

Local

Rights best protected by parliament, says Pell

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AUSTRALIA'S Cardinal George Pell is expected to enter the debate on a bill of rights in a major speech in Brisbane tonight.

In an address to the Brisbane Institute, Cardinal Pell will argue that citizens' rights are best protected by a democratically elected parliament.

``It is strange indeed that some are now claiming that this safeguard is not enough and our rights will only be secure when they are entrusted to unelected judges who are accountable only to the Constitution and the law, which they themselves interpret and administer," Dr Pell said yesterday in a preview of his remarks tonight.

``Democratic law-making is imperfect, but preferable to rule by the courts."

Dr Pell is likely to point to the futility of Zimbabwe's constitutional bill of rights, which protects rights to personal liberty, freedom of conscience and expression, freedom of assembly, protection against inhuman treatment and deprivation of property.

Dr Pell, who is the Archbishop of Sydney, will refer to the Human Rights Act in the UK, where ``anti-religious elements use the fear of Islamic violence to place limits on all religious groups bold or foolish enough to speak out publicly on issues declared taboo by the new political correctness".

``Presently, such issues touch on sexuality, marriage and family and life. In the near future, given the likely developments in bio-technology, we shall be battling against involuntary euthanasia and even compulsory eugenics, as well as human cloning."

The 2020 Summit's calls for a charter or bill of rights is set to spark debate in federal parliament, with the Opposition signalling it would fight the proposal.

The Rudd Government, despite opposition from senior Labor figures such as former NSW premier Bob Carr, has committed to an inquiry on a charter of rights, but has ruled out any model that would undermine the authority of parliament.

Mr Carr said recently a bill of rights would transfer too much power to the courts and lead to litigation on matters ranging from ``naked strollers" to ``vegetarian menus".

While some proponents favour a bill of rights entrenched as an amendment to the Australian Constitution, others believe a charter of rights, passed as an ordinary act of parliament, would be more achievable in the short term.

``The whole concept of human rights has become so massively dependent on imaginative interpretations of the law, for example, from the right to privacy to the right to abortion, that there is little knowing where it might finish up," Dr Pell said.

``The experience of human rights instruments overseas makes it very clear that some rights will be interpreted narrowly and some expansively."`