

## Introduction and overview

'Human rights' are sometimes regarded merely as a slogan. Yet, the canons of human rights benefit both nations and their people. Everywhere, human rights are both sword and shield.

Unfortunately, the value of human rights as a practical tool of governance and politics is often obscured. However, over the years, the human rights framework --of unqualified adherence to the tenets of peace and justice, universal respect for the dignity of the human being, inclusiveness and non-discrimination— has become an indicator for political performance internationally. As a universally acknowledged set of rules, it levels the playing field and protects the vulnerable from exploitation and abuse from those with unequal power.

Internationally, the language of human rights permeates the field of foreign relations, aid and trade negotiations. At home, its tenets have become a marker for good governance. The role of parliamentarians, as members of the international community and as representatives of their people, is vital to the evolution of human rights. The ideals of human rights inform and deepen democracy. They also assist development both at home and abroad and are a means of creating a fairer and more equitable world order.

The aim of this module on human rights is to illustrate practical ways by which lawmakers can make human rights a practical, living reality for all. The following units explain relevant concepts and showcase real examples of their application around the world. This module is intended to assist parliamentarians in their efforts to fulfil their mandate of promoting, protecting and realising human rights. Units 1 and 2 introduce human rights and explain their particular importance to law-makers. Units 3 and 4 focus on the international sphere of human rights --both the standards and the various structures that have been developed internationally and regionally to better protect the rights of all people. The remaining units illustrate the many ways that human rights can

be brought home-- through a variety of mechanisms, policies, legislations, processes and structures.

