt that there are some forces, both external and internal, which would seek the violent overthrow of the Meles government. And all of

Ethiopia's struggle

the fears that Meles has of what he describes as a "Jihadist plot" are not imaginary.

Ethiopia is not exactly surrounded by stable or democratic regimes. There is no doubt about Eritrea's hostility towards Meles personally and the behaviour of its quixotic President do not make the transition to democracy in Ethiopia any easier.

To the west is the chaos of Sudan and to the east is the turmoil of Somalia. Meles has given support to the internationally recognised Transitional Federal Government with little international recognition or understanding of the threat that the War Lords present to Ethiopia's stability or Somalian involvement in support of insurgents.*

Whilst understanding these challenges, however, we urged Meles to engage with the legitimate opposition and we acknowledged his thanks for the help that the UK - through a former House of Commons Clerk, has given - in reforming parliamentary procedures.

In a meeting with leading members of the Opposition, we welcomed the ending of their boycott of Parliament and had a frank and open discussion with them. They claimed there had been no progress in developing democracy.

We suggested that the fact that there had been such an increase in the number of opposition MPs elected reflected a transition towards a democratic multi-party system. We also suggested that their ability to speak to us of their criticism of the government could not have happened ten years ago and was an indicator of progress.

They did raise the issue of MPs who had been imprisoned. They seemed unaware of the IPU's



to feed democracy

Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, and we suggested that if they had concerns that MPs had been imprisoned unfairly they should make a formal referral to the IPU in Geneva.

They expressed great frustration about the elections and they claimed that they had only been given eight minutes to discuss the findings of the Commission's report into last year's disturbances.

However, the Speaker, Hon Ambassador Teshome Toga, told us that time was normally allocated according to political strength in Parliament, but that he had allowed more time to the Opposition than they were due (though not a lot) and that this had been agreed in advance with the Opposition, through the usual channels.

From his colleagues, we received very unsatisfactory answers regarding the freedom, or lack of it, of the press. They claimed that the press were undermining democracy, had slandered government ministers, fabricated stories and told lies.

Ethiopia faces enormous problems: Climatic disasters; troublesome neighbours; dissent, often violent from within. Its human rights record may not be as good as we would wish.

But it is moving slowly in the right direction and we are cautiously optimistic about its future.

**This article was written before the threat from Somali rebels to engage in a holy war against Ethiopia if they do not withdraw support from the Transitional Government which is recognised by both the Africa Union and the international community*



Roses - Ethiopia's latest export industry



A patient with her baby at the fistula hospital

THE two MPs revisited Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital – they first went there in 2004 with an IPU delegation.

Maternal deaths and disabilities in Ethiopia are the highest in sub-Saharan Africa.

The Fistula Hospital was established in 1974 by Australian doctors, Reginald and Catherine Hamlin. They were gynaecologist-obstetricians who pioneered surgery for women with Obstetric Fistula in Ethiopia.

Catherine is now widowed but despite being over 80, she is still working at the Fistula Hospital.

The biggest cause of obstetric fistula is poverty and poor nutrition which leads to inadequate physical development. Many young women are of small stature and often the pelvis has not grown sufficiently to allow a baby to pass through for natural delivery.

Without access to hospital facilities, where a Caesarian can be performed, contractions crush the baby's head against the pelvis, the baby dies and after several days of labour, the decaying body emerges.

Apart from the trauma, the woman is often left with a hole between her vagina and bladder, and sometimes the rectum, leaving her with permanent leakage of urine and faeces and frequent nerve damage. Many of these women die and others are abandoned by their husbands and families and become social outcasts.

The fistula can sometimes be repaired, and an operation can help many women to lead as normal a life as possible.

Those who cannot return to their villages and communities are offered training programmes, and many become health care workers. Some repairs are successful so that

the woman can return home. Many have further pregnancies and return to the Fistula Hospital for safe deliveries.

Sadly, some of the women, who cannot return home, need long term support including stoma therapy which is now provided by the hospital at a development project called *Desta Mender* (Joy Village) and at outreach centres.

