

Canadian Group
Inter-Parliamentary Union



Groupe canadien
Union interparlementaire

**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
respecting its participation at the meeting of the
Steering Committee of the Twelve Plus Group
Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
Paris, France
February 25, 2013**

Report

1. Introduction

Article 25 of the Statutes and Rules of the Inter-Parliamentary Union permits members of the IPU to form geopolitical groups. These groups play an important role in the functioning and activities of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

There are six geopolitical groups formally recognized by the IPU: the African Group (44 members), the Asia-Pacific Group (27 members), the Arab Group (19 members), the Eurasia Group (7 members), the Latin American Group (19 members) and the Twelve Plus Group (46 members). Each group decides on working methods that best suit its participation in the activities of the Union and informs the Secretariat of its composition, the names of its officers, and its rules of procedure.

Canada belongs to the Twelve Plus Group and the Asia Pacific Group. Because Canada belongs to more than one geopolitical group, it submits candidatures for vacant positions within the Union through the Twelve Plus Group.

2. Background on the Twelve Plus Group

The Twelve Plus Group was formed in 1974 (as the Nine Plus Group) by IPU members from the European Community. Its purpose is to coordinate the action and policy of its member Groups and, where possible, to arrive at common positions on IPU matters. The word “Plus” was intended to indicate the openness of the Group to new members of the EC as well as other like-minded nations, such as Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand. Today, the Group has 45 members, including Central and Eastern European countries.¹

The Twelve Plus Group holds meetings on a regular basis during the IPU’s spring and fall Assemblies. These meetings provide a venue for the Group’s members to discuss the functioning of the Assembly and related meetings. Members also use these meetings to discuss administrative and substantive matters of consequence to the future activities of the Union.

The Chair of the Twelve Plus Group is elected for a term of office of two years. The Chair is advised by a Steering Committee of representatives from approximately seven to nine member countries and normally meets in the weeks prior to an IPU Assembly. The Steering Committee appoints a Vice-Chair among its members by consensus.

According to the Guidelines of the Twelve Plus Group, the Steering Committee shall include: the two most recent predecessors of the current Twelve Plus Chairperson (as long as they are members of their national IPU delegation); members of the Twelve Plus Group serving on the Executive Committee; further members, invited by the Chairperson on account of their particular abilities or merits, who could benefit the activities of the Twelve Plus Group as a whole.

¹ See <http://www.ipu.org/strct-e/geopol.htm> for a breakdown of geopolitical group membership in the IPU.

3. The Meeting of the Twelve Plus Steering Committee

Nine parliamentarians participated in the meeting of the Twelve Plus Steering Committee in Paris, France on 25 February 2013. The countries represented were: France, Austria, Belgium, Canada, United Kingdom, Sweden, Switzerland and Germany.

The Canadian parliamentarian in attendance was Senator Donald H. Oliver, Q.C., from the Senate of Canada.

The agenda for the meeting included issues and questions for consideration by the Twelve Plus Group at the 128th IPU Assembly (Quito, Ecuador, 22-27 March 2013). The purpose of the meeting was to debate and make recommendations concerning these matters. The attached appendix summarizes the decisions taken by the Committee on the occasion of its meeting in Paris.

Respectfully submitted,

The Honourable Salma Ataullahjan, Senator
President, Canadian Group of the IPU

Appendix

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE TWELVE PLUS GROUP STEERING COMMITTEE SÉNAT, PARIS, MONDAY 25TH FEBRUARY 2013

Participants:

Mr Robert del Picchia (France), *Chair*, Mr Josef Winkler (Germany), Ms. Heidrun Silhavy (Austria), Mr François-Xavier de Donnea, (Belgium), Mr Donald Oliver (Canada), Ms. Michèle André (France), Mr Robert Walter (United Kingdom), Mr Krister Örnfjäder (Sweden), Mr Pierre-François Veillon (Switzerland).

Excused:

Ms. Barbara Contini (Italy), Mr Marek Ziółkowski (Poland).

The meeting started at ten past nine, chaired by President of the Twelve Plus Group Mr. Robert del Picchia (France).

