



Foreign, Commonwealth  
& Development Office

 UK Government

# Human Rights & Democracy

The 2021 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office Report





# **Human Rights & Democracy**

## **The 2021 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office Report**

Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Foreign,  
Commonwealth & Development Affairs by Command of His Majesty

December 2022



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A woman kneels in prayer. Freedom of religion or belief for all remains a long-standing priority for the UK Government.

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## Preface by the Foreign Secretary James Cleverly

*In recent months, we have seen alarming human rights violations and abuses across the world. The Iranian regime is trying to quash demonstrations by young women in defence of their freedom, while the Taliban turns back the clock on women's and girls' rights in Afghanistan. Putin has brought terror to the lives of Ukrainians and ripped up international law to challenge their right to self-determination. Security forces in Myanmar have killed over two thousand people and detained thousands more since the military coup. Uyghur Muslims continue to face horrific persecution in China.*

*I believe in the power of honest leadership and open societies to create a world where democracies prevail over autocracies, ensuring respect for individual rights and freedoms. Democracies need to work together to achieve this. That's why we are creating a network of partnerships with like-minded nations, bound by economic, diplomatic and security ties, and by our collective drive to uphold our values and face down aggression for a freer world.*



Promoting respect for human rights, freedom and democracy has been an integral part of the work I have been privileged to do throughout my time as a Minister in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. As Foreign Secretary, it is an honour to continue that work with my Ministerial Team, making long-term, sustainable gains on the human rights frontier.

This report, covering 2021, highlights how some governments used the lingering impacts of the pandemic to justify the restriction of individuals' rights, like the freedoms of peaceful assembly, association and expression. Against this backdrop, 2021 was a year of continued UK action to champion open societies, human rights and the rule of law.

We used our Presidency of the G7 to highlight causes such as the right to freedom of religion or belief and media freedom, we imposed human rights sanctions to hold those who violate and abuse human rights to account, and we used our financial programming to further our objectives to combat modern slavery, sexual violence in conflict and much more.

In 2022, our resolve to see flourishing open societies where people can enjoy their rights has only strengthened. Women and girls remain at the heart of foreign and

development policy. We continue to push for stronger international action to Prevent Sexual Violence in Conflict by hosting the PSVI international conference in November 2022, delivering a new Political Declaration to steer international work, and ensuring work continues to provide accountability for such crimes.

We will not rest in the face of alarming human rights violations in China – particularly in Xinjiang and Tibet – and in other parts of the world such as Myanmar and Sudan. And we must continue to confront the urgent situation in Ukraine, where war crimes are alleged to have taken place on an industrial scale. Putin's forces have used weapons indiscriminately in populated areas, killing civilians, and there have been reports of abhorrent gender-based violence in Bucha and other regions formerly under the control of Russian armed forces. Those responsible will be held accountable.

As the people of Ukraine face Russia's rockets, the people of Russia and Belarus face a barrage of attacks on their basic freedoms. We do not blame nor hold the innocent citizens of these countries accountable for their governments' actions, but place this squarely with the regimes violating their human rights.

The UK believes in freedom and the rule of law. All countries, including the UK, need to remain vigilant on the journey to protect those basic building blocks of democracy as our societies develop and deal with technological and other changes. The international rules-based system is critical to protecting and realising the human rights and freedoms of people all over the world. We will strive to protect and advance universal human rights in the multilateral arena, competing on the world stage for what we believe is right.

When autocrats and those who seek to do harm are bold, we must be bolder. We want to see people live in freedom, not fear. The UK is strengthening networks old and new, building a global family united by the values of freedom, human rights and the rule of law. Together we are determined that every person, in every nation, enjoys a brighter, freer future.

## Foreword by the Minister for Human Rights, Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon

*2021 was a turbulent year for human rights and the rule of law around the world. Authoritarianism continued to creep in the shadow of the pandemic, and independent and critical voices continued to be suppressed.*

*This year, Putin's brand of authoritarianism has marched to a terrifying new beat. His foreign aggression mirrors ruthless repression at home.*

*More than ever, we must restate our belief in democracy, open societies and freedom, and stand up for human rights for everyone, everywhere.*

This Report looks at the human rights landscape across the world in 2021. It includes a section on our Human Rights Priority Countries, those which either have particular challenges or are on a negative or positive trajectory. It highlights the work the UK Government has done to champion human rights and those who defend them.

The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan was a serious blow for human rights in the country. Women and girls saw the freedoms they had fought for over the last 20 years abruptly curtailed. Other marginalised groups, including religious minorities, faced increased persecution.

I have been privileged to hear the first-hand accounts of brave Afghan women, including human rights defenders and members of minority groups, and to speak at the UN Security Council and UN Human Rights Council in support of their rights. FCDO officials will continue to use our engagement with the Taliban to press them to respect the human rights of all Afghans.

The UK Government has continued to take action in response to human rights violations in China, including imposing sanctions in response to the continuing violations in Xinjiang such as mass incarceration, forced labour and forced birth control.

We imposed further sanctions on Belarus in response to their fraudulent election and subsequent human rights violations, including in response to the forced diversion of a Ryanair

flight in an unacceptable act of interference.

In Ethiopia, there have been further harrowing reports of systematic killing of civilians, ethnic discrimination, and reports of widespread rape, including of children. UK programming continued to help tackle conflict-related sexual violence there, and we have deployed UK experts to support the response.

As the Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, I have spearheaded the Government's work to tackle impunity, strengthen justice and enhance support for survivors and children born of such violence.

At the Human Rights Council, we quickly secured Special Sessions on the human rights situations in Myanmar and Sudan, following coups in those countries. The Session on Myanmar adopted a consensus resolution deploring the removal of the government and the Session on Sudan mandated a designated expert to ensure human rights monitoring in Sudan.

Working alongside the Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Fiona Bruce MP, we have galvanised international action in support of repressed groups and individuals by playing a leading role in the UN, G7 and the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance, and through hosting an International Ministerial Conference this year.



The appointment of the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for LGBT+ rights, the Rt Hon Lord Herbert of South Downs, has strengthened the UK's global efforts to defend the rights of LGBT+ people and ensure everyone, everywhere can live without fear of violence or discrimination.

Supporting media freedom and journalists continues to be a priority. We remain an influential member of the Media Freedom Coalition and continue to call out attacks against journalists and news organisations.

The UK Government remains committed to ending forced labour, modern slavery, human trafficking and the worst forms of child labour by 2030. We support projects globally to assist survivors, further workers' rights and bring about legislative change.

We will also continue to support activists, campaigners and human rights defenders across the world through direct engagement, work with allies, project funding and trial observation.

Promoting and protecting human rights is a challenging aim. But working together with partners and our international allies we can advance the frontiers of freedom and uphold the human rights of everyone, everywhere.



## CHAPTER 1: Democracy

### Democracy and Democratic Freedoms

Democracy and freedom are at the heart of the UK's values. They contribute to long-term prosperity and security; and democratic societies are the strongest supporters of an open and resilient international order. However, the global decline in democratic freedom continued in 2021, with autocracies becoming more prevalent and assertive worldwide.

The UK has responded to these challenges with plans to build a network of partnerships with like-minded partners, together promoting democracy and freedom.

### G7 and Summit for Democracy

With allies and partners, the UK continued to promote democratic freedoms around the world, including through our G7 Presidency and the US Summit for Democracy.

At the Carbis Bay Summit in June, G7 Leaders, alongside the Republic of Korea, South Africa, India and Australia, signed up to an Open Societies Statement in which they reaffirmed, and encouraged others to embrace, the values that bind us together, including respect for international rules and norms on democracy.

In December, the UK participated in the US-hosted Summit for Democracy, where the then Prime Minister, then Foreign Secretary and other UK ministers discussed the challenges and opportunities facing democracies with other governments, civil society, and the private sector. The UK announced ambitious commitments, reforms, and initiatives to defend democracy and human rights at home and

abroad. These included a strong focus on developing partnerships around trade, security, investment and technology, which will help promote and deepen democratic ties. The UK's Free Trade Agreements will set high standards of openness and accountability with like-minded open economies and seek robust measures to prevent and combat corruption risks.

### Digital Democracy

The rapid advance in technology had a positive impact on the ability of people to exercise their democratic rights. However, it also continued to be used as a basis to inhibit democracy through restricting access to the online spaces where people discuss issues, engage with governments and oppositions, challenge decision makers, and exercise their freedoms of expression and association. There were 182 internet shutdowns across 34 countries in 2021.<sup>[1]</sup> Through its bilateral and multi stakeholder efforts, the UK worked to push back against digital authoritarianism, and to keep the internet on, open and inclusive.

In June the Government of **Nigeria** blocked access to Twitter following a disagreement with the company, including over its editorial policy. The UK and our partners issued a joint

statement the same day expressing concern and convened members of the international community to lobby the Nigerian government both publicly and privately to lift the ban. The Nigerian authorities began a series of negotiations via Twitter, with the UK holding private discussions to encourage a resolution.

During the UK's G7 Presidency, G7 Leaders affirmed in June their collective opposition to measures which undermined democratic values, such as government-imposed internet shutdowns and network restrictions. The UK will continue to work with partners, including through the Freedom Online Coalition and directly with governments that impose restrictions.

### Election Observation

Election observation is an integral part of democratic scrutiny and allows the UK to support democracies around the globe. As set out in the Integrated Review, the UK began to develop a new UK capability to support election observation. The first UK thematic election observation mission took place in **The Gambia** on 4 December, conducted by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. The UK continued to support election observation



The Foreign Secretary, then Minister for the Middle East and North Africa, meeting counterparts at the first UK-Tunisia Association Council in June 2021 to discuss trade issues and human rights.

[1] <https://www.accessnow.org/cms/assets/uploads/2022/04/2021-KeptItOn-Report-1.pdf>

missions run by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). In 2021, the UK funded observers to OSCE missions, including in **Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Albania, Armenia, Moldova** and **Georgia**.

Regional elections took place in **Venezuela** in November. Observers identified some improvements in electoral conditions and structures, such as the newly appointed board of directors of the National Electoral Council with two opposition members, but there were serious shortcomings in the electoral process and evidence of significant electoral irregularities. Prior to the election, the UK provided capacity building for civil society organisations and journalists on conditions for free elections.

## Community of Democracies

The UK continued to work with the Community of Democracies (CoD) alongside 27 other states. In his speech to the tenth CoD Ministerial Conference of 22 September, Minister for Human Rights Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon underlined the importance of resilient, inclusive democracies and the UK's commitment to promoting democratic institutions.

## Transparency and Open Government

Transparency of decision making through open and inclusive governance is a hallmark of a functioning democracy. The UK supported the Open Government Partnership (OGP) and the World Bank globally through a £11.2 million programme (2018/19 – 2021/22) designed to deepen open government reform in developing countries. In **Nigeria**, OGP has enabled the government to introduce legislation on establishing a beneficial ownership registry to prevent the illicit flow of more than US\$15.7 billion through Nigeria. In 2021 the UK continued supporting OGP to develop and finalise National Action Plans with member countries, such as **Kenya**, to advance open justice commitments, developed through a

co-creation process and supported by civil society and multiple government agencies.

## Westminster Foundation for Democracy

Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) is an executive Non-Departmental Public Body dedicated to strengthening democracy overseas. In 2021, WFD continued to work with parliaments, political parties, and civil society in over 30 countries to help make political systems more inclusive and accountable. Amid the pandemic, WFD supported parliaments to monitor and assess COVID-19 emergency legislation, helping to ensure effective oversight as well as more equitable, greener recoveries. In Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe, WFD helped parliaments prepare to implement commitments made at COP26.

WFD recruited international election observers for the UK, supporting observation missions in **Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Zambia, The Gambia**, and **Somaliland**, among others. WFD also provided tools, knowledge and peer support for parliaments and civil society to advance laws and policies that safeguard democratic freedoms, combat corrupt practices, and make government actions more transparent to citizens. In **Sierra Leone** and

**Lebanon**, WFD helped develop digital platforms to improve citizen participation in the political process.

WFD worked with political parties around the world to make candidate selection processes more inclusive. In **North Macedonia**, WFD supported equal participation for people with disabilities (PWDs) through training and organising an election observation by PWDs. WFD produced new research on the importance of women's participation in public life and supported women as community and political leaders across its programme portfolio.

Through the Global Equality Project, WFD also helped with the enactment of important pieces of legislation – including a law to protect people from domestic violence in **Nigeria**. In **Sri Lanka**, WFD helped tackle LGBT+ discrimination by conducting a perceptions survey analysing gaps in laws and policies.

## Women's Political Empowerment

Women's political empowerment is critical to, and a key indicator of, a peaceful, prosperous and democratic society. Getting more women into power gives voice to a marginalised section of society, creates female role models and leads to legislative change and policies that tackle gender inequalities and discrimination.



Women's political leadership on environmental issues: following support and mentoring from the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, women leaders in three cantons in Bosnia and Herzegovina got a resolution on indoor air quality adopted. In this photo, MP Amila Hodžić discusses the resolution with the media.

In peace processes where women are able to exert strong influence, it is much more likely that an agreement will be reached and implemented, and the peace is 35% more likely to last for fifteen years.<sup>[2]</sup>

In **Yemen**, UK funding supported the UN to create a more inclusive political dialogue through non-governmental channels and civil society, particularly the inclusion of marginalised groups, including women.

Through UK leadership, the G7 reaffirmed its commitment to women's political empowerment and called for the meaningful participation of women and of women's rights organisations in decision-making for COVID-19 recovery. Throughout the year, the UK worked with others in government, the tech industry, academia and civil society to gather insights into the way in which online gendered abuse deters women from engaging in political processes and to explore solutions. In March, the UK hosted a side event at the UN Commission on the Status of Women, which explored better solutions to online violence against women in public life, and in November, the UK co-hosted an event focused on tackling online gendered harms with the Home Office, Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport and Wilton Park.

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[2] Paffenholz, T. et al (2016), 'Making women count – not just counting women: assessing women's inclusion and influence on peace negotiations', Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative; Stone, L. (2015), 'Quantitative Analysis of Women's Participation in Peace Processes' in O' Reilly et al, 'Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes', International Peace Institute

## CHAPTER 2: Equality, Gender and Inclusion



Rita French, the UK's International Ambassador for Human Rights, in Nairobi in November 2021 with Kenya's Deputy Minister for ICT, Innovation and Youth, Nadia Ahmed Abdalla, learning how to make sanitary products to supply to young girls in impoverished communities.

supporting, the development of policies that reduce the barriers to education that these girls face.