In 2004, when the parliamentary delegation visited the hospital, a young woman was brought in who had taken three days to reach it – carried by her father.

He stayed with her until she was well enough to return home.

To finance this trip, he had sold his ox - his main source of livelihood. The delegation gave him some money to replace the animal.

On their return visit, Mr Robertson and Mr Austin learned that the treatment had been successful, that the man and his daughter had returned home, and that he had bought two oxen with the money. The daughter had returned to Addis and is now working as a health care assistant.

Every year, over 9,000 Ethiopian women develop new fistulas, and there are about 200,000 women with fistulae and related childbirth injuries. The hospital performs approximately 1,200 operations each year.

Fact file: Ethiopia

Area: 450,000 square miles

Population: 71.3 million

Capital City: Addis Ababa

People: Oromo 40%, Amhara and Tigre 32%, Sidamo 9%, Shankella 6%, Somali 6%, Afar 4%, Gurage 2%, Other 1%

Languages: Amharic, Tigrinya, Oromigna, Guaragigna, Somali, Arabic, other local dialects and English

Religions: Orthodox Christianity 40%, Islam 45-50%, animist 12%, other 3-8%

Currency: Ethiopian Birr exchange rate 17 birr to £1

Political parties: The government is run by the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front, an alliance between – the Tigrayan Peoples Liberation Front, Amhara National Democratic Movement, Oromo Peoples Democratic Organisation and Southern Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Movement. Opposition parties: Coalition for Unity and Democracy and the United Ethiopian Democratic Forces.

Head of State: Girma Wolde Giorgis

Prime Minister: Meles Zenawi

Where is Moldova?

by Lord Dubs
Chair of the Moldova Parliamentary
Group

GIVE the average well educated person a map showing the outlines of European and former Soviet Union countries and ask them to identify Moldova and a surprisingly large number won't succeed, even at Westminster.

Members of the All Party British Moldova Group (MPs Ben Chapman, Quentin Davies, Martyn Jones and Anthony Steen, and Lords Dubs, Dykes, Harrison and Kilclooney) visited the country in October 2006.

We met leading Ministers and politicians, officials, voluntary organisations, British businesses, the British Ambassador, John Bayer, and the ambassadors of the United States and Germany.

We went as guests of the Moldovan Parliament, especially Dr Marian Lupu, the charismatic Speaker who played a large role in making our visit successful, informative and enjoyable.

Our visit coincided with the annual wine festival, and we spent a morning observing, drinking or should I say sampling, before being persuaded to take part in traditional dancing in the main square - an event portrayed on the front page of one of the newspapers! The local press, radio and TV and the BBC World service covered our visit.

One memorable event in Moldova was our attendance at a fund raising reception on behalf of the Hippocrates centre which is a facility for disabled children that was opened and is run with the strong help of Tony Hawks, a British comedian and author of several books including *Playing the Moldovans at Tennis*. We also had the opportunity to learn more about the work of the John Smith Memorial Trust and meet John Smith Fellows who have visited the UK during the last few years and are now in senior positions in their own country.

What did we learn from our visit? Moldova is a small country, of some 4.3 million people. It has close economic, social and cultural ties with Romania and there are concerns about what will happen in January 2007 when that country becomes a member of the EU.

Moldova fears that it will suffer more from its close neighbours joining the EU than has been the case for neighbouring countries in previous EU accessions. For example, Moldovans will have difficulties with visas to enter Schengen countries.

Indeed it was put to us that Moldovans will have to get visas from the Romanian Embassy in Chisinau in order to go to Bucharest and then get visas to another EU country.

Relations with Russia are not the happiest. Russia has a military presence in Transnistria, a small area of Moldova. Just before we arrived in Chisinau, there was a referendum in Transnistria which resulted in a large pro Russian vote. There are tensions and we were advised not to visit Transnistria so soon after the referendum.