1. Opening of the Meeting

The Chair, Mr Robert del Picchia (France), welcomed everyone. He reminded that Senator Ms. Michèle André had succeeded Mr Patrice Martin-Lalande, a Member of Parliament, as Executive President of the French Group of the IPU.

2. Adoption of the Agenda

The Chair noted that the draft Agenda did not call for any comment.

The Agenda was adopted.

3. Approval of the Minutes of the meeting of the Twelve Plus Group Steering Committee held in Paris on 17th September 2012

The Minutes were approved without comment.

MATTERS RELATED TO THE IPU

4. Matters related to the Executive Committee

a. Draft Amendment to Article 4 of the IPU Statutes

Ms. Michèle André (France) presented, on behalf of the French Group and with the support of the Swiss delegation, an amendment to Article 4 aiming to create a new reason for suspending an IPU Membership. To this day, the IPU Statutes mentioned two conditions only: when a Parliament had stopped working as such and when a Member was three years behind in paying contributions towards IPU expenses.

Paradoxically, the IPU could do nothing against a Parliament that was not trying to end genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes or ethnical cleansing committed in its own country and by its own government. The amendment aimed to remedy this shortfall. Indeed, could a Parliament be viewed as working as such if it failed in its essential tasks, namely to guarantee the operation of the rule of law and to protect its citizens' lives and property? Could the IPU have welcomed delegates of the transitional National Assembly of Rwanda during the genocide?

The amendment was followed on from IPU's work on the responsibility to protect. According to this principle recognised by the 2005 World Summit, any State had a duty to protect its citizens against genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes or ethnical cleansing. If it could or would not do it, the international community had a duty to assist it and to intervene so as to ensure protection if needed.

With that amendment, the IPU could suspend the Membership of a Parliament allowing such crimes, and would therefore take full part in the international community's action regarding the responsibility to protect. Suspension would be decided by the Governing Council as suggested by the Executive Committee with only temporary effect: as soon as the country's populations were no longer under threat, the Parliament could be eligible to immediately come back to the IPU.

Mr Pierre-François Veillon (Switzerland) approved the reasoning and reminded that the IPU had already discussed the matter in Quebec City about Syria. The amendment needed to be backed up in Quito.

The Secretary General of the IPU did deem such a suggestion contradictory to one of the essential tasks of the organisation: to gather all kinds of Parliaments. However, the amendment mentioned a mere suspension process, rather than exclusion. Furthermore, the decision would be up to the Governing Council rather than the Executive Committee or the Secretariat. Even if implementing the process could cause problems, the IPU had a duty not to turn a blind eye to the crimes targeted by the amendment.

The Chair said that the idea was for the Statutes to mention a sanction procedure for any Government that would blatantly, continuously and deliberately commit especially serious crimes against its own population with the – even passive – support of its Parliament. He said that the Secretary General of the IPU had written to the Executive Committee Members, asking them to rule against the amendment in Quito.

Mr Josef Winkler (Germany) deemed the amendment relevant but too general: on one hand, the respective roles of the Government and the Parliament were not clearly separated; on the other hand, one had to stress that the targeted crimes were being committed by the country's Government.

Mr Donald Oliver (Canada) reminded that the delegates attending IPU meetings represented their Parliament rather than their Government, and that the former alone was responsible for their decisions. He supported the amendment, but suggested deleting the phrase "within the limits of its powers", which he deemed useless.

Mr François-Xavier de Donnea (Belgium) agreed with the objective of the authors of the amendment. But drafted as such, he feared that it would apply to many African States, such as Mali or the Democratic Republic of Congo, which were unable to prevent the abuse committed on their territories because they were too weak or their army inefficient. Therefore, he suggested that "deliberately" be added after "stop".

The Chair approved the suggestion. He added that national Parliaments always had the ability to criticise, or even to overthrow their Government, or at the very least to adopt resolutions drawing the attention of international media. The amendment

actually intended to sanction them if they did not act or passively supported the targeted crimes.

Ms. Michèle André (France) also agreed with Mr de Donnea's suggestion. Parliaments had two essential tasks: to vote on legislation and to control the Government's actions. Therefore, if an IPU Member remained passive in such circumstances, it deserved criticism. However, a Parliament could not be criticised if it did not do what it could not do.

