This debating activity gives your students the chance to explore a range of human rights issues and some of the difficulties that can arise when balancing an individual’s rights against the interests of society and state sovereignty.

Suggested debate topics and links to sources for background research are included.

Parliament is not responsible for the content of external sites linked from this resource.

Debating activity instructions

Give students print outs of the news stories or internet access and the links in the sample source materials below. Students may also find their own sources that they wish to use.

Each group should choose one of the topical issues below to debate. Using the links in the source materials, they should research and form an opinion. Students could consider some of the following when discussing the issues:

- What is more important - to preserve individual human rights or the needs of the wider community?
- Should the UK do business with countries that have poor human rights records?
- What are the effects of globalisation on human rights?
- What actions should the UK take to uphold human rights around the world?

The groups can feedback to the class or, if time allows, these issues could form the basis of a class debate.

Debate topics

Extradition and Deportation

Motion – It is wrong to extradite/ deport people to countries with a poor track record of human rights.
Trade with other Countries

Motion – UK companies who trade abroad should be made responsible for ensuring the human rights of all their workers.

Votes for Prisoners

Motion – It is right, in some cases, to deny someone certain rights. Prisoners should not get the vote.

Protecting Democracy from Terror

Motion – We should be prepared to give up some human rights to protect democracy from terror.

Sporting and Cultural Relations

Motion - We should not have sporting/ cultural relations with countries that have poor human rights records.

Extension activity

For homework, or as an extension activity, students should write a short essay answering the question:

What challenges does the UK face when promoting higher levels of human rights abroad?

Source materials

This source contains links to sample source materials on a range of topics, to help students research their debates. Students should evaluate the sources they use and may also choose their own sources. Parliament is not responsible for the content of external links.

Extradition and Deportation

Consider the recent cases of Abu Qatada and the deportation of Sri Lankan refugees:

Abu Qatada wins appeal against deportation
Deported Sri Lankans arrive home from UK amid torture fears
Call for Cameron to boycott Sri Lanka summit over human rights
Video – Simon Hughes on should we deport people back to countries with poor human rights records?

Trade with other Countries

Consider the Transparency in UK Company Supply Chains (Eradication of Slavery) Bill:

Transparency in UK Company Supply Chains (Eradication of Slavery) Bill 2012-13

Votes for Prisoners

Consider the current debate about whether prisoners in the UK should have the right to vote:

Prisoner vote bill to be outlined
Prisoner voting rights
MPs to decide on prisoner votes

Protecting Democracy from Terror

Consider the Joint Committee on Human Rights report on the Justice and Security Bill:

Joint Committee on Human Rights publishes legislative scrutiny report on the Justice and Security Bill
Secret courts plan criticised by MPs
Analysis: A question of secret courts  ***

Sporting and Cultural Relations

Consider the Foreign Affairs Committee’s report on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s human rights work in 2011 and the question of boycotting events in countries with poor human rights standards:

UK human rights boycotts are inconsistent say MP’s
Formula 1’s moral dilemma in Bahrain  ***
Foreign Secretary holds talks with Bahraini Foreign Minister
UK ministers boycott England games in Ukraine

Please note that some of the links in this resource refer to stories about human rights abuses with content that, while not graphic, may not be suitable for some students. We have marked content you may want to check with a ***.