

G7

Speakers' Conference 2021

Speakers and Presidents of the Lower Houses of the member states of the G7 Chorley, United Kingdom 2021 – Declaration

We, the Speakers and Presidents of the Lower Houses of the member states of the G7, reaffirm the central role played by Parliaments in democratic life. As assemblies that bring together all the components of society, parliaments are the cornerstones of democratic governance: they represent the wills and expressions of the people through their legislative and scrutiny roles.

Democracy is based on the the will of society as a whole, fully conversant with its rights and responsibilities, as well as on the existence of well-structured and well-functioning institutions, governed by a body of standards and rules. The key element in the exercise of democracy is the holding of free and fair elections at regular intervals enabling the people's will to be expressed. These elections must be held on the basis of universal, equal, and secret suffrage so that all voters can choose their representatives in conditions of equality, openness and transparency that stimulate political competition. Elected Members should be free to carry out their duties free from intimidation and fear whilst still allowing for challenge and scrutiny of their roles. We condemn terrorist acts on our institutions and remember those who lost their lives defending these homes of democracy. Parliaments have a duty to ensure that members can operate safely. **We will continue to proactively work to ensure the safety of our members whilst ensuring the public can access their representatives and will work to ensure this democratic right is upheld.**

Open Parliaments provide an opportunity for people from all communities, districts, and constituencies to be heard through their representatives; they offer challenge to decisions on policy, facilitate debate on issues of national and international importance, and help promote peaceful solutions within the rule of law. As leaders in the international community, we recognise the importance of people being heard on international issues as part of the global community they live in. **For issues ranging from COVID-19 to climate change, we will strive to continue to provide innovative ways for our Parliaments to listen to our electorates and represent their concerns.**

The internet has changed the way that democracy works. On the one hand, social media platforms can play a positive role in opening up Parliaments to engage and communicate with people, in ways never seen before and can help people understand and engage in democracy differently. Access to representatives can be immediate: everyone can know how they have voted and what they think about a range of topics. Social media creates a sort of digital lobby with debates taking place with people MPs have never met across the world with an endless access to information. On the other hand, however, social media can also be a place of extreme negativity, as a place of abuse particularly for women, people of colour, the LGBTQ+ community, and other marginalised groups. Members of Parliament should be able to go about their daily lives free from threats to their lives and their families. **We will encourage these platforms to uphold freedom of opinion and expression within a safe environment, especially for elected members, in accordance with the rule of law.**

Since its inception, as an integral part of daily lives, television has both reflected and nurtured social change. From news services to drama series, it has the power to challenge, celebrate and highlight all aspects of democratic societies. Viewers are also voters and can be inspired through their viewing to engage and interact with their democracy. **We will encourage broadcasters to provide independent access to news and information as it is integral to building democracy and promoting debate on the issues that matter to voters.**