

CONCLUSION

As illustrated in the preceding units, there is much that parliamentarians can do to make human rights a practical reality, particularly for people living within their country, but also for those who live beyond its geographical borders. However, it is imperative to note that the active protection, promotion and realisation of human rights are a multi-pronged and ongoing process. Simply passing a law or ratifying a treaty, for instance, will not lead to greater permeation of human rights. These actions have to be accompanied by efforts to ensure that those who are given the responsibility of upholding and protecting the law are trained and fully aware of the import of the law; that they have access to means that will help in practical realisation of the human rights standards that the law seeks to uphold; that government policies and actions support the upholding of these principles; and that there is recourse for violation.

It is also significant to note that the concept of human rights is ever evolving. Contemporary standards that are accepted and respected today by the international community may not have been in vogue or considered accepted practice until very recently. The period since 1948 – when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly – has seen extraordinary developments in human rights standards and the processes for upholding them. New international standards are constantly being developed such as the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families in 1990 or the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment in 2002. Equally, it is also relevant, given the ever-increasing linkages in trade, aid and development that previously laid down international standards in respect of economic, social and cultural rights be revisited and reinforced.

The period since 1993, when the Paris Principles were adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations has seen a proliferation of national human rights institutions across the world and initiatives to make them more effective. Laws and constitutions are being amended or redrawn across the world to encapsulate human rights protections

that have come to be entrenched in contemporary human consciousness. The recently drawn up constitutions of Fiji and South Africa are quite notable in this respect.

Parliamentarians in their role as human rights protectors therefore need to keep abreast of international developments in the field of human rights. A country's adherence to the international human rights regime not only fulfils the greater aspirations of its people but also significantly enhances its status as a conscientious and responsible member of the international community. As trustees of people's combined aspirations, parliaments have a responsibility to forge new tools, develop new mechanisms and espouse human rights causes. As emissaries of democracy, parliamentarians must also exercise oversight of both governmental and non-governmental spheres and ensure that both State and non-State actors do not waver from commitment to a human rights regime. In fact, levels of human rights protection and preservation of the sanctity of the human rights discourse within a country are largely determined by the interest taken by elected representatives in upholding and realising human rights.