Mr Robert Walter (United Kingdom) agreed with the intention of the authors of the amendment, but feared that it may apply to many Governments and Parliaments. The phrasing had to be reviewed, for it implied that Parliaments were involved in the crimes committed. And that was not always the case: in some non-democratic countries, the Executive power acted without the Parliament's approval and escaped the latter's control. Far from excluding such Parliaments, the IPU should encourage them to take part in IPU meetings so that they could give their views on their country's situation and tell of their attempts, if any, to control the Executive power.

Mr Pierre-François Veillon (Switzerland) said that the Parliament concerned would be heard beforehand by the Executive Committee, which would then suggest suspension with full background knowledge.

The Chair suggested applying a double guarantee to the suspension procedure and modifying the amendment according to this.

Firstly, suspension could only be decided after the representatives of the Parliament concerned had been heard. When the Syrian delegates had been heard by the Executive Committee, they had actually remained especially vague on many points that could not be clarified.

Secondly, the United Nations Security Council should have already adopted a resolution criticising or even sanctioning the State concerned, as was the case for Syria.

Mr François-Xavier de Donnea (Belgium) reminded that although the President of Sudan had been charged by the International Criminal Court, the country's Parliament remained an IPU Member. In the future, other Parliaments would probably remain within the IPU whereas their countries had been criticised by the Security Council. Therefore, and in spite of the general agreement on the aims of the amendment, it would be difficult to find a phrasing that the Executive Committee would approve.

Ms. Michèle André (France) thought that some Parliaments were entirely fictitious. The North Korean Parliament, for instance, gathered a mere day a year and was therefore not able to control the Government, which nonetheless committed serious crimes against its population. As for Syria, it had an active Parliament that belonged in the IPU. And Syrian Parliamentarians were currently expected to express their views on the situation in their country.

The amendment had an instructional value: it aimed to remind Parliamentarians of their roles and to raise awareness. The need for the Security Council to condemn the State beforehand could be mentioned but was actually obvious: the IPU could only act along those lines.

Mr Krister Örnfjäder (Sweden) reminded that in other difficult times – the 1920s – the IPU had already had a similar debate, finally agreeing that all Parliaments could become Members of the organisation, since they would rather include than exclude them. Similarly today, many Parliaments of countries that were not democratic in a Western sense were IPU Members. And so they should, in order for discussions to take place. However, there was still an issue: what to do when a Member's attitude contradicted democratic principles or was unworthy of a Parliament?

The amendment, therefore, had to be submitted to the Executive Committee with a few changes if needed. However, it was not essential to make a decision at the Assembly in Quito. The idea was simply to encourage discussions and to hear various opinions.

The Chair warned against a potential misinterpretation of the debate: the amendment did not in any way look to set up a procedure on judging the democratic quality of a country or Parliament, or to redefine the conditions established by the Statutes for membership eligibility. If it did, many Parliaments would be targeted and the amendment would be sure to cause an outcry, especially as it would challenge the principle of universality of the IPU.

The aim of the amendment was much more restricted: it was a question for the IPU not to remain neutral when one of its Members tolerated or even accepted especially serious crimes. Neither international public opinion or national Parliaments would understand that the IPU alone, for the sake of the principle of universality, could turn a blind eye to crimes condemned by the entire international community. It was not a question of excluding Members concerned by the amendment, but of drawing their attention by suspending their IPU Membership or by threatening to do so.

Mr Pierre-François Veillon (Switzerland) agreed wholly with this approach. He suggested that the two additions proposed by the Chair during his intervention should be added and that the modified amendment should be submitted to the Executive Committee.

Mr Josef Winkler (Germany) agreed. He actually thought that the proposed arrangement was not entirely new, since it merely specified the existing rule according to which any Parliament that had stopped functioning as such – such as those not trying to prevent especially serious crimes – could have its Membership suspended. However, it would be difficult to have the amendment approved, since many IPU Members could feel targeted. Its phrasing could therefore be softened even further.

Mr Robert Walter (United Kingdom) pointed to an additional issue: the crimes targeted by the amendment were subject to strict legal definitions, and facts were declared crimes by the ICC or international criminal tribunals only *a posteriori*. Before such a specification, one could only deal with allegations of crimes.

