



The Hon Joel Fitzgibbon MP
CHIEF GOVERNMENT WHIP
FEDERAL MEMBER FOR HUNTER

4 December 2012

Dear Presiding Officers

**International Parliamentary Whips Network
Meeting 128th IPU Assembly in Quito, Ecuador (22-27 March 2013)**

I am writing to you to encourage support by your Parliamentary Whips or equivalent positions within your Parliament for the establishment of a Whips Network under the auspices of the IPU.

On Tuesday, 23 October an informal meeting for the International Whips Network was held during the 127th IPU Assembly in Quebec City. It was agreed that a further meeting should be scheduled to coincide with the 128th IPU Assembly in Quito, Ecuador (22-27 March 2013).

Several matters arose from the meeting in Quebec and I am hoping to encourage discussion before the meeting Quito to canvass ideas and level of support.

1. New name for the network

It was agreed that the name of the network needs to change to reflect the diversity of the member parliaments. That is, non-Commonwealth parliaments in which the term "Whip" is not well understood.

2. Resources/website

The Australian Parliament will establish a proto-type website which will be launched/displayed at the meeting in Ecuador. However I am happy to work with other whips or equivalents to ensure the effectiveness of the website.

Furthermore, I believe the website needs a short and clear explanation of the Network's objectives.

Documents need to be translated into at least one other language and assistance from other Parliaments may be required.

3. Workshop event

I would like to discuss with Quito participants a possible workshop in 2014 with a strategic focus on parliaments from developing countries.

Finally, the network is to be an interactive organisation and therefore I believe it should first be established as a pilot program for a period of 18 months. At the end of the pilot trial period an assessment will be undertaken to determine if the network has reached its goals of:

- Promoting the professional development of whips and equivalents
- To allow and encourage information sharing
- To allow and encourage whips and their equivalents to promote the work and objectives of the IPU
- To allow cross-nation work in developing parliaments

I hope that you are able to assist by passing this letter on to your Parliamentary Whips or equivalents and if possible consider sending your Whip or equivalent as a representative to the 128th IPU Assembly in Quito, Ecuador.

I have attached a copy of the minutes from the first the meeting in Quebec and should you have any questions or suggestions please don't hesitate to contact Natasa Sikman at email: Natasa.sikman@aph.gov.au or phone +61 262774085.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'JF', with several loops and flourishes.

Joel Fitzgibbon
Chief Government Whip

Cc Secretary General: Anders B Johnsson

Informal meeting of Parliamentary Whips

127th IPU Assembly

2.00 pm, Tuesday 23 October 2012

Quebec City Convention Centre

Attendees

- Joel Fitzgibbon MP (Convenor), Chief Government Whip, Australian House of Representatives (Convenor)
- Nigel Evans, Deputy Speaker, United Kingdom
- Ian Liddell-Granger MP, United Kingdom
- Nosipho Ntwanambi MP, South Africa
- Chris Charlton MP, Canada
- Patrick Secker MP, Opposition Whip, Australia
- Jeanette Radcliffe, Delegation Secretary, Australia
- David Elder, Deputy Clerk, Australia
- Greg Schneeman MP, South Africa
- Mmamoloko Kubayi MP, South Africa
- Najoua Aouatti, Tunisia
- Damien O'Connor MP, New Zealand
- Sonia Margarita Escudero, Senator, Argentina
- Harry Jenkins MP, Australia
- Philippe Mahoux, Senator, Belgium
- Shukria Barakzai, Parliament, Afghanistan
- Betty Amongi, MP, Party Whip, UPC, Uganda
- Andrée Lorber-Willis, Director of Support Services, IPU

Mr. Fitzgibbon opened the meeting and outlined the background to consideration of a network of members who perform duties as parliamentary whips or have similar roles within their parliaments. He referred to a workshop that had been held in Australia in July 2010. Mr. Fitzgibbon indicated that he saw value in a network being developed under the auspices of the IPU.

Mr. Fitzgibbon said that he saw the objectives of the network as being:

- to promote the professional development of parliamentary whips (and those with similar duties) for the benefit of the parliaments, particularly those in emerging parliaments;
- to allow and encourage information sharing; and
- to allow and encourage whips (and their equivalents) to promote the work and objectives of the IPU.

Mr. Fitzgibbon stated that Australia was willing to be the sponsor of the whips network, to provide secretariat support and to develop a website.

Mr. Fitzgibbon opened the matter up for general discussion.

Mr. Evans, United Kingdom, stated that he considered the idea of the network was a good one as whips come and go and support for them in their role would be valuable, particularly for newly established parliaments. Mr Evans recognised, however, that there could be considerable support required for such a network.

Mr. O'Connor, New Zealand, saw a need for the professional development and training of whips and their equivalents, and the network could be a good place to start.

Ms. Charlton, Canada, noted that there was an absence of opportunities for whips to share experiences and develop skills, as much of what they did was behind the scenes and not easily discussed openly. At a practical level, the whips may find it difficult to attend IPU meetings because of the clashes with the sittings of their Houses.

A South African delegate agreed that networking among whips was very important, although there would be a need to sell the idea to the parliaments.

Mr. Jenkins, Australia, said it was important to recognise that the role of whips was quite different in differing jurisdictions and any network would need to accommodate these differences. For example, he noted that in some Parliaments, such as the European Union, there were quaestors who performed aspects of the role of whips in Westminster systems.

Mrs. Barakzai, Afghanistan, considered that any network would need to ensure that countries like Afghanistan are not left behind as it is very important for them to develop their democratic institutions.

Ms. Aouatti, Tunisia, said her country was one of the countries experiencing the 'Arab Spring' and it would benefit from any network. However, there was a need for definition, and clarification, of the role of whips as the role in her parliament was somewhat different from that of whips in Westminster parliaments.

Ms. Escudero, Argentina, also highlighted that the role of whip was different in the Argentinian system. She said the role was akin to the head of a party political bloc. There would be a need to define what the responsibilities of whips (or their equivalents) were, and whether a network would be of benefit to the members with this variety of roles.

Ms. Amongi, Uganda, emphasised the need to define the role of whips that was intended to be captured by the network. In Uganda there were party whips, but there also were government and opposition whips.

Mr. Fitzgibbon concluded the meeting and thanked the attendees for their positive approach to the suggestion of establishing a network. He said he would further develop his proposal and report back at the next meeting of the IPU. The proposal would include a broader definition of the role of whip, or its equivalent, to take account of the variety of experience in IPU countries and an alternative suggestion for a name for the network.

Ms. Lorber-Willis, Director Support Services Division in the IPU, said that the IPU would continue to support the informal meetings at this stage with a meeting room, interpreters and copying of support documents.