

KOTTE DECLARATION

Commitment to a set of actions by the participating Commonwealth Asia Region Parliamentarians to promote and protect human rights

We, Members of Parliament, attending the ‘Asia Regional Seminar for Members of Parliament on the Role of Parliamentarians in the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights’, on 1 - 3 February 2016 in Kotte, Sri Lanka:

Recognising that Parliaments are key institutions safeguarding and upholding human rights and their corresponding role in respecting, promoting and embracing diversity and pluralism.

Noting the Commonwealth Charter; the Commonwealth Latimer House Principles; the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and other core human rights instruments, are important guiding principles for Parliamentarians,

Realising the leading role that Parliaments should play in ensuring the implementation at the national level of accepted recommendations made under the Universal Periodic Review and by other human rights mechanisms,

Emphasising Parliaments’ responsibility for integrating international norms and standards in national legislation and holding governments accountable for the enforcement of laws and human rights commitments,

Understanding Parliamentarians’ unique position to influence policies and budgets at the national level, monitor policy implementation programmes at local levels, address the needs and concerns of their constituencies and act as a catalyst in the realisation of human rights at all levels,

Reiterating the Paris Principles and emphasising the significant role that national human rights institutions can play in promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms and in developing and enhancing public awareness of those rights and freedoms,

Reminding Parliaments and National Human Rights Institutions of the significance of the Belgrade Principles,

Acknowledging the importance of active engagement with international human rights mechanisms, including the Human Rights Council the Treaty Bodies and the Special Procedures mandate holders

We declare as follows:

1. To take forward our responsibility as Parliamentarians in raising awareness of international and national human rights norms and mechanisms, and Parliamentarians’ concomitant roles and responsibilities in engaging with them;

2. To advocate for human rights principles to be reflected in new laws and addressing gaps in existing legislation where necessary;
3. To strengthen the protection of human rights through the effective use of parliamentary tools such as parliamentary questions, motions, financial oversight and budget allocations;
4. To advocate for the integration of human rights education into curricula at institutions of learning, and to strengthen it where it is already in place;
5. To seek to develop a deeper appreciation of human rights issues and establish suitable Parliamentary forums, where they do not exist, to promote human rights and fundamental freedoms;
6. To proactively seek and avail ourselves of international technical assistance, such as from the Commonwealth Secretariat, in the field of human rights where necessary;
7. To promote the establishment of Paris Principles-compliant national human rights institutions and the need to strengthen the independence, functioning and sustainability of existing ones;
8. To support the establishment of a South Asian regional mechanism for the protection and promotion of human rights similar to those in other regions;
9. To promote and enhance cooperation among Parliamentarians and all relevant stakeholders, including national human rights institutions, civil society, community leaders and young people, in the promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms;
10. To encourage dialogue and promote the exchange of information and experience on salient human rights issues and challenges in Asia, including on tolerance, respect and understanding; freedom of thought, conscience and religion; freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly, and freedom of association; and violence against vulnerable groups including women and children and to end early, child and forced marriage;
11. To take appropriate steps to increase the engagement of Parliaments in the reporting and implementation process of international and regional human rights mechanisms, including the Treaty Bodies, Universal Periodic Review and Special Procedures; and
12. To support the establishment of the Asian Commonwealth Parliamentary Human Rights Group, a network of lawmakers to promote inter-parliamentary co-operation with a view to ensuring better practices and strengthened parliamentary engagement with the Universal Periodic Review, Treaty Bodies and Special Procedures and the effective and sustainable implementation of their recommendations; enhanced interaction between parliaments and national human rights institutions; operationalisation of this Declaration; and further efforts to promote and protect human rights.

*Adopted at Kotte, Sri Lanka
3 February 2016*