Indeed, one might very well consider the actions committed in Nagorno-Karabakh, Former Yugoslavia or South Ossetia as ethnical cleansing. However, all parties involved in those conflicts had remained IPU Members. Furthermore, the Parliaments concerned were not necessarily involved in those actions.

If the phrasing of the amendment was too specific, the IPU could get entangled in complex legal debates aiming to prove, on one hand, that the crimes had indeed been

committed whereas the decision would not yet have been made by international courts, and on the other hand, that the Parliaments had more or less been involved in them.

Furthermore, some Members risked being suspended simply when challenged by another Parliament: the Azerbaijani delegation, for instance, could request a procedure against Armenia about Nagorno-Karabakh; Georgia could do the same against Russia about South Ossetia.

The phrasing of the amendment should therefore not be too specific. The IPU could perfectly deem one of its Members' attitude unacceptable for various reasons, without their being mentioned in the Statutes.

Mr François-Xavier de Donnea (Belgium) deemed it essential to submit the amendment to the Executive Committee in order to encourage discussion. It was impossible at this stage to come to a perfect phrasing. The amendment could not be modified before the Assembly in Quito; that would be up to the Executive Committee if needed. In any case, the amendment was unlikely to be approved as early as Quito. However, it could be modified later on according to comments made by Members of the Executive Committee.

As for mentioning an existing condemnation by the United Nations Security Council, it was not appropriate: such a resolution was indeed sometimes vetoed by a permanent Member. Finally, one should be aware that the procedure described in the amendment might very well be used by an IPU Member against another one.

Mr Pierre-François Veillon (Switzerland), too, wanted the amendment to be submitted to the Executive Committee. He wondered whether to start discussions on the basis of the amendment as it was or to already submit modifications.

Ms. Michèle André (France) confirmed that the amendment could no longer be modified before the Assembly in Quito. In any case, it was crucial to bear in mind that public opinion and the media were increasingly interested in international affairs and might be surprised by the IPU's silence on especially serious crimes. Parliamentarians of democratic countries were accountable to their fellow citizens. In such conditions, submitting the amendment to the Executive Committee would at least engage discussions. The modifications mentioned earlier could be brought forward by a Member of the Committee.

When a Member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Francophonie stopped functioning, its Membership was suspended. For instance, the Parliament of Mauritania had already been suspended during various coups in the country. This did not prevent officials to keep in touch or the delegation concerned to come back as soon as the requested conditions were met again. Such a method emphasised the need to respect certain democratic principles and parliamentary practices at all times.

Mr Krister Örnfjäder (Sweden) reminded that at the Assembly in Bern, several IPU Members had met the Syrian delegation to draw its attention to the worsening situation of their country. The head of the Syrian delegation had denied the facts, even inviting other delegations – who had obviously declined – to go to Syria when municipal elections were to take place the following month. That being said, it was essential that the meeting could have been held, even if it had not been made public

then. In that sense, it would be perfectly possible to have a public meeting in a similar case in order to show international public opinion that the IPU was not inactive.

The Chair told the Twelve Plus Group to draft sub-amendments that could fuel the debate at the Executive Committee, if needed.

b. Hiring a new Secretary General

The Chair reminded that Mr Anders Johnsson's term would end on 30th June 2014 and that his successor would have to take office as of 1st July 2014. As currently described by the Statutes, the selection procedure should start ten months before the end of the current term, namely on 1st September 2013. Applications would be accepted within four months of the vacancy being published, namely until late December 2013. Early 2014, the President of the IPU and the Vice-President of the Executive Committee would pre-select twenty applications, among which each Member of the Executive Committee could select up to five applications within one month. The five applicants with the highest number of favourable opinions would be invited to the Spring Assembly in 2014. The Executive Committee would have an additional working day to hear each of the five applicants; at least two applications would then be submitted for the final choice. Geopolitical Groups and the Meeting of Women Parliamentarians would also be able to hear applicants. Each of the finalists would have five minutes to introduce themselves during the last session of the Governing Council at the Spring Assembly. Finally, the Council would elect the Secretary General by an absolute majority of the votes cast, and for a four-year term.

