

Committees have the power to:

- ▶ examine matters referred to it by the House
- ▶ report to the House from time to time
- ▶ send for persons, papers and records
- ▶ delegate to a sub-committee any of its powers except the power to report to the House
- ▶ examine and inquire into the bill referred to it by the House
- ▶ report the bill with or without amendments
- ▶ study and report on all matters relating to the mandate, management and operation of government departments assigned to them
- ▶ review all Order in Council appointments referred to them
- ▶ examine all permanently referred reports
- ▶ send for persons whom the committee considers competent to appear as witnesses on technical matters

Public servants who appear before committees do so as representatives of, and are subject to, the instructions of their Ministers.

Public servants may be prevented from answering certain questions relating to:

- confidential advice given to Ministers;
- the private affairs of individuals, companies or institutions on which information has been supplied in confidence;
- matters which are the subject of sensitive negotiations between governments;
- specific cases which are sub judice.

In those instances where the committee requires the testimony of a witness who has refused an invitation to appear, **the committee has the power, under the Standing Orders, to issue a formal summons.** Should a witness refuse to appear after a formal summons has been issued, or should a witness refuse to answer questions, the committee's only recourse is to report the matter to the House. **A witness who refuses to appear after having been issued formal summons will be held in contempt of the House.**

Parliamentary Committees and DFAIT

DFAIT officials are requested to appear before a Parliamentary Committee under the following circumstances:

- to support a Minister, usually speaking only when requested by the Minister
- to provide information on matters of departmental administration and management
- to explain government policy and the reasons behind it
- to provide technical or expert knowledge in reference to a legislation under a review or a study undertaken by the Committee

Format of a Committee hearing:

The Chairman: The presiding officer elected by the committee, usually from the governing party.

Two vice-chairmen: A Member of the government party and a Member of the Opposition.

- The Chair presides over the hearing to ensure fairness, order and decorum, but can also ask questions and engage in debate.
- Hearing may last from ninety minutes to two hours. Witnesses are expected to make a