The UK's flagship Girls Education Challenge continued to run in 2021. It is the world's largest programme dedicated to girls' education, supporting up to 1.52 million marginalised girls with access to education across 17 countries. In 2021 the programme continued to help these girls to learn and improve their literacy and numeracy skills, complete primary school and transition to secondary education or training.

Under the UK's G7 Presidency in 2021, the UK agreed two ambitious global targets of getting 40 million more girls in education, and 20 million more girls reading by age 10, by 2026. In May 2021, the then Prime Minister launched the Girls' Education Action Plan, setting out the practical steps the UK will take to deliver our global targets.

In July, the UK co-led a United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) resolution on girls' education with the **United Arab Emirates**, which was adopted by consensus and gained 97 co-sponsors. The UK was also proud to co-sponsor the UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution 2601 on the Protection of Education in Armed Conflict, reaffirming that the right to education makes a fundamental contribution to building peace and security.

Also in July, the UK co-hosted the Global Education Summit with **Kenya** – raising an unprecedented US \$4 billion (£2.9 billion) for the Global Partnership for Education. At COP26, the UK showcased girls' education as an essential tool for

### Gender Equality

#### Women's and Girls' Rights

In November, the then Foreign Secretary committed to putting women and girls at the centre of UK foreign and development policy. The UK is alarmed by the increased challenges to the hard-won rights for women and girls. In negotiations at the UN and in other multilateral fora, the UK worked tirelessly to protect and promote women's and girls' rights, especially sexual and reproductive health and rights.

#### Educating Girls

The UK remained steadfast in its commitment to stand up for the right of every girl to have 12 years of quality education. This includes ensuring the most marginalised girls can catch up on lost learning due to COVID-19 and are equipped with basic skills.

The school closures caused by COVID-19 exacerbated existing inequalities, especially where there was no quality alternative learning offer available to all. Combined with the shutdown of public life in 2021, this contributed to a lack of safe spaces.

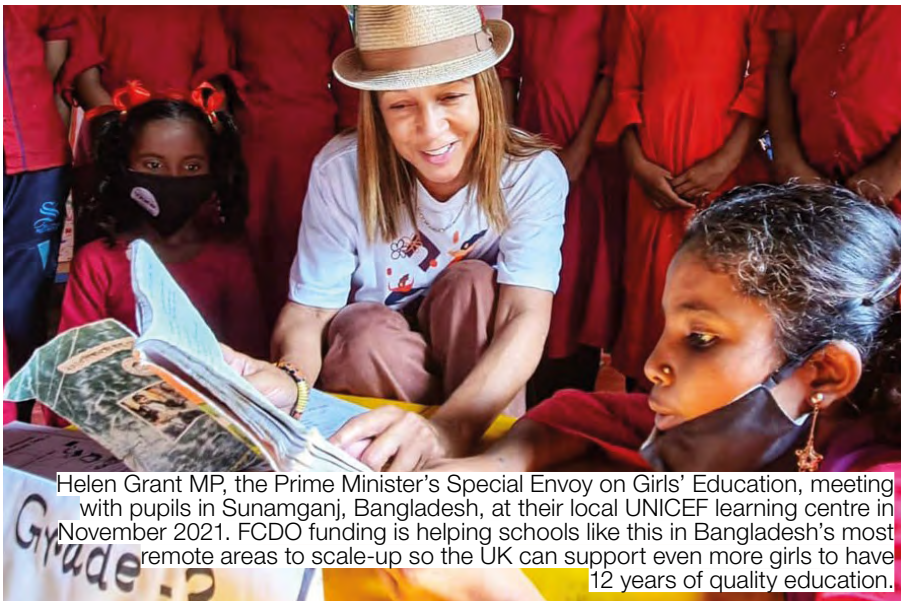
However, the costs were highest for already disadvantaged groups including poor students and adolescent girls in particular.<sup>[3]</sup> Secondary age girls were most at risk of staying home or marrying early because their families fell into poverty. Emerging data on dropouts show the real impact of school closures on children's school participation.<sup>[4]</sup> For example, a survey in Kenya found that twice as many girls (16%) failed to return to school in January 2021 compared to boys (8%) and adolescent girls noted that school closures disrupted their access to menstrual products.<sup>[5]</sup>

In 2021, the UK continued work to support mothers and girls who are pregnant to return to school, including lobbying for, and

[3] <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/publication/prioritizing-learning-during-covid-19-the-most-effective-ways-to-keep-children-learning-during-and-post-pandemic>

[4] Where are we on Education Recovery? | UNICEF

[5] Promises to keep: Impact of COVID-19 on adolescents in Kenya (popcouncil.org)



Helen Grant MP, the Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Girls' Education, meeting with pupils in Sunamganj, Bangladesh, at their local UNICEF learning centre in November 2021. FCDO funding is helping schools like this in Bangladesh's most remote areas to scale-up so the UK can support even more girls to have 12 years of quality education.

responding to the climate crisis. The UK's bilateral country programmes adapted to ensure children are safe and can continue to learn. UK humanitarian funds helped provide safe spaces for learning for 38,000 displaced children, including 28,000 girls. In **Afghanistan**, the UK called for girls' secondary education to be restored.

## Women, Peace and Security (WPS)

In 2021, in line with the objectives in the UK's WPS National Action Plan (NAP) from 2018 to 2022, the UK continued to focus on promoting women's full, equal and meaningful participation in peace processes, increasing support and protection for women resolving conflict and building peace at the grassroots.

In February, the UK published three guidance notes on peacekeeping, gender-based violence and humanitarian response, to support HMG implementation of the NAP's strategic outcomes.

In **Libya**, the UK supported civil society and women rights organisations to address the needs of women and girls and support local communities to overcome the challenges of COVID-19 and conflict. UK funding delivered community-based activities, ranging from

outreach campaigns to livelihoods and business skills to psychosocial support.

In **Vietnam**, the UK supported the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' Institute for Peace and Reconciliation to develop their training module on WPS. The UK shared its experience of implementing National Action Plans as part of the first phase in the development of Vietnam's first NAP on WPS.

The UK continued to build **Somalia's** police and military capability to better include, serve, and protect women, including through building capacity within the Somali Ministry of Defence and Somali National Army to deliver training on gender.

In 2021, the UK helped increase women's leadership and presence in security through providing £1.2 million to the Elsie Initiative Fund for Women in Peace Operations and through pre-deployment training delivered to peacekeepers through the British Peace Support Team (Africa). Through our funding and diplomatic support to the Women Mediators across the Commonwealth Network, members provided technical expertise to various peace dialogues, including in **South Sudan, Cyprus** and **Myanmar**.

The UK helped to secure stronger WPS language in UN Security Council products with WPS referenced in 63% of all UN Security Council Resolutions. The UK also led efforts to address a global rise in reprisals against women Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) and peacebuilders, supporting the development of UN guidance and providing emergency grants to those facing intimidation or reprisal in conflict settings.

## Gender and Climate Change

Climate change can exacerbate gender and other social inequalities and can undermine the enjoyment of human rights. Women, girls and marginalised people are disproportionately impacted by climate change. While women and girls are critical agents of change within the response, they are often excluded from decision-making.<sup>[6]</sup> The UK is committed to advancing gender equality and social inclusion within climate action, including by championing women's and girls' climate leadership and empowerment within the green economy, while building their resilience to climate impacts.

The UK prioritised taking an inclusive approach to our COP26 Presidency, including by driving implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Gender Action Plan agreed at COP25. The UK hosted a Presidency theme day on gender at COP26 in November, announcing £165 million UK funding to tackle gender inequality and climate change hand-in-hand, and welcoming new commitments on gender and climate from multiple countries and non-state actors. The UK also integrated gender equality into events across the COP26 fortnight, successfully demonstrating that gender equality is not an isolated issue but fundamental to many of the challenges and opportunities presented by climate change.

[6] Work and Opportunities for Women: Women's Economic Empowerment and Climate Change: A Primer ([publishing.service.gov.uk](https://publishing.service.gov.uk))

At COP26, Parties agreed building blocks for a review of the Gender Action Plan scheduled for COP27. This review will strengthen the implementation of the Gender Action Plan. The Glasgow Climate Pact also encourages Parties to increase the full, meaningful and equal participation of women in climate action and to ensure gender-responsive implementation.

In June 2021, the UK joined the Generation Equality Action Coalition on Feminist Action for Climate Justice and made commitments on gender and climate finance, women and girls' climate resilience and leadership, and data on the gender-climate nexus.<sup>[7]</sup>

## Women's Economic Empowerment

Women and girls are at the heart of the UK's approach to economic development. The UK has increased investment and continued to help women access the benefits of trade globally.

In 2021, our £19 million Gender-Responsive Social Protection programme developed guidance to support the most marginalised women and girls in informal employment. The Land Investment for Transformation programme supported the Government of **Ethiopia** to implement legislation giving women equal land registration rights with men and helped reduce the gap in labour force participation.

In July 2021, the UK's Development Finance Institution, CDC Group, co-led the creation of the 2X Collaborative, a new global industry body that promotes gender lens investing. Under the UK's Presidency, G7 Ministers and 2X partners set an ambition to invest \$15 billion in development finance from 2021 to 2022 to help women in developing countries access jobs, build resilient businesses and respond to the

devastating economic impacts of COVID-19.

In 2021, the SheTrades Commonwealth programme rolled out SheTrades Outlook to 32 developing countries and helped governments to collect data and share best practice on trade policy that affects women entrepreneurs and their businesses.

## Ending Violence against Women and Girls

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) continues to be one of the most systemic and widespread human rights abuses of our time, with one in three women worldwide experiencing physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime, as well as high rates of child marriage and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).<sup>[8]</sup> COVID-19 has exacerbated the drivers of VAWG, including long-term school closures which increase children's vulnerability to violence, exploitation and the risk of child marriage.<sup>[9]</sup>

In **South Sudan**, the UK continued its six-year £25 million programme

with the International Medical Corps to provide support to GBV survivors. The UK also funded 2,154 instances of GBV care through the Health-Pooled Fund between April and December 2021. In **Syria**, UK funding helped provide dedicated GBV case management to 17,498 women and supply over 70,000 dignity kits to vulnerable Syrians.

The elimination of all forms of VAWG so that women and girls can live freely and without fear is a priority for the FCDO. In November, the then Foreign Secretary stepped up the UK's global leadership on ending violence against women and girls, announcing a package of over £22 million new funding to end child marriage, support survivors, and fund women's rights organisations. In November, Minister Ford launched the £67.5 million 'What Works to Prevent Violence: Impact at Scale' programme, which is the first global effort to scale-up proven violence prevention approaches worldwide.

Through the UK's co-leadership of the Generation Equality Action Coalition on Gender-Based Violence, which was launched in June 2021,



The then Foreign Secretary meets with the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group for Trade Out of Poverty in March 2021, to set out how the UK is tackling the barriers women face in trade and how it is prioritising women's economic empowerment in our Financial Trade Agreements.

[7] Feminist Action for Climate Justice Action Coalition: Commitment Makers

[8] World Health Organisation (2021) 'Violence Against Women Prevalence Estimates 2018'

[9] UNICEF has estimated that the pandemic could result in 10 million extra child marriages in the years immediately following the crisis until 2030, as a result of school closures, financial insecurity, breakdowns in social networks, and unintended pregnancies <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/10-million-additional-girls-risk-child-marriage-due-covid-19>

the UK helped to raise the importance of funding women's rights organisations to end violence.

## Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict

The scale of sexual violence in conflict globally is appalling. In November, the then Foreign Secretary confirmed that the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) would be one of her top priorities. The Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon, led UK efforts to tackle conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). The PSVI focused on three objectives: strengthening the global response; strengthening pathways to justice and tackling impunity; and enhancing support for all survivors and children born of sexual violence in conflict.

In June, a member of the PSVI Team of Experts was deployed to **Ethiopia** to address justice for sexual violence crimes. The UK worked with partners to implement the expert's recommendations.

In **Iraq**, there was progress on legislation to provide reparations for survivors of Daesh crimes. In March 2021, the Iraqi Parliament passed the Yazidi Survivors Law, which formally recognised Daesh atrocities as genocide and crimes against humanity and established a reparations framework for female survivors of CRSV. The UK was one of the first donors to contribute to implementation efforts and worked with the government and partners to press for full financial provision of the law. The UK also supported the provision of psychosocial support services for female survivors of CRSV.

The UK secured agreement from NATO Leaders to endorse NATO's first policy on CRSV. In November, the UK launched the 'Call to Action to Ensure the Rights and Wellbeing



In November 2021 Lord Tariq Ahmad launched a Call to Action asking countries to speak out about the challenges faced by children born of sexual violence in conflict and commit to action to change the laws, policies and practices that prevent them from realising their rights and living life to the fullest.

of Children Born of Sexual Violence in Conflict'. In the same month, the then Foreign Secretary announced a £1.4 million contribution to the Global Survivors Fund.

Throughout 2021, the UK funded consultations on the Murad Code, the global code of conduct for collecting information from survivors. The UK also funded community dialogues on the principles of the Declaration of Humanity in **South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo** to tackle survivor stigmatisation.

As a global leader in tackling CRSV, the UK called for a stronger international response. The then Foreign Secretary announced her intention to strengthen international consensus on tackling CRSV and to host an international conference in November 2022, marking ten years since PSVI's launch and driving forward global action on this issue. The UK works closely with its PSVI Survivor Champions to help ensure a survivor-centred approach.

## Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment

The UK remained committed to tackling sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment

(SEAH). The FCDO published its annual progress report in December 2021 against the 22 donor commitments from the 2018 Safeguarding Summit,<sup>[10]</sup> and continued to convene stakeholders from across the aid sector, including to support progress against Summit commitments and to produce an annual sector-wide progress update.<sup>[11]</sup>

The UK embedded tackling SEAH into FCDO's policies and procedures, reported back on the progress made in implementing the 2020 UK SEAH aid sector Safeguarding Strategy and continued to drive change.<sup>[12]</sup>

The UK announced a new £5 million programme to support victims and survivors, with projects in the **DRC, Liberia and Haiti**, making the UK the largest donor to the UN Trust Fund to support victims of SEAH. The UK also funded the UN's Sexual Harassment Taskforce in Geneva. The UK continued to drive change to improve both prevention and response to SEAH through our Safeguarding Innovation and Engagement Fund, Project Soteria and the Resource and Support Hub.