Mr Pierre-François Veillon (Switzerland) suggested amending the Statutes in order to increase the length of the procedure from ten to fifteen months, which would therefore start as of the upcoming 1st April. Indeed, a ten-month period seemed much too short. That being said, the General Secretariat was not in favour of this. The speaker therefore asked his colleagues for a mandate in order to submit the amendment on their behalf at the following meeting of the Executive Committee. He said that the procedure should begin immediately after the meeting in Quito. He therefore proposed to ask for the Agenda to be modified so that the matter would not be discussed at the very end of the session.

The Chair noted that the Steering Committee approved Mr Veillon's suggestion. He then presented an amendment by the Chilean delegation aiming to apply a regular geographic rotation principle to the appointment procedure of the Secretary General, if possible.

He stressed that he personally opposed this, since the Secretary General had to be chosen according to objective criteria in terms of skills. Everyone would obviously be very happy if a non-European candidate was eventually selected. Geographic origins could even be a criterion allowing the Governing Council to decide between various equally skilled finalists, but it seemed inappropriate to mention it as a principle in the Statutes.

Mr Krister Örnfjäder (Sweden) agreed: although geographic rotation was relevant for the IPU Presidency, priority should be given to skills when selecting a Secretary General.

Mr François-Xavier de Donnea (Belgium) thought also that a positive discrimination criterion could be used to favour a non-European candidate – or a woman – as long as they were equally skilled.

The Chair told his colleagues that the current debate had led to a consensus on possibly removing some mandatory criteria such as experience in international organisations management. However, it seemed appropriate that the applicants should be well versed into the functioning of Parliaments.

Mr Pierre-François Veillon (Switzerland) reminded that the Executive Committee would have to define the principles pertaining to the draft position profile in Quito. He too deemed professional skills and knowledge of Parliaments more important than experience in international organisations management.

Mr François-Xavier de Donnea (Belgium) believed indeed that knowing how a Parliament worked was indispensable; however a postgraduate degree did not seem necessary.

c. Implementing the Reform of the Annual Assemblies

The Chair reminded that the Reform of the Annual Assemblies was on the upcoming Agenda of the Executive Committee. It was also to be discussed by the Twelve Plus Group, and could lead to a broadening of the Committees' scope. He personally feared the announced proliferation of "panel discussions", which at the end of the day, were no more than experts' monologues and did not really allow Parliamentarians to take part in discussions.

Mr Robert Walter (United Kingdom) approved the Chair. Furthermore, he wondered how relevant it was to officialise informal whips' meetings, since they very rarely attended IPU Assemblies.

The Chair said it was the same in France, and wondered whether occasional whips' meetings in Geneva might not be more convenient.

Mr Krister Örnfjäder (Sweden) reminded that some whips had requested such meetings. The Women Parliamentarians had been meeting on the whips' model for a long time, and other Parliamentarians wished to do the same. Organising informal meetings should still be possible whilst avoiding spreading oneself thin: the IPU had to focus on its core missions.

Mr Josef Winkler (Germany) supported the pending reform, but was surprised by "informal" meetings being mentioned in an official document: they should not cause any problem as long as they did not lead to additional costs.

The Chair deemed it unnecessary to include formal whips' meetings in the Annual Assemblies. However, any group was obviously allowed to get together.

Mr Pierre-François Veillon (Switzerland) reminded that there should also be a discussion on the much needed improvement and professionalization of the Standing Committees. Several measures had thus been proposed: to strengthen the role of the Bureau, to commit Members for several years, to improve support given by the General Secretariat, similar to what was being done within national Parliaments. Unfortunately, it did not seem that the propositions discussed in Quito would move

the case forward. The Executive Committee would nonetheless have to deal with the matter later on.

d. IPU Budget

Mr Krister Örnfjäder (Sweden) hoped to present surplus accounts for 2012 in Quito, but was not as yet able to state the amount of the surplus. Furthermore, its potential use was still being discussed.

Mr Pierre-François Veillon (Switzerland) said that potential surpluses should not necessarily be allocated to current expenses in the following financial year: provisions might well be needed.

Mr Krister Örnfjäder (Sweden) agreed and said that a long-term approach was needed.

