



**UN Human Rights Council  
UNITED KINGDOM  
2021–2023 candidate**

*For everyone's  
human rights,  
leaving no person  
behind*





Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab launching the UK's Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime alongside Nikita and Natalia Magnitsky and Bill Browder



Prime Minister Boris Johnson at the UK's Girls' Education Reception in August 2019



Human Rights Ambassador Rita French visiting International Red Cross Volunteers in Beira, Mozambique following the cyclone in November 2019



## Foreword by Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister of State for Human Rights

**I am delighted to present the United Kingdom for election to the UN Human Rights Council for the term January 2021-December 2023.**

Seventy-five years ago, the UN Charter established the three pillars of the UN's work: maintaining peace and security, promoting and protecting human rights, and fostering development. As we celebrate the UN's 75th anniversary, the UK's commitment, as a founding member of the UN, to these principles remains steadfast.

Respect for human rights sits at the heart of the international system. States that respect human rights create the conditions for societies that are more secure, more prosperous, and better equipped to meet the needs of their people.

The Human Rights Council (HRC) is an affirmation of the international community's commitment to tackle the most pressing human rights challenges of today and prevent those of tomorrow. The Council faces great challenges. Its success depends on us working together in a spirit of

collaboration and partnership to corral the political will to face difficult issues and create the conditions for change.

The UK has always been, and will remain, a strong advocate for the UN's human rights fora. We fully support the Council and the tools and mechanisms at its disposal, and will work to ensure that respect for human rights is recognised throughout the UN as a key factor both for development and for the prevention of conflict. We would be honoured to serve a further term.

Our pledges are grounded in the UK's human rights priorities, both domestically and internationally. They build on a tradition of inclusive, democratic values, and focus on some of the most prominent challenges which the international community faces: promoting gender equality including the full, meaningful and effective participation of women in political, economic, and social life; standing up for freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief; bolstering democratic values and supporting civil society; and defending media freedom. As part of the UK's commitment to these



priorities, in 2019 we appointed Rita French to the new role of International Ambassador for Human Rights.

In July 2019, we also announced plans to implement a UK autonomous global human rights sanctions regime, which will help to deter, and provide accountability for, serious human rights violations and abuses anywhere in the world.

We stand for election to work with all those who stand for the preservation of our universal human rights and freedoms, to improve the lives of all people, throughout the world.

## The UK pledges to promote 12 years of quality education for all girls and work to end violence against women and girls.

We will continue to work to end violence against women and girls, including Female Genital Mutilation, Child, Early and Forced Marriage, and conflict-related sexual violence through the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI). The UK will ensure a survivor-centred approach to conflict-related sexual violence, and at the 2020 PSVI international conference will launch tools to strengthen justice for survivors and hold perpetrators to account. We will continue to work to reduce the impact of conflict on women and girls, and to ensure they participate meaningfully in efforts to prevent and resolve conflict, including as mediators.

With only ten years remaining in which to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we will continue in our efforts to promote action for all girls to receive 12 years of quality education by 2030 as we work towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4. As Equal Rights Coalition co-chairs, we have a specific focus on the importance of the SDGs and the UN pledge to leave no-one behind, and the relevance of the SDGs will be an important feature in the UK-hosted international LGBT rights conference in May.



Ambassador Joanna Roper speaking at a Girls' Education panel at the Women Deliver conference in Vancouver in June 2019

## The UK pledges to stand up for freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief.

The UK will continue to be a global leader, and a strong voice internationally, defending Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB). We will raise awareness of the scale and severity of FoRB violations, and call out states which target and persecute people on the grounds of their religion or belief. We will make full use of mechanisms and procedures to defend FoRB, including international meetings, UN Universal Periodic Reviews, and other international fora.

Last year, we commissioned an independent review to look at our work in support of Freedom of Religion or Belief, particularly our work to support persecuted Christians. The review made a series of recommendations, which set out what else the UK could do on FoRB. The UK Government accepted all the recommendations, and work has begun to implement them in a way that will deliver positive change for people of all faiths and beliefs, and of no belief.



## The UK pledges to support democratic values.

The UK remains committed to promoting and contributing to the SDGs, including on Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). A diverse, resilient and effective civil society, including the media, is important for open and inclusive societies, and for holding governments to account.

The UK will support the participation of Human Rights Defenders and civil society in UN business wherever appropriate, and will work to counter instances of reprisals as part of a wider effort to create a safe environment for Human Rights Defenders and civil society representatives. The UK has a long history of supporting Human Rights Defenders through bilateral engagement and through raising global standards via focused engagement within the multilateral system. We recognise the essential role that Human Rights Defenders have in promoting and defending democracy, and will work within the HRC to ensure that they are able to fulfil this role. Through our Magna Carta Fund, we also continue to support initiatives that defend democratic values and civil society, directly aiding Human Rights Defenders in their causes.



A voter has his thumb marked after casting his ballot in Haiti's presidential elections at a polling station in Croix-des-Bouquets, near capital Port-au-Prince.  
©UN Photo/Logan Abassi

## The UK pledges to be at the forefront of global efforts to protect media freedom.

In 2019, alongside Canada, we launched the Global Campaign for Media Freedom, and in July 2019 co-hosted the first global conference on media freedom, attended by representatives from government, civil society and media from over 100 countries. Several initiatives were launched at the conference, including a global fund to defend media freedom, an independent legal panel, and the signing of a pledge to protect media freedom including a commitment to actively respond to acute threats as well as addressing long-term issues. Those countries who signed the pledge formed a Media Freedom Coalition.

As a founding member of the Media Freedom Coalition, the UK will continue to work with other governments to promote a free media and create a safe and enabling environment that protects journalists and media workers from harm (SDG16.10). Supporting the right to freedom of expression, which is key to the promotion and protection of the full range of human rights, is an essential component of the UK's human rights work. As global challenges mount, as a member of the HRC we will defend and wherever possible advance the right to freedom of expression.



Photojournalist in a conflict zone (iStock)

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