

'Parliaments as promoters of human rights, democracy and the rule of law'

Might I suggest that an acutely valuable area for discussion at this session would be to consider the role of Parliamentary Committees in terms of both monitoring and initiating constitutional change, particularly their scope for so doing in the field of human rights, democracy and the rule of law? Parliamentary Select Committees, at least from the Westminster perspective and experience, are uniquely and, arguably, ideally positioned to perform such a function. They can be effective accountability mechanisms which are independent of Government, demonstrating cross party and non-partisan working practices. Moreover, such committees can have a significant public profile and garner increased democratic legitimacy.

In such a discussion one might wish to consider whether one particular Committee should exist with this specific purpose (for example, the function of the Joint Committee on Human Rights) or whether other 'constitutional' Committees could effectively promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law. It is also a live issue as to whether such Parliamentary Committees should perform scrutiny as their dominant function or whether their role in terms of policy initiation should increase. If the constitutional Parliamentary Committees were to actively promote these issues this could result in enhanced focus on and engagement with such matters by a wider range of Parliamentarians, the media, the public and Government.

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