Mr Donald Oliver (Canada) said that the Canadian Parliament aimed to drastically reduce the amount of its contribution, as part of Canada's efforts to reach budget balance as of the following year. No doubt that the contributions of some Parliaments would have to be reduced.

Mr Robert Walter (United Kingdom) asked whether appropriations had been made for the appointment procedure of the Secretary General, which could cost up to half a million Swiss Francs. Moreover, Japan had decided to unilaterally reduce its contribution, which would have consequences on the other countries. It was also for budget reasons that Australia had left the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

Mr Krister Örnfjäder (Sweden) noted that the Japanese Parliamentarians had been invited to discuss those financial issues, but had not replied. He thought that the IPU was doing its best, and that it was now up to them to act.

He confirmed that an appropriation should be made for the appointment of the new Secretary General, which had not yet been done. He invited his colleagues to make suggestions on how to reduce the cost of the procedure.

Mr Pierre-François Veillon (Switzerland) said that preparation of the budget should take into account the fact that the IPU had decided to refocus its activities the previous year.

Mr Krister Örnfjäder (Sweden) said that, like last year, the strategy of the Subcommittee on Finance would be to anticipate revenue first, and then to suggest suppressing less important activities, if needed. The Subcommittee would not ask for the Members' opinions again, as little had changed since they had been consulted a year before. Furthermore, its work this year should benefit of now well-oiled working methods. One could only wish that all of its Members would attend – since they had not the year before.

Mr Örnfjäder added that the Subcommittee would meet in May, June and then again in August once it had more specific figures regarding the budget surplus. The Group would obviously be kept updated as the work progressed.

The President reminded that he once had battled within the Executive Committee to get a reduction of IPU expenses. They had to carry on like that, otherwise some

countries, including France, would no longer be able to pay their contributions or would have to decrease them. The IPU had too many activities outside its scope of action. For instance, it had been decided it would no longer attend WTO meetings – seemingly in vain.

Ms. Michèle André (France) added that all States currently had no choice but to consolidate their public finances. In France, the amount of the debt was now higher than that of the National Education. Many appropriations had now been officially frozen, with the tendency intensifying. How, then, could less important expenses not be reduced? Appropriations for both Chambers of the French Parliament had actually suffered a recent 3% cut, and the situation was more or less the same in the whole of the Euro zone.

Mr Krister Örnfjäder (Sweden) reminded that in 2011, it had been decided that 400,000 Swiss Francs could be taken from the working capital to balance the budget if needed. However, it had not been necessary, since the amount needed had been saved on the budget. Consequently, although the working capital in 2012 had experienced a shortfall of 400,000 Swiss Francs, its amount remained unchanged.

In 2005, it had been decided that the amount of the working capital should cover half of the yearly IPU budget, and that any surplus should be used to that end. At this stage, however, the working capital roughly represented only a third of the yearly budget. This posed the question of where to allocate the 2012 surplus. Since the Group thought that the IPU should save funds in 2014, why not use the surplus to still implement its strategy? Indeed, what was the use of allocating the surplus to the working capital if the IPU did not fulfil its tasks?

Mr Pierre-François Veillon (Switzerland) stressed that Members' contributions tended to decrease, and therefore could not be the sole funding source for the IPU. They probably would have to wait for the new Secretary General to be appointed to breathe new life to the matter of refocusing IPU activities. As for using the working capital, whenever a company made a profit, it recorded it in the balance sheet to cover potential losses in future financial years. It did not use it to balance the following budget! He would therefore keep opposing such use of the funds.

Mr Krister Örnfjäder (Sweden) said that in 2013, 85% of the IPU budget was funded by its Members' contributions.

The Chair concluded that whichever means were used, the contributions needed to be reduced – which meant reducing the IPU budget. Austria, Japan and the Netherlands, among others, wished to reduce the amount of their contributions. The IPU might have defined a strategy for 2012-2017, but extraordinary situations called for extraordinary decisions: it would have to reduce its budget.

5. Preparation of the 128th Assembly in Quito

The Chair informed his colleagues that the general discussion of the 128th Assembly would be entitled: "From unrelenting growth to purposeful development; *Buen vivir*. New approaches, new solutions".