Wine is probably Moldova's most important



Members of the delegation meeting MPs from Moldova in the country's Parliament in Chisinau

product, and prior to this year Russia bought about 65 per cent of output. Early in 2006, Russia decided to ban the import of Moldovan wine, a serious blow to the industry and indeed to the whole economy. The country is now making energetic efforts to secure new markets within the EU.

We went to Milesti Mici, which, according to the *Guinness Book of Records* is the largest wine cellar in the world, with some 1.6 million bottles in store. But the most important issue for the future of Moldova is the country's wish, eventually, to join the EU and in the meantime to establish closer ties.

This may prove to be a fairly lengthy journey as Moldova will have to meet EU standards on a free market, the environment, the judicial system, tackling crime and corruption, including meeting concerns about people trafficking into the EU and prostitution.

The problems in Transnistria will also have to be resolved. On the positive side is the commitment by the Government and people to move towards European standards.

There is a strong sense of closeness to Europe especially in the light of Romanian accession.

Fact file: Moldova

Area: 33,843 sq km

Population: 4.29m

Capital City: Chisinau (population: 656,000)

People: Moldovan/Romanian (65%), Ukrainian (13.8%), Russian (13%), Gagauz (Christian Turks) (3.5%), Jewish (1.5%), Bulgarian (2%), other (1.2%)

Main Languages: Moldovan and Russian

Religions: Eastern orthodox (98%), Jewish, Baptist

Currency: Moldovan lei

Political system: Republic; a form of parliamentary democracy, with a strong presidency

Political parties: Communist Party, Popular Christian Democratic Party, Moldova Noastra (Our Moldova), Democratic Party

Head of State: President Vladimir Voronin

Prime Minister: Vasile Tarlev



Jordan lacks the natural resources of its neighbours, and is working very hard to make up for that. With 50 per cent of its population under 15 and a 14 per cent unemployment rate, it places enormous importance on education as the route to prosperity.

It is ahead of the rest of the region, with high literacy rates, mandatory primary education, plans for secondary schools and for an extraordinary 40 per cent to go to university.

Oil they do not have, and water is scarce. They hope to address the latter problem via the ambitious scheme to pump from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea, which has reduced by 50 per cent, as water from the River Jordan has been diverted to Israel and Jordan itself. They look to UK support for the project.

They are aware of the limitations of their democracy, but urge that they have to go at their own pace. There are few women in the Jordanian parliament – six in the House of Representatives (through quotas) and seven (through royal appointment) in the Senate, and one is the Deputy Speaker and one a Minister.

The Minister would prefer to avoid quotas but felt for the moment that this was necessary because of their culture. Local Government will have higher proportions of women when elections take place shortly.

The Ministers were all highly educated – the Water Minister trained in engineering in the UK. Clearly, we benefit from such education links, and I wish that it was easier for foreign students to study in the UK.



Baroness Northover, Christine Russell MP and Baroness Hooper with women at the Hitteen Refugee Camp

Fact file: Jordan

Area: 89,213 sq. km (34,445 sq. miles)

Population: 5.3 million

Capital City: Amman (population: 2,027,000)

People: Arab (98%), Circassian (1%), Armenian (1%). The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) report that 1,740,170 Palestinian refugees and displaced persons reside in Jordan -307,785 live in the 10 official UNRWA refugee camps.

Languages: Arabic (official), English

Religions: Sunni Muslim 92%, Christian 6%, Other (2%)

Currency: 1 Jordanian Dinar (JD) = 1,000 fils

Government: Constitutional Monarchy

Head of State: His Majesty King Abdullah II Ibn al-Hussein

Prime Minister: Dr Marouf Bakhet (24 November 2005)



Peter Kilfoyle (right) exchanging views in Nicaragua in September 2005 with Diego Ortega (left) who was elected President of the country a few months later



of El Bluff, which is across the bay from Bluefields, and saw several players still proudly wearing their Liverpool shirts.

"We and the footballers of the Atlantic Coast are very indebted to Peter Kilfoyle and to Liverpool FC for all their efforts," he said.

