



# British Group Inter-Parliamentary Union

## **Speech by the Chair of the British Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (BGIPU)**

**Rt Hon Alistair Burt MP**

**To mark the 125th Anniversary of the Inter-Parliamentary Union**

**Palais des Nations, Geneva, 30 June 2014**

Mr President, Secretary General and Secretary General-elect, Excellencies and colleagues.

I am very proud today to take just a moment of your time as the Chair of the British Group of the IPU, to be following in the footsteps of Randal Cremer, the British MP who along with his French counterpart Frederic Passy founded the Inter Parliamentary Union 125 years ago. I am proud to be speaking today on behalf of my French colleague, Mme Andre who I sit beside.

Mr Cremer was a man of humble origins, a Liberal MP, whose passion for world peace and desire to see the rights of everyday, non-privileged people given voice through democracy, drove him in his life's work. He was joined in that by M Passy, a man of strong intellectual achievement in politics and economics, an indefatigable worker for foreign affairs arbitration, and the two of them were the cofounders of what we see here today. How proud they would be today, and how proud we in the UK and France are to see their efforts so rewarded.

The achievements laid at the door of our founding fathers and their successors are many: eight IPU leaders have won the Nobel Prize, the IPU has played a role in the founding of the UN, in building inter- state relations during the Cold War, (Mrs Thatcher's meeting with Mr Gorbachev as the key example) helping post conflict countries transition into democracy through the building of institutions, setting international standards on elections and parliamentary practice, and urging increases in women's participation world-wide. Some legacy for M. Passy and Mr Cremer!

Let me at this point acknowledge officially on our part our thanks for the outstanding commitment and service of Anders Johnson and our best wishes and strong hopes for Martin Chungong in the vital role on all our behalf of Secretary General.

Remembering the past, and the difference that this work has made in changing lives, the subject of our session this afternoon, is vital to understand our role for the future The UK is particularly proud of the unique status of the IPU. There are many multilateral organizations now, and there are many governmental and multi governmental organs, but a Parliamentary union is different, and should remain different. Whilst we value hugely our relationship with the UN, whose work we proudly support, I know it will not be offended when we assert that we are not the UN, and value our difference from it. Our roles are complementary and there is a strong value in that remaining the case. The UN is a collection of Governments, which at its best is greater than the sum of its parts. But the IPU has an independence from our governments, we may have to uphold the rights of parliamentarians against Governments, and speak out for their safety.

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Palace of Westminster | London | SW1A 0AA

Tel: +44 (0) 20 7219 3011/3012/3013 | Fax: +44 (0) 20 7219 8780 | E-mail: [bgipu@parliament.uk](mailto:bgipu@parliament.uk) | Website:  
[www.bgipu.org](http://www.bgipu.org)

Chair: The Rt Hon Alistair Burt MP | Director: Rick Nimmo



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As we debate disillusion with democracy, we need to be sure our aim is true. As one example, too many states there is a lack of awareness that public criticism is not treachery, and that Opposition is a role to be cherished. The IPU would do well to take a lead and champion that role. To have the ambition to become, democratically, a future government, is as vital a part of the constitutional process as good governance when in office. If we are true to this, in a way we represent all Parliamentarians of the past and those yet to come.

But we should not forget that despite the pressures upon it, democracy was the most successful political idea of the 20th century. By 2000 it was estimated that 120 countries or some 63% of the world were so classified standing for the cherished principal that the 'will of the people is the authority for government'

Finally, and if you want an immediate example of the impact of governance on the lives of the world's communities for good or ill, and understand the difference that good, honest democratic government can provide, a new threat to democracy emerges on this very day. Yet another authoritarian group, ISIL falsely claims religious justification for their determination to enslave their population, their mocking claim to reject democracy as "western garbage" needs fierce denunciation from us all, without fear or favour from those of us who have faith or are secular.

The democratic movement of peoples that we represent needs to proclaim that democracy is universal, a fundamental human right, and will not fall victim to those who would subvert belief to win power and control over others. Whilst there are many ways in which such claims will be challenged and overcome the reassertion today by this body that people have a right to consent to the governance of their country freely and without fear, wherever they are in the world, and that such a right is inalienable and if need be will be fought for, will be heard and seen as making a vital contribution to the further advancement of the rights of the oppressed of the world. Democracy is everywhere threatened if it is not to be defended.

In such a way we as Parliamentarians can connect with those who worked so hard for parliaments in the past, and will continue the vital work of the IPU for the future.