The FCDO demonstrated global leadership, including by supporting the UN Secretary General's zero tolerance approach to SEA and

[10] Commitments made by donors to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in the international aid sector (publishing.service.gov.uk)

[11] Safeguarding against sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment: cross-sector progress report 2020 to 2021 – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

[12] FCDO Progress Report on Safeguarding Against SEAH in the International Aid Sector 2020-2021 (publishing.service.gov.uk)

ensuring that all mandates for Peacekeeping Missions contained language on the protection of women and children from SEA and on accountability measures. The UK shared best practices with the UN and member states, including on the impact of the UK's Domestic Abuse Act 2021 extending extra-territorial jurisdiction for certain sexual offences committed by UK nationals abroad. The British Peace Support Team (Africa) provided training to support capability development to over 10,000 personnel from African Troop and Police Contributing Countries deploying to UN and African Union Peace Operations. All our British Peace Support Team (Africa) courses had a module on SEAH.

## Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

FGM is one of the most extreme manifestations of gender inequality. It is a human rights violation that can result in a lifetime of physical, psychological and emotional suffering. In 2021, the UK demonstrated its continued commitment to this agenda and continued delivering the second phase of our support for the Africa-Led Movement to End FGM – a multi-year, multi-country UK aid package working with activists, communities and harnessing



The then FCDO Minister for Africa, Vicky Ford, meets Mama Iqbal, a community leader who successfully campaigned to make her 200,000-strong community of Tuti island free from FGM.

evidence-based solutions to scale up efforts to end FGM.<sup>[13]</sup>

In 2021, through the Africa-Led Movement to End FGM, engagement with communities in **Kenya** has provided a safe space and platform for them to speak about FGM and rights violations, an important step towards changing behaviours on FGM at a local level.

UK support to the UN Joint Programme for ending FGM helped support **Mauritania** and **Senegal** develop and implement costed national plans to end the harmful practice. Through programme work in **Sudan**, the UK also continued to support the Sudanese-led movement

to eradicate FGM, building on longstanding efforts to change social norms, support an improved legal environment, and strengthen systems combatting FGM.

## Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People

The UK is fully committed to promoting and protecting the rights and dignity of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT+) people. The UK condemns any discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity.

In 2021, the pandemic continued to impact on key opportunities to advance the human rights of LGBT+ people. There were signs of countries backsliding and becoming increasingly unsafe for LGBT+ people. A growing number of countries are using divisive issues to undermine social attitudes towards LGBT+ and restrict their human rights through the introduction of discriminatory legislation. These vocal debates detrimentally affect broader human rights and equalities issues, including the rights of women and girls.

In 2021 the UK and **Argentina** continued to co-chair the Equal Rights Coalition (ERC), a grouping



The UK's International Ambassador for Human Rights, Rita French and Director for UNFPA, Monica Ferro, receiving a Maasai welcome when meeting community members in the Kajiado county of Kenya in November 2021, to learn how they are ending the practice of FGM.

[13] The successful first phase of our programme support to the Africa-Led Movement to End FGM ran from 2013 to 2018, the second phase began in 2019



of 42 like-minded countries, partnering with civil society and international organisations to address violence and discrimination against LGBT+ individuals around the world, and the continuing criminalisation of same-sex conduct in almost 70 countries. The UK is committed to strengthening the work and impact of the ERC and in July 2021 launched the ERC's first Strategy and Five-Year Implementation plan at a two-day virtual conference, with a follow up virtual meeting in January 2022 to assess progress. The pandemic had delayed delivery of the Strategy, which had two rounds of broad consultation with ERC stakeholders.

In May 2021, the Prime Minister appointed Lord Herbert as Special Envoy on LGBT+ rights, to continue to drive UK's global leadership on LGBT+ rights. The Special Envoy worked closely with our diplomatic network as they continued to monitor and raise human rights issues, including in response to incidents of human rights violations against LGBT+ people or activists. This includes marking important occasions, such as the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT) and by participating in physical Pride marches and hosting virtual events to raise awareness of the challenges LGBT+ people face.

In many parts of the world, LGBT+ people continue to face challenges that limit their visibility, representation and meaningful participation in society. The UK's diplomatic network therefore continued to fly the rainbow flag, including for the first time in **Barbados, Ecuador** and the **United Arab Emirates**, as a symbol of solidarity and a visible demonstration of our commitment to human rights and equality for all LGBT+ people. We also flew the flag in celebration of progress on LGBT+ equality, such as the opening of marriage to same-sex couples in **Switzerland** and **Chile**.

## Overseas Territories

Each Overseas Territory has its own constitution, government and local laws. The UK Government continued to expect the territories to abide by the same basic standards of human rights as the UK. The UK continued to encourage the territories to seek the extension of the core UN human rights conventions ratified by the UK when they were ready to apply them.

The UK Government is committed to equal rights, including upholding the rights of LGBT+ people. At the end of 2021, 10 Overseas Territories had legal recognition and protection for same-sex relationships. Same-sex marriage is legal in the British Indian Ocean Territory, British Antarctic Territory, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, Pitcairn Islands, St Helena, Ascension Island, Tristan da Cunha, and the Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia for UK military and civilian personnel.

Marriage law is an area of devolved responsibility in Overseas Territories and is for the territories to decide and legislate on. However, the UK will continue to encourage all the Overseas Territories to ensure enjoyment of human rights by all their citizens, and to ensure that all legislation is compliant with human rights obligations.

In October the UK hosted a virtual meeting of ERC member states to co-ordinate responses to violations against LGBT+ people in **Afghanistan**. The UK was the first country to offer a bespoke route for the relocation of vulnerable LGBT+ Afghans and working closely with civil society organisations such as Stonewall, Rainbow Railroad and Micro Rainbow, welcomed the first of several groups to the UK in October 2021. This represents just part of the UK's effort to get vulnerable Afghans to safety through the Afghan Relocations and Assistance

Policy and the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme.

In 2021, the UK committed over £2.7 million to support projects focused on LGBT+ rights around the world. This funding provided capacity building for grassroots HRDs and enabled legal technical assistance to governments and civil society organisations seeking to overturn discriminatory laws and policies in the Commonwealth.



The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office lit up in rainbow colours in July 2021 to mark the 30th Anniversary of the UK Government lifting the ban on LGBT+ people serving openly in the diplomatic service, and to highlight our commitment to advancing LGBT+ equality and human rights internally and around the world.

## Rights of People with Disabilities

The global COVID-19 pandemic continued to disproportionately impact people with disabilities around the world and reversed many of the hard-won gains to secure their human rights, as set out in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The FCDO committed to launching a refreshed strategy on disability inclusion and rights to reflect its new departmental mandate and rising global challenges, including recovering from the pandemic. The UK completed its term as co-chair of the Global Action on Disability (GLAD) Network and continued to play a key role, co-chairing the Inclusive Health Working Group.

During 2021, the FCDO continued to deliver results on disability inclusion. For example, the FCDO Disability Inclusive Development programme supported approximately 2.9 million people with disabilities across several areas such as education, health and jobs. This included providing 3,600 people with disabilities with better access to healthcare in **Nigeria, Bangladesh, and Kenya**. In **Somalia**, the UK's Adolescent Girls Education project assisted 927 girls with disabilities to attend school.

Over the year, organisations of persons with disabilities, funded by the FCDO Disability Capacity Building programme, secured more than 50 legal reforms and programme changes across 11 countries to ensure people with disabilities receive improved rights. Partners trained over 300 new disability activists in how to advocate for disability rights and supported 5 alternative reports to human rights reporting mechanisms. Through the Global Disability Innovation Hub, the UK supported the development of 3D-printing of assistive devices for people with weak or damaged bones, joints, and muscles in Uganda. The project also

developed partnerships with local hospitals to utilise the technology developed.

## Rights of the Child

Every year it is estimated that more than 1 billion children experience violence, exploitation and abuse,<sup>[14]</sup> with long lasting impacts. The UK Government is firmly committed to the promotion, protection and realisation of children's rights.

In 2021, the FCDO led cross-Governmental efforts to help secure the adoption by consensus of a number of child's rights resolutions at the UN General Assembly and the HRC, in line with UK priorities. This included UN Security Council Resolution 2601(2021) on the Protection of Education in Armed Conflict.

The UK continued to actively participate in the UNSC Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, which responds to the UN Secretary General's annual report on Children and Armed Conflict, negotiating and issuing recommendations to priority countries. The UK provided £250,000 to UNICEF's Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism for financial year 2021-2022 for its core activities in providing accurate information on grave child rights violations to the UNSC.

In 2021, the UK was the largest donor to Education Cannot Wait – the global fund for education in emergencies – with a 20% burden share, having pledged £90 million from 2019 until 2023. The UK continued to be a strong advocate of the Safe Schools Declaration, a commitment to protect students from the worst effects of armed conflict, and the UK ensures the Declaration is gender responsive by situating it within our Girls' Education campaign.

The UK remained steadfast in our commitment to protect vulnerable children through our policy leadership and programmatic work. The UK is one of the founding Board members of the Global Partnership to End Violence (EVAC), and the UK provided £10 million between 2017 and 2021, including £5 million for the *Safe to Learn* campaign to accelerate action at local, national and international levels towards ending all violence in schools by 2024.<sup>[15]</sup>

The FCDO has continued to provide support to the **Overseas Territories** (OTs) throughout the year, including funded expertise, to assist them in strengthening their child safeguarding systems. This has included partnering with UNICEF on a Positive Behaviour Management Programme in four Overseas Territories;<sup>[16]</sup> and the establishment of Practice Partnerships with UK Local Authorities and a number of Territories, enabling the development of professional peer relationships, the sharing of good practice and training, and the provision of expertise.

In November 2021, Leaders of the **Overseas Territories** (OTs) acknowledged the importance of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and committed to continue to promote and protect children's rights as set out in the Convention, and to review the outstanding reservations.

In response to the specific challenges of protecting children from the effects of armed conflict, the UK continued to apply diplomatic pressure in the UNSC Working Group on Children in Armed Conflict (CAAC), responding to the UN Secretary-General's annual report published in June 2021 and CAAC country-specific reports, which assess the treatment of children within conflict zones and lists governments and armed groups for committing grave violations against children. In October 2021 the UK co-sponsored the UNSC Resolution 2601 on the Protection of Education in Armed Conflict.

[14] <https://www.who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health/violence-prevention/global-status-report-on-violence-against-children-2020>

[15] In 2022 the UK is working with partners to shape EVAC's focus on country level implementation, through active representation at Board level, and by sharing evidence from our world-leading *What Works to Prevent Violence* programme

[16] Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, Montserrat and the Turks and Caicos Islands

## Rights of Older People

The UK takes a life course approach, aiming to protect the rights of all individuals at all stages of their lives. The UK recognises the diverse experiences, priorities, and requirements of older people, many of whom have disabilities, which can impact their autonomy, dignity and participation in society.

COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on older people – directly and indirectly and across all areas of life. Older people remained at a significantly higher risk of contracting COVID-19, developing severe complications and dying.<sup>[17]</sup> The pandemic has exposed the inequalities and age discrimination many older people face and exacerbated the barriers, exclusion and isolation they already experienced.

In 2021, the UK worked with international partners to push for co-ordinated, inclusive COVID-19 responses, including by providing specialist advice to governments on the inclusion of older persons and marginalised groups in social protection responses to COVID-19 via an expert advice helpline, and by requiring all humanitarian partners to follow minimum standards and explain how their responses were inclusive of vulnerable groups.

In 2021, the UK also worked with the Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing,<sup>[18]</sup> and supported the human rights of older people and widows through resolutions and statements at the HRC,<sup>[19]</sup> the UN General Assembly,<sup>[20]</sup> and elsewhere. The UK remained open to the principle of a multilateral instrument dedicated to the human rights of older people.

As a key stakeholder in the Titchfield City Group on ageing, the FCDO continued to invest in improving the collection, analysis and use of disaggregated data.<sup>[21]</sup> The UK continued to support assistive technology, recognising its critical role for inclusion, its transformative impact for older people, and as a key enabler for change.<sup>[22]</sup>

[17] <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/articles/coronaviruscovid19latestinsights/deaths>

[18] <https://social.un.org/ageing-working-group/eleventhsession.shtml>

[19] <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/48/3>

[20] <https://undocs.org/A/C.3/70/L.19/Rev.1>

[21] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/leaving-no-one-behind-our-promise/inclusive-data-charter-action-plan#:~:text=The%20Inclusive%20Data%20Charter%20Action,of%20the%20poorest%20and%20most>

[22] <https://www.gov.uk/international-development-funding/assistive-technology-impact-fund-research-and-innovation>

## CHAPTER 3: Human Rights Priority Themes

### Freedom of Religion or Belief

Promotion of the right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) remained a key human rights priority for the UK in 2021. The Minister for Human Rights, Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon continued to lead FoRB work, in collaboration with the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief, Fiona Bruce MP. The then Prime Minister appointed David Burrowes as Deputy Special Envoy for FoRB, to support the Special Envoy in promoting FoRB.<sup>[23]</sup>

In **China**, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Falun Gong practitioners and others remained at risk of persecution. In particular, systematic restrictions on the practice of Islam in Xinjiang persisted. The UK imposed asset freezes and travel bans on Chinese government officials and one entity responsible for human rights violations in the region. UK efforts helped secure the support of over 40 countries for statements on Xinjiang and Tibet at the UN in June and October.<sup>[24]</sup>

In **Afghanistan**, religious minorities continued to face persecution and threats, including by the Taliban themselves. The minority ethnic Hazara group (predominantly Shia Muslims) faced attacks and forced evictions, displacing communities and leaving people homeless. Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) attacks increased, frequently targeting Shia Muslim communities.

In **India**, our High Commission engaged with religious representatives and faith communities. The UK supported a UK-India Interfaith Leadership Programme for emerging Indian

leaders of diverse faith backgrounds, creating an exchange of UK-India expertise on leading modern, inclusive faith communities, and promoting values of tolerance and multi-culturalism.

In North East **Nigeria**, terrorist groups including Islamic State West Africa and Boko Haram continued to indiscriminately attack those of all faiths who do not subscribe to their ideology. In addition, the UK remains concerned about intercommunal conflicts and criminal banditry in the North West and Middle Belt states. Religious identity can be a factor in this violence, but the UK continues to assess that competition over resources, historical grievances and criminality are key drivers. The UK continued its work to address the underlying causes of this violence in Nigeria.

In **Iran**, Christians, especially converts, suffered discrimination and violence while systemic persecution of Baha'is increased. At the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) session in March, the UK highlighted to Iran that such persistent human rights violations were unacceptable.

In **Pakistan**, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, Shia Muslims, Christians, Hindus, and Sikhs experienced violence and discrimination, including from denial of political participation, targeted killings, and damage to places of worship and desecration of graves. Forced conversion and forced marriage continued. Ahmadis additionally continue to be denied political participation unless they give up the right to call themselves Muslim.