Mr Gareth Thomas, Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Department for International Development, also praised the move. He said there continued to be concern about reducing poverty in Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast region. Latest figures showed that seven out of ten people survived on less than 1\$ a day.

About 15 per cent of the DfID Nicaragua bilateral programme went directly to the region – about £700,000 over the past 18 months.

Mr Kilfoyle said: "During my visit to Nicaragua, I discovered there was a huge group of English-speaking people on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua and that they had next to nothing.

"I got speaking to some of their representatives and was told there were a lot of soccer fans in the region - and it all started from that."

He added: "I am so glad that we could bring a little bit of joy to these desperately poor people .

"Although I am an Evertonian, I do represent Liverpool Football Club as well and I recognise that they would probably appeal to these youngsters more than my own club. After all, there is a township called Liverpool on the Nicaraguan Atlantic Coast."



Tom Kennedy, Britain's ambassador to Nicaragua with the victorious El Bluff side

Liverpool FC are winners in Nicaragua



Britain's Ambassador to Nicaragua, Tom Kennedy, with the Bluefields team wearing Liverpool FC strip

TWO teams of soccer mad youngsters in Nicaragua have been kitted out with Liverpool Football Club's famous strip following a British Group IPU visit to their country.

Merseyside MP Peter Kilfoyle contacted the club after leading a delegation to the Central American state a year ago and hearing about the youths.

The far away fans of the Premiership side are members of a local youth group in a place called Bluefields on the Atlantic coast – an isolated region that was once British territory.

They were astonished – and jubilant - when Britain's Ambassador to Nicaragua Tom Kennedy paid them a visit in September - and handed over the kits.

The players for *Bluefields Pointeen* immediately donned a set of the famous red shirts - Liverpool's home strip - and challenged a club from the neighbouring village, *El Bluff Classico*, who wore a set of the away strip in yellow. The "yellows" beat the home team by two goals to nil.

The event was hosted by an organisation called – *Jovenes Establiendo Nuevos Horizontes* (Youth Establishing New Horizons) - which runs sporting tournaments and activities for teenagers in poor areas.

The region suffers high unemployment, and one aim is to help keep youngsters off the streets to combat drug-taking alcoholism and delinquency.

"We explained that these strips were the actual training kits used by the great Liverpool team and that they had therefore been worn by great players like Steve Gerrard," said Mr Kennedy.

"The teams had arranged to play a friendly match in the kit and did so



for us - despite torrential tropical rain. The level of skill on a difficult pitch in awful conditions was amazing."

He added: "It was great to see such commitment to soccer – another great British export across the world."

Mr Kennedy said that local community leaders were very keen to see support for sports activities as a way to help young people develop healthily and to dissuade them from getting involved in drugs. Narcotics are a big problem locally because the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua lies directly on the drug route from South America to the United States.

Hours after the game, Mr Kennedy visited the town

Continued on page 19

Quick Quiz

1. The Parliament of the Republic of Palau is the 148th to join the IPU. Where is it and what is its capital?
2. Which of these countries has the oldest, still functioning parliament - England, Iceland, Denmark, Norway?
3. What is the currency of Sudan?
4. Name Britain's ambassador to the United States and America's ambassador to the UK
5. Who is the socialist nominee for the French presidential election?
6. What is the name and nationality of the new UN Secretary General?

Quiz Answers

1. A group of islands in the North Pacific Ocean. Capital: Moon, Korean and Robert Holmes Tuttle; 5. Segolène Royal; 6. Ban Ki-Meekook; 2. Iceland; 3. The Dinar; 4. Sir David Manning

Diary

THE British Group welcomed to Westminster in January a delegation from the Republic of Korea and hopes to host a visit by a group from Lebanon soon.

UK delegations to Mexico and Madagascar in the coming months are being proposed.

THE 116th IPU Assembly will be held in Bali in Indonesia from 29 April to 4 May.

Come and join us!

MEMBERS of the British Group of the IPU invite all MPs and Peers to join them.

Those interested in taking part in the Group's activities should telephone the secretariat on 7219 3011, visit our Website - www.bgipu.org - or write to:

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