The Twelve Plus Group had a rapporteur in each of the three Standing Committees: Mr Janquin (France) in the First, Mr de Donnea (Belgium) in the Second, and Ms. Charlton (Canada) in the Third. The Twelve Plus Group would also have to select candidates for the three Drafting Committees.

To this day, only one emergency item had been suggested: it came from Morocco and aimed to consider as "crimes against humanity" serious degradations to world heritage cultural property. However, it should be mentioned that several conventions or treaties already addressed the matter, which did not seem appropriate as an emergency item.

The Chair encouraged his colleagues to submit more appropriate suggestions, and to think of matters that the Committees might address at the 130th Assembly.

6. Vacancies

The Chair said that the Twelve Plus Group would have to fill two vacant positions in Quito, one titular and the other a substitute on the bureau of the Third Standing Committee – "Democracy and Human Rights".

Mr Pierre-François Veillon (Switzerland) submitted the application of one of the Members of the Swiss delegation.

7. IPU Membership

The Chair said that the Parliament of Bhutan had applied for Membership and two requests for reaffiliation had been sent to the Secretariat, one from the Parliament of Somalia and the other from the Parliament of Liberia. Furthermore, it seemed that many Members of the US Congress in favour of the United States coming back to the IPU had been beaten or decided not to stand for re-election, which made it even less likely that the United States would re- enter the organisation. Finally, the Global Organization of Parliamentarians against Corruption had sent a request for an observer's status.

Mr Josef Winkler (Germany) was very much in favour of Bhutan being granted Membership. He had recently been to the country.

8. Specialised IPU meetings since the 127th IPU Assembly in Quebec City.

The Chair said that he had taken part in the latest yearly IPU/United Nations parliamentary hearing and was happy with the innovating and fruitful organisation of the discussions.

Mr Pierre-François Veillon (Switzerland) had also liked the discussions, especially how interactive they were.

The Chair also said that Mr Donald Oliver (Canada) had actively taken part in the annual 2012 session of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO, and that Messrs Serge Janquin (France) and Lord Judd (United Kingdom) had been to Gaza in January for the Committee on Middle East Questions.

9. Other matters related to the IPU

Mr Krister Örnfjäder (Sweden) suggested that the First Standing Committee – "Peace and International Security" – should deal with the following theme in 2014: the

responsibility of Parliamentarians in the fight against the world-wide issue of drugs, which fuelled organised crime, threatened the rule of law, generated Mafia States and unsettled the stability of democratic societies. Sweden might have Mr Anti Avsan, President of its delegation, apply for the co-rapporteur position.

Moreover, he said that his term as Member of the Executive Committee would end in October 2013 and that Mr Truls Wickholm, from the Norwegian delegation, might succeed him.

Mr Pierre-François Veillon (Switzerland) reminded that further to discussions on the IPU logo and its new communication policy, a small majority had eventually decided to keep the current logo. During the last meeting of the Executive Committee, Mr Johnsson had said that modernising the logo would still be pursued. The agency "developing the visual identity" of the IPU had carried out a second online survey of its Members. Apparently the Secretariat wished to make a decision during a telephone conference, which seemed inappropriate. The matter would therefore be on the Agenda in Quito. However, was it absolutely necessary to change the logo? Neither the UN nor UNESCO did it.

Furthermore, Azerbaijan had apparently proposed to host the IPU Assembly in 2014, which again raised the question of which criteria should be used to accept a country's invitation. The system currently worked on a "first come, first served" basis, with an effort towards geographic rotation and importance given to the organisational quality of the Assembly. No political criteria had been considered at any time. A serious discussion on this matter should be held at the Executive Committee. One could not turn a blind eye to the reports of the Council of Europe on the situation in Azerbaijan. Members of the Executive Committee and the Twelve Plus Group should make a decision on this matter.

Mr Krister Örnfjäder (Sweden) said that the Swedish delegation did not wish to go to Azerbaijan if there was an alternative. Should the invitation be confirmed, could they not hold the Geneva Meeting in the spring, and ask Parliaments to host the Autumn Assembly?