The UK funded programmes to promote the rights of the most vulnerable members of Pakistani society and raised concerns with Pakistan. In December, the UK imposed sanctions on a terrorist commander for orchestrating the 2017 bombing of a Sufi shrine.

The lack of freedom of religion or belief in the **Democratic People's Republic of Korea** continued to see Christians and other faith groups worshipping in secret for fear of being caught and persecuted. The UK worked with partners to secure strong UN resolutions on DPRK, with emphasis on the right to FoRB.



[23] <https://www.gov.uk/government/people/david-burrowes>

[24] The UK has long called for unfettered access to Xinjiang for the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights. Unfortunately, during her visit in May 2022, such access was not granted by the Chinese authorities.

In March, the UK made a statement at the OSCE about the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses in **Russia**.<sup>[25]</sup> The UK continues to call on Russia to uphold its commitments on the right to FoRB for all.

The military coup in **Sudan** put many of the gains on human rights made since the 2019 revolution at risk. In the House of Commons on 25 October, the then FCDO Minister for Africa, Vicky Ford, called for the Sudanese people to be able to protest and pray without fear of violence.<sup>[26]</sup>

In **Sri Lanka**, the marginalisation of Muslim communities continued despite the ban on mandatory cremations for those deceased due to COVID-19 being lifted. The state's promotion of Buddhism led to increased land disputes in areas of cultural significance for other faiths. The UK called for the rights of people from all faiths to be respected, including through a UK-led resolution on Sri-Lanka at the HRC.

In **Saudi Arabia**, open practice of non-Muslim faiths remained prohibited. However, the Saudi authorities have employed more inclusive language towards other faiths. In June, the British Embassy in Riyadh hosted an Interfaith Dialogue. The aim of this event was to foster trust and respect between different

faiths and to understand concerns of non-Muslim groups.

Engagement with international partners remained central to the UK's work. In March, Lord Tariq Ahmad hosted a meeting at the UN Security Council (UNSC) on the persecution of religious minorities in conflict zones, and in June the Special Envoy spoke on emerging challenges to FoRB on a panel in the margins of the HRC. The UK used our G7 Presidency to secure language on FoRB in the G7 communique, laying the foundations for further collaboration within this group.

The UK was an active member of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance (Alliance) and in December, the Special Envoy was elected as Chair of the Alliance for 2022. In November, the then Foreign Secretary addressed the Alliance Ministers' Forum and agreed a joint statement.<sup>[27]</sup> The UK joined Alliance statements, including on repression of Jehovah's Witnesses, on standing in solidarity with victims of attacks by the **Myanmar** security forces, and on the need to respect the rights of members of religious minorities in **Afghanistan**.

Lord Tariq Ahmad and the Special Envoy participated in events with civil society and parliamentary stakeholders throughout the year.

This included the UK FoRB Forum, chaired by the Bishop of Truro and his successor, Mervyn Thomas, an event on the UN Day to Commemorate Victims of Violence based on FoRB and the All-Party Parliamentary Humanists Group Annual General Meeting.

In May, the Special Envoy made a virtual visit to the Holy See, where Foreign Minister Archbishop Gallagher expressed support for UK efforts on FoRB. In July, Lord Tariq Ahmad and the FoRB Special Envoy launched training on 'Religion for International Engagement'.

The John Bunyan Fund supported research by the Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development into intersecting vulnerabilities experienced by religious minorities living in poverty in the shadow of COVID-19.

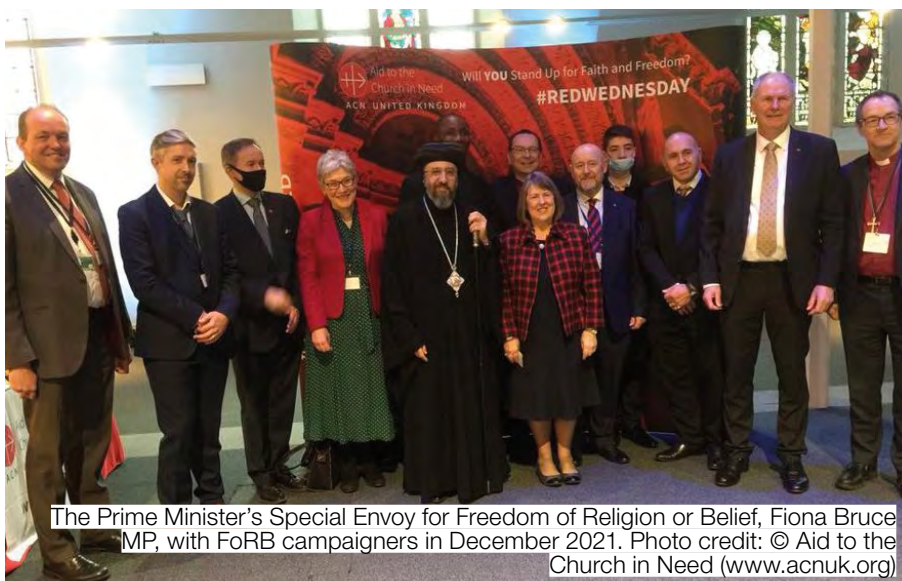
The UK marked a number of international days in 2021. In November, the FCDO UK estate was lit up in red to mark Red Wednesday, highlighting the persecution of Christians around the world.

Work continued towards the 2022 UK-hosted international Ministerial Conference on FoRB.

## Post-Holocaust Issues

The UK Government is committed to international co-operation to promote Holocaust education, remembrance and research. This ensures that the UK can effectively counter Holocaust denial which has at its heart the recasting of history. The UK also remains committed to addressing Holocaust distortion, a more mainstream but equally pernicious activity.

The Rt Hon Lord Pickles continued to serve as the UK's Special Envoy for post-Holocaust issues, ensuring the UK played a leading role in a number of international bodies related to



The Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief, Fiona Bruce MP, with FoRB campaigners in December 2021. Photo credit: © Aid to the Church in Need (www.acnuk.org)

[25] <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/deteriorating-human-rights-situation-in-russia-uk-statement>

[26] <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2021-10-25/debates/77AD3D2F-95F9-4900-97D2-C656A9A1DEBB/ArrestOfSudanesePrimeMinister>

[27] <https://www.state.gov/statement-from-the-international-religious-freedom-or-belief-alliance-ministers-forum/>

remembering the Holocaust and addressing antisemitism.

Lord Pickles also continued to head the UK delegation to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). In January, the FCDO and the Israeli Embassy hosted an online event to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day. The then Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab, Lord Pickles and the Israeli Ambassador to the UK delivered remarks for the event which centred around a first-hand account from a Holocaust survivor. It was confirmed in June that the UK will chair IHRA in 2024, as part of our continued international leadership in combatting antisemitism.

On 6 October, Lord Tariq Ahmad represented the UK at the 80th anniversary commemorating the Babyn Yar massacre, the largest massacre of Jews in the Holocaust to that date in 1941. The event was hosted by Ukrainian President Zelenskyy and attendees included the Presidents of Germany and Israel. Lord Tariq Ahmad met civil society and religious representatives, including the Chief Rabbi of Kyiv and Ukraine.

Lord Pickles led the UK delegation to the Malmö International Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and Combatting Antisemitism on 13 October, marking 20 years since the signing of the Stockholm Declaration. The then Foreign Secretary announced a number of UK pledges, including the construction and opening of the new Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre in London by 2025, improving teacher training to cover the Holocaust and address antisemitism better, and the Online20Safety Bill to tackle harmful20abuse online.

The UK continued to support the work of the Wiener Holocaust Library, the world's oldest institution devoted to the study of the Holocaust. The Wiener Library is the UK home to the digital copy of the International Tracing Service (ITS) which is a key resource to research the fate of victims of the Holocaust.

## Media Freedom

The UK remains committed to championing media freedom around the globe, both bilaterally and through international fora. In 2021 the UK continued our work on key initiatives, ranging from the Media Freedom Coalition to the Global Media Defence Fund and development programming. The UK worked with media organisations and civil society throughout – all with the aim of making the world a safer place for journalists and supporting resilient and financially sustainable models for independent journalism.

The UK used its G7 Presidency to highlight the importance of media freedom and was successful in securing strong commitments to champion this agenda, including through the Media Freedom Coalition, and continued to lead by example domestically. Partners agreed to use their diplomatic missions to coordinate locally, supporting journalists and independent media under threat.

The UK also participated in a number of media freedom events during 2021. The UK supported the World Press Freedom Day Conference by organising a side event on 'The role of governments in protecting Media Freedom: What more can the Media Freedom Coalition do?' The then Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab recorded a message, in which he discussed the impact of COVID-19 and the

increased financial challenges that threaten media freedom.

Lord Tariq Ahmad co-hosted, with the High Commissioner for **Namibia**, a meeting of Commonwealth Heads of Mission in London, highlighting the importance of media freedom in the Commonwealth. In **Turkey**, where civil society continued to face pressure, the UK supported a variety of media freedom initiatives and civil society groups, including by hosting them at the Embassy in Ankara for panel discussions and through observing the trials of journalists.

When it came to legal reform, in **Ecuador**, the Embassy worked closely with the incoming government before it assumed power in June 2021. On his first day in office, the new president repealed an old communication law and announced plans for a new law, encompassing media freedom. In **Montenegro**, the British Embassy funded a project which aims to improve the existing legislative and policy framework and prescribe tangible mechanisms which will defend media freedoms and the safety of journalists.

Journalists play a critical role to maintaining media freedom. The UK worked with **India's** vibrant media, including through support for the Thomson Reuters Foundation to train over 20 journalists to report about issues such as human trafficking and child labour.

In **Malta**, the long-awaited public inquiry into the assassination of journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia



concluded in July 2021. The report made a series of recommendations aimed at strengthening the rule of law and media freedom. The Government of Malta has committed to meeting the recommendations and the UK High Commissioner held regular meetings with a range of actors supporting change.

### Media Freedom Coalition

Membership of the Media Freedom Coalition grew to 50 in 2021 with the additions of **Chile, Croatia, Guyana, Ireland, New Zealand, Portugal, the Republic of Korea and Sierra Leone**. Coalition members commit to raise media freedom at home and abroad, share best practice, and lobby on cases.

As the UK handed over the role of co-chair of the Media Freedom Coalition to **The Netherlands**, it has taken steps to create a secretariat to offer ongoing administrative support to the Coalition, helping member states focus more on action on the ground.

The UK also worked with partners to establish a working group of the Media Freedom Coalition to improve the coordination and effectiveness of Coalition members' support to the media sector.

The Coalition issued statements to mark key dates such as World Press Freedom Day, the anniversary of the London global conference and the

International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists. The Coalition also issued statements highlighting situations of concern.

Civic and media spaces in **Afghanistan** diminished. While the Afghan media remained largely free and independent until August, there were targeted killings of journalists, civil society activists and HRDs, largely attributed to the Taliban. In response, the UK and Canada, as co-chairs of the Media Freedom Coalition, released a joint statement condemning the violence in late January. The UK also offered resettlement to over 70 journalists and other employees of UK media organisations during the evacuation.

In response to the deteriorating media freedom situation in **China**, including the sentencing of citizen journalist Zhang Zhan, the UK and other members of the Media Freedom Coalition issued a joint statement on 20 January 2021 that highlighted our deep concerns about the ongoing efforts by the Chinese authorities to curtail media freedom, and called on China to allow all journalists to practise their profession without fear of arrest, harassment or reprisal.

### High Level Panel of Legal Experts

The High Level Panel of Legal Experts is an independent advisory

panel of 15 distinguished lawyers, focused on improving legal protections for journalists and for a free and independent media. The UK promoted the work of the Panel amongst the Media Freedom Coalition, facilitating meetings in 2021 to showcase its most recent reports and work.

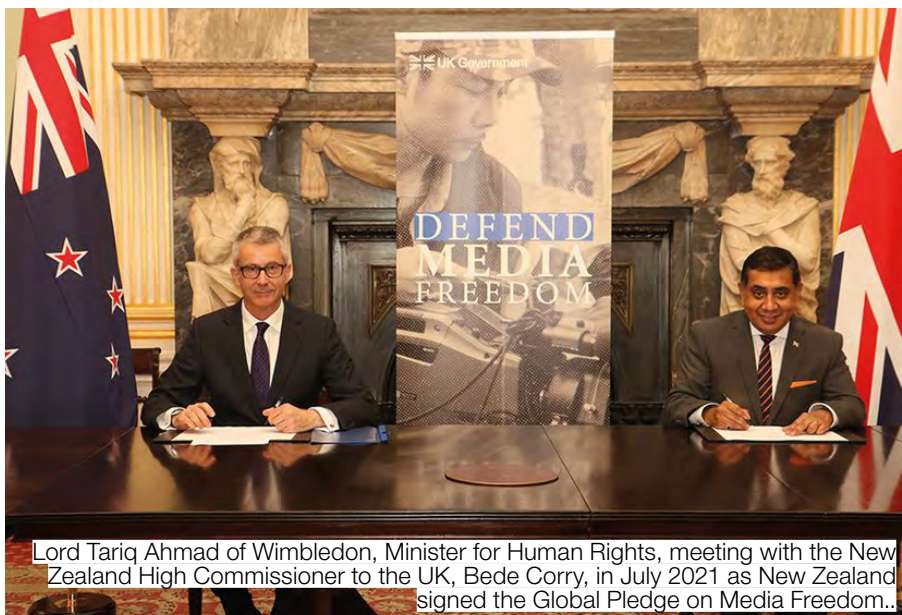
### Global Media Defence Fund

The UK continued to support the UNESCO administered Global Media Defence Fund, aimed at ensuring effective legal assistance and support to civil society and journalists. The UK donated £600,000 in 2021 as part of a five-year commitment to the Fund. In Spring 2021, UNESCO ran its second call for proposals, which has resulted in 42 projects being selected which will support a further 1,500 journalists worldwide, bringing the total number of journalists supported by the Fund to over 3,000 to date.

### Protecting Independent Media for Effective Development

The UK's Protecting Independent Media for Effective Development (PRIMED) programme has brought together several world-leading media development organisations in a consortium led by BBC Media Action. Since its launch in 2019, this four-year programme has been working in depth with 13 public interest media organisations in **Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Sierra Leone**. PRIMED support is helping these organisations to survive and thrive during difficult economic times.

PRIMED has also worked with editors, regulators and CSOs to develop a better environment for media in those three countries – for example by supporting a nationwide consultation on a new Code of Practice for Media in Sierra Leone, which launched in December. PRIMED also published a Coalitions for Change learning brief in November, which set out the challenges and success factors for building coalitions to support media freedom.



Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister for Human Rights, meeting with the New Zealand High Commissioner to the UK, Bede Corry, in July 2021 as New Zealand signed the Global Pledge on Media Freedom..

In addition to PRIMED, the FCDO continued to support two other major programmes supporting freedom of expression and media development. The Protecting Rights, Openness and Transparency – Enhancing Civic Transformation programme (PROTECT) supports media organisations to improve their sustainability in **Kenya** and has provided emergency support to journalists under threat in **Myanmar**. The Aswat Horra (Free Voices) programme helped to build the capacity of 11 civil society organisations to campaign more effectively for freedom of expression in **Lebanon** and **Libya**.

## Civil Society and Civic Freedoms

The UK's support for civic freedoms is strongly linked to our values. Civic freedoms help promote accountability, expose corruption and bring about positive change. Vibrant and diverse civic spaces, in which people can access and enjoy their rights to the freedoms of peaceful assembly, association, and expression, are crucial for good governance and a healthy democracy. By providing valuable expertise from an independent viewpoint, civil society can inform better policy and act as a pressure valve to transform the increasing dissent we have witnessed in 2021 into constructive public debate.

Sadly, many governments are choosing to characterise the enjoyment of civil rights as a threat and as a result civic space is becoming more contested, with civic freedoms increasingly restricted in many parts of the world.

The UK Government, as part of its commitment to civic freedoms, stood alongside civil society against these encroachments. The UK also supported the extraordinary bravery

of HRDs and people who work for civil society organisations (CSOs), often at serious personal risk, in some of the world's most dangerous places.

### Restrictions to Civic Space

2021 proved to be another challenging year for civic space, with the COVID-19 pandemic continuing to be used by some governments as cover for imposing unwarranted restrictions to civic space that will remain long after the pandemic has receded. According to the findings of the CIVICUS Monitor, the number of people living in countries with significant restrictions to civic space amounted to almost 89% of the global population in 2021.<sup>[28]</sup>

The tools used to restrict or control civic space included disproportionate responses to peaceful protest and dissent such as the excessive use of force, measures restricting freedom of expression (e.g. censorship, internet shutdowns, surveillance and attacks on journalists, HRDs and academics), the misuse of terrorism laws and counter-terrorist financing standards to target activists, administrative harassment through restrictive NGO laws (making registration and financing of NGOs difficult), and the smearing, harassment, attacks and killings of activists,<sup>[29]</sup> all of which has sadly become routine.<sup>[30]</sup>

The groups most commonly affected were those advocating for women's rights and women HRDs, environmental groups, labour rights groups, LGBT+ people and young people.

Thousands of criminal cases in **Belarus** have been launched against members of the opposition, civil society and HRDs. By the end of 2021, more than 300 CSOs had been, or were in the process of being, liquidated. At least 37,000

people were arbitrarily arrested and detained between May 2020 and May 2021. Evidence of torture and ill-treatment were found in a number of detention facilities. Prisoners were denied medical help, food and water, they were beaten and subject to excruciating treatment, and sexual and gender-based violence was used against all genders.

Governments continued to show little tolerance for questions over land rights and sovereignty disputes. In **Indonesia**, there was an increase in violence against civilians, disruption to internet services, and arrests of activists and journalists in the Papua region over the past year. The UK repeatedly reaffirmed its respect for Indonesia's territorial integrity, including the provinces of Papua and West Papua, and continued to call for equitable development in the region. The UK continued to monitor the situation and supported calls for access to the region by the international community.

International NGOs and donors increasingly faced jurisdictional barriers, with states imposing new regulatory requirements on organisations in receipt of foreign funding. Such rhetoric has been used to justify legal barriers to receiving foreign funding, with increasing numbers of countries proposing or enacting restrictions on the receipt of foreign funds.

In **India**, some NGOs faced difficulties due to the application of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) by the Indian authorities and some, like Oxfam India, had applications to renew their foreign funding licenses rejected in December 2021. The UK demonstrated its commitment to the civic space agenda by discussing these issues directly with the Indian government and the UK continues to support a wide range of local NGO

[28] An independent research tool built by the CIVICUS global civil society alliance on the state of civil society freedom across the world. See: <https://monitor.civicus.org/about/>

[29] Dobichina, I, Poonam P, Green S. and Savage J, 'As a 'force for good', what could and should Global Britain do to help defend civic space around the world? 2021 As a 'force for good', what could and should Global Britain do to help defend civic space around the world? – The Foreign Policy Centre (fpc.org.uk)

[30] Frontline Defenders Global Analysis 2021: <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/publications>



partners in India, including through programmes.

In **Tanzania**, since President Samia Suluhu Hassan took office in March 2021 she has signalled a positive change in approach to human rights and fundamental freedoms, following a serious decline under her late predecessor. The UK has encouraged the repeal of various pieces of legislation which have unduly affected the freedom of civil society and the media to operate. The UK expressed at all levels to the Government of Tanzania the importance of ensuring a timely and transparent process for the trial of opposition leader Freeman Mbowe on terrorism charges.

Civic space continued to be contested in the multilateral arena, with CSOs and HRDs facing intimidation and reprisals for engagement and cooperation with the UN, its representatives and mechanisms. Eighty countries signed the UK's Statement to the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly calling for members states to "*ensure all civil society organisations and human rights defenders can engage the UN without fear of intimidation or reprisal*".<sup>[31]</sup>

## Human Rights Defenders

As part of its commitment to freedom and democracy, the UK supports the courageous work of HRDs globally. HRDs play a crucial role, often at great risk to themselves, in defending the full range of human rights. HRDs often document and report human rights violations and abuses and speak up for vulnerable and marginalised groups, bringing public attention to cases, holding governments to account and acting as agents of change.



Operation Pitting: UK troops on route to evacuate Afghans at risk following the Taliban takeover in August 2021. UK MOD © Crown copyright 2021

In 2021, HRDs continued to play an important leadership role in protecting democracy and civic space wherever governments used COVID-19 to justify the restriction of human rights and the rule of law. According to the NGO Front Line Defenders, at least 358 HRDs were killed in 35 countries in 2021.<sup>[32]</sup> Other HRDs were threatened, arbitrarily detained, placed under surveillance or disappeared.

The UK continued its support for HRDs through bilateral engagement via our global diplomatic network and through multilateral organisations such as the UN. The UK diplomatic network has continued to monitor cases, observe trials, and raise issues with host governments. Our 2019 document 'UK support for Human Rights Defenders' sets out the importance of HRDs to the UK and what the UK Government can and will do to support them.<sup>[33]</sup>

In **Afghanistan**, following the Taliban take-over in August, the UK has regularly supported Afghan women

in particular to speak out in defence of their rights, including at the UN Security Council. The UK regularly raises human rights, including the right to freedom of expression, in our political engagement with the Taliban. Between April and December 2021, the UK brought around 7,900 Afghans to the UK under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) including through military evacuation flights. The UK also welcomed around 1,000 further people particularly at risk, including journalists, women's rights activists, members of the LGBT+ community and judges.<sup>[34]</sup>

In **Thailand**, the protection of HRDs is a priority in light of reports of harassment, intimidation, and retaliatory lawsuits and of the use of the *lèse majesté* law and other charges to limit freedom of expression. The UK actively supported HRDs through project funding, direct engagement, trial observation, and activities in partnership with like-minded

[31] <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/we-must-ensure-civil-society-and-human-rights-defenders-can-engage-with-the-un-without-fear-of-reprisal>

[32] Frontline Defenders Global Analysis 2021: <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/publications>

[33] [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/819299/UK-Support-for-Human-Rights-Defenders.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/819299/UK-Support-for-Human-Rights-Defenders.pdf)

[34] The Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) which opened on 6 January 2022 will also include at risk groups, including those who stood up for democracy and the rule of law.

embassies. The UK implemented a range of projects supporting efforts to tackle strategic litigation against public participation, capacity building for HRDs, and strengthening HRD and media capacity to engage with the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process.

## Freedom of Expression

Freedom of expression is essential to functioning democracies and enables a full range of other human rights. However, according to the Freedom in the World 2021 report, “freedom of personal expression, which has experienced the largest declines of any democracy indicator since 2012, was further restrained during the COVID-19 health crisis”.<sup>[35]</sup>

The right to freedom of expression exists online as well as offline. The UK is committed to a free, open, peaceful and secure internet. In the first five months of 2021, the NGO Access Now documented at least 50 internet shutdowns in 21 countries worldwide.<sup>[36]</sup> The UK continued to support Access Now and its #KeepItOn campaign, which brought together a coalition of 243 organisations from 105 countries to counter internet shutdowns.

The UK also worked to defend a free, open and secure internet through our membership of the Freedom Online Coalition (FOC), a partnership of 34 member countries working to support internet freedom and protect human rights online globally.

In **Syria**, decades of systematic political oppression by the Syrian regime have deprived the country of autonomous spaces for civil society to operate. The regime has curtailed freedom of expression through arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances. Other groups in Syria, including Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, have continued to unlawfully and arbitrarily deprive civilians of their liberty, including journalists and women activists, who

have been detained for exercising their fundamental freedoms.



The Foreign Secretary, then Minister for the Middle East and North Africa, met with civil society members Ibrahim Olabi and Mazen Gharibah in October 2021 to discuss human rights, accountability of crimes by the Syrian regime and the future of Syria.

In **Uganda**, arbitrary detention and torture have been used against government critics, members of the opposition and peaceful protestors who were exercising their right to freedom of expression. This has included those critical of the government on social media. The Ugandan government closed the internet for five days over the elections in January 2021. The UK has publicly raised our concerns and encourage the Government of Uganda to hold those responsible for human rights abuses to account.

In **Vietnam**, free expression is increasingly restricted, including online. Journalists, bloggers, activists and NGOs – including climate and environmental activists – peacefully expressing their views have been detained and given lengthy prison sentences. The UK has raised concerns directly with the Government of Vietnam, including during the former Foreign Secretary's visit in June 2021. The UK also publicly raised concerns around the

time of Vietnam's Universal Periodic Review mid-term report in December.

## Security and Justice

Respect for human rights is critical in the security and justice sector. 2021 saw some positive global developments on security and justice issues. For example, **Bahrain** took progressive steps, including by extending the use of alternative sentencing legislation and raising the age of criminal responsibility to 15 years (from seven). The UK continued to support the Government of Bahrain's efforts to ensure the new legislation is implemented effectively.

Unfortunately, backwards steps on justice and security were observed in other states in 2021. In **Mali**, Human Rights Watch documented a spate of alleged summary executions, enforced disappearances, and incommunicado detentions by government security forces.<sup>[37]</sup> In **Syria**, human rights violations and abuses continued unchecked across Assad regime-held territory including assassinations of opposition figures, arbitrary arrests and detention.

## Death Penalty

The UK Government opposes the use of the death penalty, in all circumstances, as a matter of principle.

2021 saw both progress and regression globally in the use of the death penalty. **Kazakhstan** abolished the death penalty. In July 2021 the President of **Sierra Leone** signed the Abolition of the Death Penalty Bill into law.<sup>[38]</sup> The **US** imposed a federal-level moratorium on the death penalty but resumed executions via lethal injection in Oklahoma. In **Pakistan**, the Supreme Court revoked the death penalty for prisoners with mental health conditions, but the Senate opposed legislation that would have removed the death penalty for many

[35] <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2021/democracy-under-siege>

[36] <https://www.accessnow.org/keepiton/#problem>

[37] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/10/22/mali-alleged-disappearances-executions-security-forces>

[38] Dismantle the gallows! Sierra Leone becomes the latest country to abolish the death penalty | The Death Penalty Project

drug offences. In **Saudi Arabia**, application of the death penalty increased from 2020 levels; however, it remains significantly lower than in 2018 to 2019 and some death sentences for prisoners who were minors when charged were overturned. In **Bahrain**, no death penalty sentences were issued however, 26 prisoners remain on death row.

Estimates continue to indicate that **China** executes more people than the rest of the world combined. **Iran** also continued to rank as one of the most prolific users of the death penalty globally. In **Iraq**, widespread and indiscriminate use of the death penalty against Daesh suspects continued. In **Egypt** there was a sharp increase in the number of executions. In the **Occupied Palestinian Territories** (OPTs), the de facto administration in Gaza, Hamas, issued 16 death sentences in 2021.<sup>[39]</sup> The death penalty remains legal across the OPTs, though is not used in courts in the West Bank. Three individuals were executed in **Japan**. **Belarus** remained the only country in Europe to retain and administer the death penalty and in 2021, there were unsubstantiated reports of two executions.

In 2021, through both targeted bilateral interventions and working with multilateral institutions, the UK continued to work to bring an end to the use of the death penalty. To achieve this, the UK continued to support projects through the Magna Carta Fund which aim to abolish the death penalty, including the Death Penalty Project which facilitated training and legal intervention in **Bangladesh, the Caribbean, Ghana, Guyana, Indonesia, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Tanzania,**

## **Trinidad and Tobago and Zimbabwe.**

### **Torture prevention**

The UK Government unreservedly condemns the use of torture in all circumstances. The UK is clear that it does not participate in, solicit, encourage or condone the use of torture for any purpose. Globally 2021 saw both some progress in preventing the use of torture but also continuing serious challenges.

In **Bangladesh** human rights groups estimated that law enforcement agencies were responsible for custodial deaths and incidents of torture, including 80 extra-judicial killings. In **Iraq**, the widespread use of torture to extract forced confessions in the criminal justice system continued. In **Uzbekistan**, many torture victims remained incarcerated for national security offences.

In 2021 the UK used the Magna Carta Fund to support projects which furthered its objectives on preventing torture and improving the treatment of detained persons, including the Association for the Prevention of Torture.

### **Arbitrary Detention**

Arbitrary detention is a hallmark of authoritarian regimes, and its use is a means of political intimidation. In 2021, the UK continued to work both publicly and privately to condemn the use of arbitrary detention, in order to support those who have been arbitrarily detained and to demand accountability.

In **Saudi Arabia**, arrests and detentions continued, as did reports of torture, neglect, lack of medical care and solitary confinement. In

**Myanmar**, on 31 December 2021, a total of 8,338 people were arbitrarily detained;<sup>[40]</sup> including Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Myint. The UK secured a UNSC Press Statement on 8 December calling for the release of all those in arbitrary detention.<sup>[41]</sup>

In February, the UK joined Canada and other partners in signing the Declaration Against Arbitrary Detention in State-to-State Relations.<sup>[42]</sup> The purpose of the Declaration is to enhance international cooperation and end the practice of arbitrary arrest, detention or sentencing, to exercise leverage over foreign governments. It is a clear statement by a broad group of countries that this practice is unacceptable.

