

Draft Motion on Parliamentary Reform

THIS HOUSE RESOLVES to convert the Select Committee on Parliamentary Reform into a Committee of the whole House, in manner that all Members of this House in Committee may discuss and consider the following principles to underpin a reform and modernisation of Parliament and its work:

1. Question Time

Each Minister should appear in Parliament at least once a month to answer questions about the areas of his/her Ministerial responsibility. The Chief Minister should answer questions once every two weeks. Standing Orders should limit the duration of each such monthly session and empower the Speaker to direct that questions which seek statistical information should be put down for written and not oral answer. Such a reform would enable the Opposition to question and hold to account Ministers on a much more frequent, regular and timely basis, in contrast to the present four annual opportunities to do so.

2. Parliamentary Committees

Although our House is too small to permit of the widespread use of multiple Parliamentary Committees, as in other larger Parliaments, there should be at least one standing General Purposes Select Committee, chaired by a Member of the Opposition able to summons Ministers, officials and others in any policy area as in the case of Select Committees in the UK Parliament, in accordance with procedures and processes to be approved by Parliament and included in Standing Orders. The composition of such a Committee should be variable for different meetings depending on the subject matter to be considered.

3. Opposition Motions

Opposition Members should have at least a monthly opportunity to bring Motions for debate in Parliament.

4. Broadcasting of Parliament

Parliamentary meetings which are already broadcast on GBC radio should also be broadcast on GBC television.

5. Standing Orders

Standing Orders should be reviewed and modernised, including as required to implement any changes approved by this Committee of the House.

6. Back benchers

The new Constitution allows Parliament, acting by a two thirds majority, to increase the number of Members of Parliament. The number of MPs, but not the number of salaried Ministers and front bench Opposition spokesmen, should be increased, by a number and at a time to be decided by Parliament, to allow “back benchers” on both sides of the House. Back benchers should receive only a nominal attendance allowance. The existence of back benchers would allow people who did not immediately aspire to Ministerial Office to participate in legislative and other Parliamentary activity and to “cut their political teeth”. It would also allow Ministers to be demoted and replaced as happens in other Parliaments.

7. Public Consultation

Political parties not represented in this House, Non Governmental Organisations and members of the general public are hereby invited to write to the Committee through the Clerk of the House, with any other Parliamentary Reform suggestions that they would like considered by the Committee.