Mr Robert Walter (United Kingdom) noted that the Parliament of Azerbaijan's Membership request to the Twelve Plus Group had been voted for by a simple majority – but not by the required two-third majority – at the Assembly in Quebec City. The Azerbaijani invitation was now on the table. In January, the Council of Europe had discussed the report on Azerbaijan by the Monitoring Committee. The country did not fully meet Membership criteria, but neither did many other countries, including some Twelve Plus Members and other States that had hosted IPU Assemblies – such as Cuba. One should therefore apply caution to the "categorisation" of States. Azerbaijan organised elections on a pluralistic basis. Now, how democratic was Mongolia? And was China really a pluralistic democracy? Furthermore, there seemed to be a concerted campaign to try and undermine the democratic credibility of Azerbaijan. The country had substantial gas and oil resources which would soon fuel the European market. Should the Nabucco pipeline – which went across Turkey and Austria – be completed, it would challenge Gazprom's supremacy on the market. It might be far-fetched to see Gazprom as playing a role here, but Russia was definitely not being very cooperative.

The Eurovision had taken place in Baku; a parliamentary meeting of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) should presently be held there; the European Parliament and the Eastern Partnership countries had met there late last year. Since Mongolia seemed to have withdrawn its invitation, why not give Azerbaijan the benefit of the doubt? If doubts remained in terms of human rights, it would still be possible to address them in Baku.

Mr Josef Winkler (Germany) noted that Azerbaijan's application for Twelve Plus Membership should be considered separately from the invitation sent to the IPU. Germany was no great supporter of Azerbaijani democracy, but did not like boycotting a country. That being said, it would probably not send a delegation to Azerbaijan. Since Mongolia – and perhaps Vietnam – had implied that they could host the next Assembly, it might be wise to stay in touch with them.

Mr François-Xavier de Donnea (Belgium) agreed that the democratic quality of many IPU Members could be challenged. However, the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia was an issue – and an objective factor. Was it wise to hold the IPU Assembly in a State that was in an open – and violent – conflict with its neighbour? Therefore, the best solution would be to convince Columbia – which had proposed to host the Autumn 2014 Assembly – to move its invitation forward. Azerbaijan could then be passed over without too much explaining to do, which would not be the case if it was decided to hold the Assembly in Geneva.

The Chair reminded that the Executive Committee had not yet received an official invitation, which would probably be addressed in Quito.

MATTERS RELATED TO THE TWELVE PLUS GROUP

10. Programme of activities and meetings at the 128th IPU Assembly in Quito

The Chair informed colleagues of the meetings to be held by the Twelve Plus Group at the 128th IPU Assembly in Quito.

11. Twelve Plus Group Membership: the Ukrainian Parliament's Membership request

The Chair said that the Group would have to make a decision – as it had done in Quebec City for Azerbaijan – on the Ukrainian Parliament's Membership request. Legislative elections had been held there on 28th October 2012. The Group had actually postponed its vote so as to take into account how they had been organised, which it considered as a criterion – among others – to help with its decision. As it had been reminded for Azerbaijan, Membership approval required a two-third majority.

Mr François-Xavier de Donnea (Belgium) noted that Ukraine currently presided over the OSCE. It could therefore not be compared to Azerbaijan. The elections had gone well, even though observers had challenged the quality of the election campaign. He therefore did not deem it appropriate to carry on excluding Ukraine from the Twelve Plus.

Mr Krister Örnfjäder (Sweden) agreed.

Mr Robert Walter (United Kingdom) was also in favour of Ukraine joining the Group, but noted that Azerbaijan would preside over the Council of Europe in 2014.

12. Date of the next meeting

The Chair informed his colleagues that the 129th Assembly would be held in Geneva on 7th, 8th and 9th October 2013. The Steering Committee of the Twelve Plus Group could therefore meet on Monday 9th September.

The meeting ended at 12.00 p.m.

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
ACTIVITY	Meeting of the Steering Committee of the Twelve Plus Group
DESTINATION	Paris, France
DATES	February 25, 2013
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Donald H. Oliver, Q.C.
HOUSE OF COMMONS	
STAFF	
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 4,333.78
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 680.16
HOSPITALITY	
PER DIEMS	\$ 300.02
OFFICIAL GIFTS	
MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES	
TOTAL	\$ 5,313.96