The UK worked with Canada and others to develop a Partnership Action Plan to further tackle the issue,<sup>[43]</sup> and made tackling arbitrary detention a priority for our G7 presidency.<sup>[44]</sup> All G7 members signed the Declaration on 15 February 2021. As a signatory of the Declaration, the UK Government reaffirms its strong condemnation of the use of arbitrary arrest, detention, or sentencing of all people. The UK makes clear its abhorrence when it is used as part of a deliberate attempt to exert pressure on another government.

### **Overseas Security and Justice Assistance**

Overseas Security and Justice Assistance (OSJA) guidance continues to be implemented across the UK Government, with advice from FCDO. The OSJA Guidance is the government's framework used to make assessments of human rights risks related to the UK's security and justice work overseas, and to identify suitable mitigation measures for

[39] While the UK maintained a no-contact policy with Hamas, the UK continued to make clear its objections to its use of the death penalty including in the UK parliament. In November 2021, the UK made Hamas in its entirety a proscribed terrorist organisation.

[40] AAPP | Assistance Association for Political Prisoners » Blog Archive » Daily Briefing in Relation to the Military Coup (aappb.org)

[41] Security Council Press Statement on Myanmar | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases

[42] [https://www.international.gc.ca/news-nouvelles/assets/pdfs/arbitrary\\_detention-detention\\_arbitraire-declaration-en.pdf](https://www.international.gc.ca/news-nouvelles/assets/pdfs/arbitrary_detention-detention_arbitraire-declaration-en.pdf)

[43] [https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues\\_development-enjeux\\_developpement/human\\_rights-droits\\_homme/arbitrary\\_detention-detention\\_arbitraire-action\\_plan.aspx?lang=eng](https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/human_rights-droits_homme/arbitrary_detention-detention_arbitraire-action_plan.aspx?lang=eng)

[44] [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1040131/G7\\_Foreign\\_and\\_Development\\_Ministers\\_\\_Meeting\\_\\_December\\_2021\\_-\\_Chair\\_s\\_Statement.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1040131/G7_Foreign_and_Development_Ministers__Meeting__December_2021_-_Chair_s_Statement.pdf)

those risks. This guidance ensures that UK overseas security and justice assistance work meets our human rights obligations and our values.

The table below gives an estimate of the number of new OSJA assessments completed across government during the financial year of 2021 to 2022, broken down by region.

### Estimated number of OSJA assessments completed across government for financial year 2021 to 2022

Region	Assessments
Europe	175
Central Asia	14
Americas	90
Middle East & North Africa	97
Sub Saharan Africa	51
South Asia	50
Asia Pacific	46

### Export Controls

Export licence applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis against strict export licensing criteria. Risks around human rights violations and abuses are a key part of the UK's assessment. The government will not grant a licence for items where it determines there is a clear risk that such items might be used to commit or facilitate internal repression, or where the UK determines there is a clear risk that the items might be used to commit or facilitate a serious violation of international humanitarian law.

The UK does not license equipment and technology where it determines there is a clear risk that the items would, overall, undermine peace and security, including internal peace and security. On 8 December, following a review of export controls, the UK Government announced the revised Strategic Export Licensing Criteria and strengthened Military End-Use Control.<sup>[45]</sup>

### Private Sector – Business and Human Rights

The private sector carries a responsibility to respect human rights, whether this is by businesses supporting the victims of forced labour and modern slavery, global security companies ensuring that their operations reduce the risk of human rights abuses or by ensuring that minerals are resourced responsibly.

The UK's 2021 G7 Presidency demonstrated continued leadership to ending modern slavery. At the G7 meeting in June, leaders reaffirmed their commitment to uphold human rights and committed to prevent, identify, and eliminate forced labour in global supply chains. In October, G7 Trade Ministers built on these commitments to eradicate forced labour, protect victims and improve global supply chain transparency, including by implementing the principles set out in the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. At the Annual Forum on Business and Human Rights in November, the Acting UK Migration

and Modern Slavery Envoy set out UK action to help businesses tackle modern slavery.

Bilaterally, in **India**, through the FCDO's Work in Freedom programme, the Garment and Fashion Workers' Union enrolled approximately 578 workers from 17 factories in Chennai, enabling workers to challenge labour issues including abusive work hours and forced overtime.

### Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights

The Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights (VPs) provide tangible guidance for companies operating in high-risk and conflict-affected areas on how to manage their global security operations in a manner that reduces the risk of human rights abuses and conflict. The VPs are therefore a key tool for implementing the UN Guiding Principles and further detail on the UK's work on this can be found in the UK's 2021 Voluntary Principles Annual Report.<sup>[46]</sup>

The UK continued to support the Security and Human Rights Implementation Mechanism, a multi-donor fund committed to improving business, security and human rights through the implementation of international initiatives in fragile contexts. In 2021, UK funding supported projects focussing on the extractives and private security sectors in the **DRC, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria** and **Colombia**.

### Private Security Companies

As a founder signatory to the Montreux Document, which reaffirms the international legal obligations of states and the activities of private military and security companies during armed conflict, the UK advocates for implementation of the Montreux Document via the

[45] <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2021-12-08/hcws449> On 19 May 2022, through secondary legislation, DIT amended the Control to address threats to national security, international peace and security and human rights arising from the use of non-listed items by the military, police or security forces, or entities acting on their behalf, in an embargoed destination

[46] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/voluntary-principles-on-security-and-human-rights-for-businesses-operating-in-complex-or-fragile-environments-2021-uk-annual-report>

International Code of Conduct. The Code sets out governance, industry principles and standards based on human rights and international humanitarian law. Compliance is monitored by the International Code of Conduct Association for Security Providers. The UK supports the Association through a seat on the Governing Board and through project funding, which in 2021 helped to build the capacity of private security companies and their clients on responsible security.

## Responsible sourcing of minerals

Tin, tungsten, tantalum and gold (3TG, or so called ‘conflict minerals’) are key components of modern technology and, under the right conditions, the mining and trading of these metals and minerals can build prosperity and security for local communities. However, the risk remains that their supply chains are linked to a range of deplorable practices from human rights abuses to the illicit financing of conflict, as well as severe damage to the environment.

The Conflict Minerals (Compliance) (Northern Ireland) (EU Exit) Regulations (2020) came into force in Northern Ireland on 1 January. Based on the EU Conflict Minerals Regulation and the OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains of Minerals from Conflict-Affected and High-Risk Areas, and as required under the Northern Ireland Protocol of the EU Withdrawal Agreement, the Regulations require the largest importers into Northern Ireland of 3TG to conduct and demonstrate due diligence to ensure that their imports have been mined and processed responsibly.

A UK delegation participated in the inaugural OECD intergovernmental meeting of International Gold Trading

Centres on responsible sourcing, which aims to build stronger international cooperation to tackle illicit financing in gold supply chains.

UK engagement in the European Partnership for Responsible Minerals (EPRM) focused on providing resources and support to SMEs through the UK-funded online portal – the EPRM Due Diligence Hub. The UK also funded a number of training webinars to increase capacity in the sector to implement due diligence in their mineral supply chains.

## The Kimberley Process

The UK works within the Kimberley Process (KP) to stem the flow of conflict diamonds and prevent them from entering the legitimate trade, as well as tackling other abuses in the rough diamond industry.

On 1 January, the UK began its independent participation in the KP (having previously been represented by the EU). Throughout the year, the UK worked with participants, industry and civil society to strengthen and enhance the KP through participation in intersessional and plenary meetings, and in KP working groups. UK participation in the KP and the activities of the Government Diamond Office enable the UK to take a leading role in preventing the rough diamond industry from fuelling conflict.

## Modern Slavery

Around the world, approximately 40 million people have been forced into modern slavery.<sup>[47]</sup> The UK remained committed in 2021 to the eradication by 2030 of all forms of modern slavery, forced labour and human trafficking, as set out in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8.7 and pledged its support for the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour in 2021. The FCDO published its first annual modern

slavery statement on 25 November,<sup>[48]</sup> which sets out how the FCDO is committed to tackling modern slavery in its own supply chains.

The G7 Summit demonstrated how the UK is revitalising cooperation between democratic, open societies to tackle the most pressing global challenges, including modern slavery. The government engaged with international partners, in particular through the UK Migration and Modern Slavery Envoy who used this role by:<sup>[49]</sup>

- » holding talks with the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, including on forced labour in Xinjiang
- » strengthening UK partnerships with key stakeholders and encouraged coordination between key actors such as the Alliance 8.7 Global Partnership and the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons
- » launching the high profile, UK-funded report ‘Developing Freedom’, which analysed how ending modern slavery can contribute to sustainable development agenda.

The second year of the COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact some of the poorest and most vulnerable across the world, including victims of modern slavery.<sup>[50]</sup> A major concern for the UK is the risk that the pandemic reverses years of progress towards ending modern slavery.

The pandemic affected millions of jobs in both the garment and domestic sectors in **Bangladesh**. An increase in unpaid wages and other worker grievances was also observed by our implementing partners. This increased the vulnerability of women to forced labour and exploitation. UK support helped the Work in Freedom programme to adapt its interventions in response, by focusing on local employment. Interventions included increasing the awareness of local

[47] <https://www.walkfree.org/projects/global-estimates-of-modern-slavery/>

[48] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fcdo-modern-slavery-statement-2020-to-2021>

[49] Jennifer Townson left the role in August 2021. After a period of temporary cover, Andrew Patrick took over in January 2022.

[50] <https://modernslaverypec.org/assets/downloads/Modern-Slavery-PEC-Policy-Brief-Impact-of-Covid-19-on-MS.pdf>

garment and domestic workers of their labour rights and establishing linkages for work-age women and girls to local employment/vocational opportunities.

In **Malaysia**, there was some progress, including remediation payments to some workers in the Personal Protective Equipment manufacturing sector and the launch of a National Action Plan to tackle forced labour.<sup>[51]</sup> However, modern slavery, particularly the treatment of migrant workers, remained a concern in manufacturing sectors. The UK continued to work with the Malaysian government, manufacturers and civil society to improve the protection of migrant workers and tackle labour abuses.

In **Indonesia**, the UK supported the Indonesian government's efforts to tackle modern slavery. The UK has supported research on labour laws and regulations as well as practices in the fisheries industry to contribute towards building a legal and institutional system that will protect Indonesian migrant workers from modern slavery practices.

In **India**, the UK supported partners to strengthen the capacity of law enforcement agencies to prevent human trafficking in Madhya Pradesh, Telangana and Gujarat, and to prevent bonded labour in Rajasthan and Telangana. Child protection systems were improved in select districts of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Assam and West Bengal, working with district and Panchayat authorities. Over 15 million families of vulnerable children from Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal were linked to social protection schemes.

The Modern Slavery Fund (MSF) and the Modern Slavery Innovation Fund (MSIF), managed by the Home Office, continued to implement programmes internationally. In **Albania**, the MSF supported the development of the

National Action Plan on trafficking, approved in November, while continuing to provide essential reintegration support to victims of trafficking. In **Vietnam**, law enforcement training, supported by the MSF and incorporated into the People's Police Academy, means that successive classes of police recruits will be better able to identify and respond to trafficking cases. Projects across **Sudan, Ethiopia, South Africa, India, Malaysia, Mauritius, Indonesia and USA** supported legislative change, capacity building, victim welfare, workers' rights and global research initiatives.

In March, the UK Government launched an online modern slavery statement registry and is now encouraging all organisations in scope of section 54 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 to submit their statement to the registry. By the end of 2021, 6,860 statements were submitted, covering 22,410 organisations. In the future, the UK will mandate organisations to submit their statement to the registry.

## Migration and Human Rights

The UN estimated there were 281 million international migrants globally in 2021.<sup>[52]</sup> The International Organization for Migration (IOM) observed that the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing socio-economic vulnerabilities for many migrants, including preventing them from being able to return home.

Irregular migration continued to expose migrants to risks of exploitation and human rights abuses by organised crime groups. The UN estimated that 4,470 migrants lost their lives along migration routes worldwide, with at least 32 migrant deaths in the English Channel, including the tragic events in November when 27 people died

attempting to cross from **France** to the UK. These crossings are dangerous and are often facilitated by criminals. The UK continued to work with international partners on a 'whole of route' approach to tackling the challenges of irregular migration, including investing £54 million in priority work with France in 2021 to 2022.

Through the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF), the UK provided migration management capacity to **Nigeria** and **Niger** to help them better respond to people trafficking, cross-border crime and modern slavery. The CSSF helped develop **Turkey's** ability to address its migration challenges, strengthening the provision of services to vulnerable refugees, including women, girls and young refugees, as well as enhancing human rights compliance in the management of irregular migrants.

The UK continued to meet commitments made under the Withdrawal Agreement to the EU Trust Fund for Africa and the Facility for Refugees in **Turkey**,<sup>[53]</sup> where UK funding from 2016 to 2023 supports 3.6 million Syrian refugees in Turkey. In particular, UK funding supports refugees living in vulnerable situations, whilst also supporting their host communities in providing access to quality education, health, protection and livelihoods.

The UK also provided the IOM with approximately £75 million, making us its third largest bilateral donor. IOM delivered programmes in over 100 countries, including providing humanitarian assistance to forced migrants, refugees and other vulnerable groups.

The UK continued to make clear our expectation that all states should discharge their international obligations towards migrants with full respect for human rights. The UK condemned the **Belarusian** regime's

[51] <https://www.mohr.gov.my/ebook/National%20Action%20Plan%20On%20Forced%20Labour/NAPFL%202021-2025.pdf>

[52] <https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/wmr-2022-interactive/>

[53] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/agreement-on-the-withdrawal-of-the-united-kingdom-of-great-britain-and-northern-ireland-from-the-european-union-and-the-european-atomic-energy-community>, [https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/index\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/index_en), [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/840655/Agreement\\_on\\_the\\_withdrawal\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_Kingdom\\_of\\_Great\\_Britain\\_and\\_Northern\\_Ireland\\_from\\_the\\_European\\_Union\\_and\\_the\\_European\\_Atomic\\_Energy\\_Community.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/840655/Agreement_on_the_withdrawal_of_the_United_Kingdom_of_Great_Britain_and_Northern_Ireland_from_the_European_Union_and_the_European_Atomic_Energy_Community.pdf)

actions in engineering a migrant crisis to try to undermine Poland and others in the region for political purposes, highlighting their disregard for international norms. The UK supported humanitarian partners working to alleviate the suffering of migrants at the Belarus border, including through political advocacy and contributions to the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund.

In line with the UN Global Compact for Migration, the FCDO continued to support efforts to ensure more global migration was safe, orderly and regular, including providing £3.7 million from 2019 to 2021 to the Multi-Partner Trust Fund, which supported UN Member States' implementation of the Compact's commitments in their countries. The FCDO also launched the Better Regional Migration Management programme, aiming to maximise the socio-economic benefits of safe and regular migration in East Africa, contributing to poverty reduction and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that global forced displacement surpassed 84 million in mid-2021,<sup>[54]</sup> and the latest data (from 2020) suggests conflict and violence triggered 48 million displacements – the highest ever figure recorded.<sup>[55]</sup>

The UK continued to be a strong supporter of UNHCR and provided £56m in funding across bilateral and multilateral channels in 2021 and continues to advocate for the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees. FCDO's aid programmes seek to strengthen stability and security, which in turn helps to tackle some of the drivers of displacement. In 2021, the FCDO also continued to work to address the drivers of conflict, instability and lack of economic opportunities in key origin countries of migration. By improving education, creating jobs

and livelihoods and facilitating labour mobility the UK is giving people more opportunities to build a decent life at home or in their region.

Recognising that climate change will increasingly play a significant factor in driving global migration, the UK also committed to spending £11.6 billion in international climate finance over the next five years to help vulnerable countries build resilience to climate change.<sup>[56]</sup>

## Economic and Social Rights

The UK is committed to ending the preventable deaths of mothers, newborn babies and children by 2030. Preventable deaths of women and children are fundamentally linked to the ability of all women and girls to exercise control over their own bodies, and access quality health services.

The UK approach paper to ending preventable deaths sets out support for human rights and gender equality through health policy and programming.<sup>[57]</sup> UK leadership secured a landmark commitment to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights for all within the UK G7 Presidency and the UK stood firm against intensified efforts to undermine these rights in negotiations at the UN and elsewhere. The UK actively supported global advocacy and accountability through networks such as the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, with over a thousand members, and the family planning partnership FP2030, closely linked to countries committed to family planning actions.

UK Official Development Assistance (ODA) supported development partners and countries in the delivery of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services to vulnerable communities and to strengthen the systems that sustain them. By active

engagement and support to global mechanisms including the Sanitation and Water for All partnership and the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme, the UK's work fostered collaboration, sector leadership and accountability, essential to increase financing and to accelerate progress.

UK funding for innovative public-private partnerships such as the FCDO/Unilever Hygiene Behaviour Change Coalition, which responded to the COVID-19 crisis, helped to reach 1.2 billion people through mass media and digital behaviour change campaigns across 37 countries. Partners provided 280,000 handwashing stations and trained over 480,000 key workers in some of the world's most vulnerable and marginalised populations.

UK commitment to nutrition continued, for example at the Nutrition for Growth Summit in December, where the UK committed to integrating nutrition across sectors, including health and in humanitarian contexts, and to invest in foods systems to improve access and affordability of nutritious food for all.

Recognising that land rights support the realisation of a number of human rights, the UK Government supported good land governance and tenure security as a foundation for prosperity, climate mitigation and protecting biodiversity. Achievements included a new global donor pledge, organised by the UK and launched in the margin of COP26, to advance Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' forest tenure rights and promoted greater recognition for their role in land governance.

Social protection is critical in protecting individuals and families against poverty and risks to their livelihoods and wellbeing. In 2021, the UK supported social protection programming in more than 25 countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East and North Africa, and provided technical assistance to

[54] UNHCR – Refugee Statistics

[55] IDMC | GRID 2021 | 2021 Global Report on Internal Displacement (internal-displacement.org)

[56] <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-aid-to-double-efforts-to-tackle-climate-change>

[57] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ending-preventable-deaths-of-mothers-babies-and-children-by-2030>

help countries adapt and strengthen their social protection systems in response to and recovery from COVID-19. This support integrated a focus on gender equality and social inclusion to support women and girls and other marginalised groups such as people with disabilities, who have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 crisis.



The then Deputy Head of Mission to Brazil, now Chargé d’Affaires, Melanie Hopkins meeting with indigenous leaders at the Embassy in Brasilia in August 2021.



Former UK Ambassador to Brazil, Peter Wilson, and indigenous leaders of Pará state in the Brazilian Amazon discussing sustainable development and protecting the human rights of indigenous groups in September 2021.



## CHAPTER 4: Human Rights and the Multilateral System

### Human Rights at the United Nations

The UN is the leading international forum for the development of collective standards on human rights, scrutiny of human rights violations and abuses, and human rights dialogues between states. The main intergovernmental forum on human rights is the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council (HRC). Other important UN forums include the UN General Assembly (UNGA) Third Committee, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

The UK welcomed the scrutiny of specific country situations that the HRC and the Third Committee provided in 2021. The UK aimed to ensure that UK-led resolutions demonstrated best practice, with honest appraisals of human rights situations, and effective use of technical assistance from the wider UN system to support states in improving their performance.

In 2021, the UK called for Special Sessions of the HRC on the human rights situations in **Myanmar** and **Sudan**, and supported the session led by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation on **Afghanistan**, and the EU-led session on **Ethiopia**.

In 2021, the UK maintained its financial support for UN human rights work on a range of thematic and geographic priorities and was, once again, one of the top ten voluntary donors to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), providing funding of around \$8 million.

### Priority Country Issues at the UN

The UK continued to take action on human rights in **Syria**, leading resolutions at every HRC session. The UK also co-sponsored the UNGA Third Committee resolution. The UK repeatedly condemned all human rights violations and abuses in Syria at UNSC meetings and strongly supported efforts at the UN to ensure continued humanitarian access to the most vulnerable.

The UK supported resolutions on the **Democratic People's Republic of Korea** at the HRC and at UNGA Third Committee that addressed the dire human rights situation and called on the DPRK government to take concrete action to end systemic and widespread human rights violations.

Following the coup in **Sudan**, the UK led an HRC Special Session on the human rights situation there. The session unanimously adopted a resolution calling for the protection of human rights, including freedom of assembly and expression, and appointed an expert to report on the situation.

In **South Sudan**, given continued widespread abuses and violations, exacerbated by conflict and the humanitarian crisis, the UK led efforts at the March HRC to ensure the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan was able to continue its vital work reporting on human rights concerns.

## Ethiopia



The then FCDO Minister for Africa, Vicky Ford, discussing the importance of tackling the situation in Ethiopia, Mali, Somalia and South Sudan with Martha Pobee, the Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations for Africa at the United Nations Secretariat, in October 2021.

In November 2020 conflict broke out in the north of Ethiopia. The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) conducted a joint investigation (up to June 2021) that found that the conflict resulted in serious violations of international human rights law, humanitarian, and refugee law.<sup>[58]</sup> These include systematic sexual and gender-based violence, massacres, forced displacement along ethnic lines, mass detentions, torture, and attacks on civilians.

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and international human rights organisations continued to report on ongoing violations of human rights in the second half of 2021, both in relation to the northern Ethiopia conflict and a deteriorating human rights situation across

the country. Humanitarian access and access to basic services in the Tigray region was severely limited by insecurity and restrictions imposed by the federal and regional governments.

The UK co-sponsored the resolutions passed during the 47th Session of the HRC in July and the Special Session in December – the latter resolution mandated the creation of the International Commission on Human Rights Experts in Ethiopia, an independent and transparent mechanism to investigate and report on human rights violations and abuses during the conflict. The UK continues to urge all parties to the conflict to cooperate with this mechanism. The UK has raised concerns about human rights abuses and violations at multiple meetings of the UNSC.<sup>[59]</sup> Under the UK's G7 Presidency in 2021, the G7 issued joint statements and communiqués condemning the use of conflict-related sexual violence in Ethiopia. The UK regularly raised human rights issues directly with the Ethiopian government.<sup>[60]</sup>

The UK is also providing practical support. During 2021 the UK developed a new Human Rights and Peacebuilding programme, which is providing support to build the capacity of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission including through enhanced investigative capacity, improved the availability and accessibility of services for survivors of gender-based violence, supported peacebuilding initiatives, and established a national conflict research facility. In 2021 the UK deployed one of the UK's Team of Experts to Ethiopia to assess how to strengthen justice for sexual violence crimes; supported the deployment of four experts to the UN system to enhance the response to Gender-Based Violence and sexual exploitation and abuse; and provided £4 million to help support survivors of sexual violence.

Following the February coup in **Myanmar**, the UK secured multiple UNSC statements condemning the military and violence. At the HRC, in addition to calling for a Special Session, the UK supported resolutions that renewed the mandate of the Special Rapporteur and called for the release of prisoners. At the UN General Assembly, the UK worked with partners to deliver a resolution urging states to prevent the flow of arms.

The UK announced £500,000 of additional funding for the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar.

In October, the UK supported an HRC resolution that mandated a Special Rapporteur to monitor human rights in **Afghanistan**, building on the Special Session resolution that mandated reporting by the High Commissioner. The UK co-chairs the UN-based Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan and

on 21 October, Minister for Human Rights, Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon, spoke in support of women's rights in Afghanistan at the UNSC's annual Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security.

At Third Committee, as a member of the core group, the UK again supported a resolution tabled by **Ukraine** on human rights in illegally annexed Crimea. The resolution condemned Russia's illegal annexation and sought to ensure

[58] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/09/16/ethiopia-eritrean-refugees-targeted-tigray>, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G21/106/21/PDF/G2110621.pdf?OpenElement> <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/ET/OHCHR-EHRC-Tigray-Report.pdf>,

[59] This included inviting an Ethiopian civil society briefer to the Open Debate on Conflict Related Sexual Violence held under the UK's Presidency of the UNSC in April 2022.

[60] This included during the Minister for Africa's visit to Ethiopia in January 2022.

accountability for Russia's actions there. At the HRC, the UK supported a resolution extending the monitoring and reporting mandate of the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission (HRMMU) and the regular interactive dialogues to maintain international attention on the human rights situation in the country, in particular in Crimea and non-government controlled areas of eastern Ukraine.

The UK continued to raise concerns about human rights in **China** at the HRC and the UNGA Third Committee. In February, the then Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab, delivered a Ministerial Statement on Xinjiang at the HRC. UK diplomatic efforts helped secure the support of over 40 countries for statements on Xinjiang, Hong Kong and Tibet in June and October, led by Canada and France respectively.

The March session of the HRC adopted four resolutions under Item 7, and one resolution under Item 2 on the situation in **Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories**. At a Special Session of the HRC in May, the UK opposed the creation of an open-ended mandate for a Commission of Inquiry. The UK continues to support justified scrutiny of the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories under appropriate agenda items but remains concerned by the HRC's disproportionate focus on Israel.

The UK regrets that the mandate of the Group of Eminent Experts on **Yemen** was not renewed. The UK remains concerned about serious and widespread human rights violations and abuses by parties to the conflict.

In March, the HRC adopted resolution 46/1 on **Sri Lanka**, led by the UK and Core Group partners, on promoting accountability, reconciliation and human rights. The Sri Lankan government opposed the resolution and continued to reverse progress on post-conflict accountability.

Across the HRC and Third Committee, the UK supported further resolutions on the human rights situations in **Iran, Belarus, Georgia**

(Abkhazia and South Ossetia), **Mali, Nicaragua, Eritrea, Burundi, Cambodia, Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Libya,** and **Somalia**.

### Priority Thematic Issues at the UN

The UK continues to support international mechanisms designed to tackle the global scourge of racism, including through important instruments such as the International Convention for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). During the 48th session of the HRC, the UK reaffirmed its commitment to participate actively in mechanisms to share best practice on upholding human rights obligations to tackle racial discrimination.

The UK remains concerned by the rise in consistent attacks in UN forums on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). At the HRC and UNGA Third Committee, with like-minded states, the UK pushed back against Russia and other delegations' tactics designed to disrupt negotiation proceedings, which included opposing previously agreed language on reproductive rights, tabling last-minute amendments, and triggering votes on gender-related resolutions. Attacks on the rights of women and girls were concerning at a time of increasing sexual and gender-based violence around the world and with women and girls facing reduced access to essential health services.

### Universal Periodic Review

The UK strongly supports the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and has participated in all reviews since the process began.

During **Myanmar's** review, the UK expressed concern about the conflict in the Chin, Kachin, Rakhine, and Shan states and denial of humanitarian access to many regions. The UK urged Myanmar to implement the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine and amend the 1982 Citizenship Law

and ensure the protection of the human and civil rights of the Rohingya and other disenfranchised groups.

During **Lebanon's** review, the UK welcomed security forces' engagement with civil society. The UK urged their full compliance with human rights obligations, the repeal of criminal defamation laws, and greater protections for migrant workers. The UK stressed that Lebanon's economic crisis should not affect the most vulnerable disproportionately.

During **Somalia's** review, the UK called on Somalia's leaders to hold inclusive elections without further delay. The UK welcomed Somalia's acceptance of our recommendations to urgently adopt the 2018 Sexual Offences Bill, establish an independent National Human Rights Commission and pass legislation allowing humanitarian organisations to operate within a clear framework.

### Responsibility to Protect and Mass Atrocity Prevention

The UK supports the UN principle of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). R2P focuses on the responsibility of states to protect populations from mass atrocities. In 2021, the UK supported a resolution that will include R2P on the agenda of the UN General Assembly. At the HRC the UK supported the role of Special Procedures and the HRC in helping to prevent human rights violations and abuses which can lead to mass atrocities. At the UNSC, the UK supported resolutions on **South Sudan**, and on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. From 2020 to 2021, the UK funded the work of the joint UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, and the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect.

### Peacekeeping

The UK is a leading contributor to the delivery and reform of UN peacekeeping. The UK ensured missions were mandated and

resourced to promote respect for human rights and pursue accountability for human rights violations and abuses; and highlighted the importance of upholding human rights and protection of civilians after missions draw down.

## Commonwealth

The Commonwealth continues to be an important forum for the protection, promotion, and strengthening of democracy, human rights, good governance and the rule of law.

Following the further postponement of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in 2021, the UK continued as Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth. Throughout its extended tenure as Chair-in-Office, the UK demonstrated leadership to deliver on CHOGM 2018 commitments, particularly in the area of democracy, human rights, good governance and the rule of law. This was at the heart of our activity under the fairness pillar of our work and one of the four priority areas the UK set out at the last CHOGM.<sup>[61]</sup>

## Human Rights Institutions

The UK continued to fund two resident human rights advisers at the Commonwealth Small States Office (CSSO) in Geneva. They provided technical assistance to Commonwealth small states in their engagement with the HRC. This support helped Commonwealth member states including **Sierra Leone, Vanuatu, Nauru, Kiribati** and **Malawi** with their engagement in the UPR reporting system. **Vanuatu, Mauritius, Sierra Leone** and **Malawi** also received specific technical assistance to draft and deliver statements at several HRC sessions.

While the UK remained Commonwealth Chair-in-Office, the UK continued to fund the Equality and Human Rights Commission

(EHRC) in their role as Chair of the Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs). The Forum brought together NHRIs across the Commonwealth to share best practice and expertise in order to strengthen the capacity of NHRIs so that they can more effectively promote, protect and improve human rights for all Commonwealth citizens.

During 2021, they worked on a range of human rights issues, including LGBT+ rights, the impact of COVID-19 from a rights perspective and produced a good practice report on protecting the rights of people with disabilities during the pandemic.<sup>[62]</sup>

## Social and Political Inclusion

The UK continued to support The Commonwealth Equality Network (TCEN), which included supporting the long-term sustainability of TCEN so that it is better able to meet the needs of its diverse and growing international network of LGBT+ organisations.

Improvements to its online platform facilitated real-time interaction and collaboration among its members, to share experience and best practice. The project supported work with over 30 LGBT+ organisations in over 20 Commonwealth countries, which helped strengthen their capacity to advocate for positive legal reform and inclusive, non-discriminatory and rights-based responses to COVID-19.

In 2021, our ongoing partnership with the UK branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) included support for the participation and representation of women in Parliaments across the Commonwealth. During this period, CPA-UK activity included a review into the effectiveness of legislation protecting women from violence across the Commonwealth,<sup>[63]</sup> and an event in March 2021 celebrated both International Women's Day (IWD) and Commonwealth Day with a particular focus on combatting online harms.

The UK continued to provide funding to the Women Mediators across the Commonwealth Network (WMC). The WMC now includes almost 40 members from across 20 Commonwealth countries.

## The Role of the Commonwealth

Lord Tariq Ahmad, as Minister for the Commonwealth, represented the UK at meetings of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) in March and December 2021. CMAG received updates from the Commonwealth Secretary-General on developments in member states and recognised the important work of the Commonwealth's organisations in advancing its values.

Throughout most of 2021, the Commonwealth Secretariat has facilitated a member state Expert Working Group (EWG), which sought to agree a first ever set of Commonwealth Principles on Freedom of Expression and the Role of the Media in Good Governance (also known as the Media Freedom Principles). The UK continues to play a leading role in this work.

CHOGM in June 2022 provided an important opportunity for Commonwealth leaders to come together and reaffirm our collective commitment to human rights, as enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter. The associated People, Youth and Women's Forums provided a dynamic and inclusive platform for Commonwealth citizens, civil society and governments to discuss key challenges and opportunities, including issues related to rights and freedoms.

[61] The four Priority Pillars: Fairness, Sustainability, Prosperity and Security

[62] <https://cfnhri.org/resources/commonwealth-nhris-join-forces-to-support-disabled-people-through-pandemic/>

[63] <https://www.uk-cpa.org/media/3952/wip-report-final-3.pdf>

## Europe

### Council of Europe

The UK's Council of Europe (CoE) membership provides an important platform for the promotion and protection of human rights, democracy and the rule of law throughout Europe.

The Committee of Ministers (CM) held its annual Ministerial meeting in hybrid format in May. The then Minister for the Middle East and North Africa, James Cleverly, called on the Russian Federation to respect the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of **Georgia** and **Ukraine**, and also noted the entry into force of Protocol 15 to the Convention, which would give effect to measures reforming the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). Home Office and Justice Ministers participated in meetings on cybersecurity and restorative justice.

Throughout the year, the UK continued to oppose all forms of discrimination, called for greater protection of LGBT+ rights, racism to be tackled, gender equality, media freedom and the safety of journalists.

The CoE holds quarterly meetings to supervise implementation of ECtHR judgments. In December, the CoE gave notice that it would start infringement proceedings against **Turkey** for its failure to implement the ECtHR judgment in the Kavala case.

The UK will continue to work closely with Turkey as a key partner to find a resolution. The CoE also adopted a draft Decision in the McKerr group of cases, which concerns the adequacy of investigations into deaths in Northern Ireland during the 1980s. The UK's submission set out our commitment to the Stormont House Agreement.

The number of cases brought against the UK decreased to 118, down from 210 in 2020. Those cases that went to a judgment remained low, as did the number of judgments that found violations. The Court's ongoing caseload increased to 70,150 by the end of 2021. The UK continued to advocate reform of the Court, to allow it to concentrate on the most important cases before it.

The UK funded work in priority areas, including a variety of country-specific projects, such as enhancing disciplinary and reward procedures in Turkish prisons, improving application of the right to a fair trial in **Ukraine**, tackling cybercrime and promoting biodiversity.

The UK will play a key role in shaping the future strategic direction of the CoE following **Russia's** expulsion from the organisation on 16 March 2022, as a result of its unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. The UK will continue to uphold the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and drive forward human rights standards throughout Europe,

with a particular focus on cybercrime, artificial intelligence, women's rights, LGBT+ rights, and the right to a fair trial.

### Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) provides a forum for dialogue between 57 participating states, including on human rights, rule of law and democratic governance.

The UK worked with like-minded partners to address the ongoing human rights challenges in the OSCE region, including human rights violations in various participating states and the growing pressure to constrain the OSCE's autonomous human rights institutions.

The UK's International Ambassador for Human Rights, Rita French, attended a Warsaw conference to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). Ambassador French highlighted the UK's staunch support for ODIHR in a series of bilateral meetings, including with civil society organisations.

Throughout the year, the UK delivered numerous thematic statements at the OSCE Permanent Council on issues such as freedom of religion or belief, freedom of expression and media freedom. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport presented the UK's National Action Plan on Freedom of Safety of Journalists at the Stockholm Media Freedom Conference. The UK also worked with an expert ODIHR team that visited Glasgow to consider national and local authorities' facilitation of peaceful assemblies linked to COP26.

Following on from the UK's leading role in activating the 2020 Moscow Mechanism report into human rights violations in **Belarus**, the UK continued to work to keep the international spotlight on the heinous actions of the Lukashenko regime. On 5 November, the UK led a group



Minister Morton, then Minister for Europe and Americas, meets with Rik Daems, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, in December 2021 to discuss topics including the Istanbul Convention, human rights in Russia and FoRB.

of 35 participating states invoking the Vienna (Human Dimension) Mechanism to register our concerns. In December, the then Foreign Secretary delivered a keynote opening statement at a Ministerial Council side-event on Belarus.

During the year, the UK continued to support ODIHR's election observation missions by funding UK observers and agreeing a new framework with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy to provide UK observers for the next three years. The UK condemned publicly the limitations that **Russia** placed on election monitoring which prevented the deployment of an ODIHR election observation mission for the September Duma elections.

The UK, with other like-minded partners, also condemned Russia's actions in obstructing the holding of the 2021 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM), Europe's largest annual human rights conference.<sup>[64]</sup>

There was no constructive response from Russian federal authorities to the recommendations of the 2018 OSCE Moscow Mechanism report on human rights in Chechnya. New credible allegations of serious human rights violations in Chechnya continued to emerge, including the abduction and forced return of individuals from other regions of Russia to Chechnya.

## European Union

In 2021, the UK continued to work with the European Union (EU) on shared human rights objectives and engaged regularly with the EU on human rights situations of concern around the world.

The UK also worked closely with the EU on human rights sanctions. In March 2021, the UK adopted sanctions alongside the EU, US and Canada, targeting four senior individuals and the Public Security Bureau of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, responsible

for human rights violations in Xinjiang against the Uyghur Muslim community in **China**. The UK will continue to consider joint action on human rights sanctions to hold those who commit human rights violations and abuses to account.

The UK worked closely with the EU at the UN in New York and HRC in Geneva. In February, the UK and the EU together led at the HRC a Special Session on the human rights implications of the crisis in **Myanmar**.

In March, the UK pledged at least £205 million at the Brussels Conference on "Supporting the Future of **Syria** and the Region".<sup>[65]</sup> In November, the UK Mission to the EU hosted an event on media freedom alongside the Netherlands. This included a visit to Brussels by the UK Co-ordinator for the Global Media Freedom campaign, to discuss the UK's media freedom priorities ahead of handing over the role of co-chairmanship of the Coalition to the Netherlands.

## Network of European Human Rights Ambassadors

The UK is one of eleven European nations to appoint a European Human Rights Ambassador, signalling our strong collective commitment to protecting and promoting international human rights obligations. In 2021 the group (consisting of the UK, Finland, Netherlands, Sweden, France, Spain, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Germany, Slovakia and Estonia) issued 22 Joint Statements on a variety of human rights issues and held meetings with a range of civil society organisations.

## International Criminal Justice

Supporting international criminal justice and accountability is a key element of UK foreign policy. Those who commit the most serious crimes of international concern must be held accountable.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) plays an important role in ending impunity for those responsible for the very worst crimes. In 2021, the UK continued to provide practical and financial support to the ICC, contributing £10.6 million. The UK also cooperated on sentence enforcement and witness protection.

The UK welcomed the election of a British barrister, Karim Khan QC, in December 2020 as ICC Prosecutor. Further developments in 2021 included the conclusion of the Colombia Preliminary Examination and the granting of authorisation to proceed to a full investigation for the situations in **Palestine, Philippines** and **Venezuela**.

During 2021, the ICC delivered the verdict in the case of Dominic Ongwen of the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda. The conviction of Bosco Ntaganda, who was found guilty of various war crimes and crimes against humanity in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)**, including sexual enslavement and rape, was also upheld.

The UK supported the work of the Independent Expert Review, and the ICC continued to work through the recommendations of the Independent Expert Review to improve the governance of the ICC, the working methods of the judiciary, and the process of investigations and prosecutions.

The UK continued to support international efforts to gather, analyse and preserve evidence of atrocities committed, to ensure that genuine accountability remains possible. This included through the UN International Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) and the Independent Investigative Mechanism for **Myanmar** (IIMM), establishing the Myanmar Witness Programme, which is gathering, verifying, and reporting information on human rights violations in Myanmar, and the UN Investigative

[64] The 2022 HDIM took place in Warsaw in the Autumn.

[65] The UK remained one of the largest donors to the Syrian crisis, committing over £3.7 billion in UK aid since 2012.

Team for the Accountability of Daesh (UNITAD).

The UK supported the work of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT) fulfilling the residual functions of the International Criminal Tribunal for the **former Yugoslavia** and the International Criminal Tribunal for **Rwanda**. Ratko Mladic lost his appeal against his conviction for genocide, crimes against humanity and violations of the laws and customs of war and was sentenced to life imprisonment.

The UK also continued its support for the Residual Special Court for **Sierra Leone** (RSCSL) and for the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of **Cambodia** (ECCC), as well as the Special Tribunal for **Lebanon** and the **Kosovo** Specialist Chambers.

## CHAPTER 5: Human Rights Priority Countries

### Afghanistan

NATO's withdrawal and the subsequent Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August changed the human rights picture. While it brought about an end to the conflict, the situation worsened for many groups, especially women and girls, and minorities. The military withdrawal and temporary closure of most embassies, including our own, dramatically reduced the international community's ability to support human rights.

In the first half of 2021, the conflict continued to have devastating effects. The UN reported 5,183 civilian casualties (1,659 killed and 3,524 injured) between January and June,<sup>[66]</sup> a 47% increase compared with the first half of 2020, with 64% attributed to anti-government groups. The UK Government's focus in this period was on encouraging the Afghan government and the Taliban to reach a peaceful political settlement, including through providing capacity-building support to the State Ministry of Peace, women's networks and civil society organisations.

Women suffered abuse and discrimination in Afghanistan before the Taliban takeover, but there had been progress since 2001. Women were increasingly active in law, media, business, and government, and they held over a quarter of the seats in Afghanistan's (now disbanded) parliament. The number of girls in education was gradually increasing, with over 3.6 million girls in school. The situation significantly deteriorated from August. The Taliban imposed oppressive social practices

and restrictions on women's freedom of movement, preventing many women from working. Most girls were unable to attend secondary school from September. Some women were able to continue their university studies, but most could not. Women and girls faced increased barriers to accessing basic services and humanitarian aid, and reports of gender-based violence increased. The Taliban dissolved the Ministry of Women's Affairs and appointed no women to cabinet-level positions.

The UK repeatedly called publicly for women's rights to be respected, including at the UNSC on 10 September and as co-chair of the UN Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan on 21 October. The FCDO provided emergency education funding through UN agencies and NGOs and supported services to protect vulnerable people through humanitarian aid.

Religious minorities continued to face persecution and threats, including by the Taliban themselves. Moreover, Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKAP) attacks, which frequently targeted Shia Muslim communities, increased. Between 19 August and 31 December, the United Nations recorded 152 attacks by the group in 16 provinces, compared to 20 attacks in five provinces during the same period in 2020.<sup>[67]</sup> This includes two significant suicide bombings at Shia mosques on 8 October and 15 October, which killed at least 135 people and injured over 200.<sup>[68]</sup> The minority ethnic Hazara group (predominantly Shia Muslims) faced attacks and forced evictions, displacing communities and leaving people homeless.

The UK joined a Statement on 10 September from the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance calling for the rights of members of all religious and ethnic minorities in Afghanistan to be respected. LGBT+ Afghans' rights were non-existent.

Civic and media spaces diminished. While the Afghan media remained largely free and independent until August, there were targeted killings of journalists, civil society activists and human rights defenders (HRDs), largely attributed to the Taliban. In response, the UK and Canada, as co-chairs of the Media Freedom Coalition, released a joint statement condemning the violence in late January.

From August onwards, the Taliban imposed restrictions on the media and many outlets were forced to close. Journalists, civil society activists and HRDs were harassed, killed and arrested, leading to increased self-censorship. In December, Reporters without Borders said 40% of Afghan media outlets had closed and 80% of women journalists had lost their jobs since 15 August.<sup>[69]</sup> In September, the Taliban announced that any protests required official approval, and used violence to repress demonstrators.

During late 2021 there was increasing evidence of reprisals against former Afghan security forces and government officials. Human Rights Watch reported that more than 100 former security officers were executed or subjected to enforced disappearances by the Taliban in four (of 34) provinces between August and November.<sup>[70]</sup> The UN reported that a rule of law

[66] 26\_july\_2021\_-\_civilian\_casualties\_set\_to\_hit\_unprecedented\_highs\_in\_2021\_unless\_urgent\_action\_to\_stem\_violence\_-\_un\_report\_english\_0.pdf (unmissions.org)

[67] [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/sg\\_report\\_on\\_afghanistan\\_january\\_2022.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/sg_report_on_afghanistan_january_2022.pdf)

[68] <https://www.hrw.org/node/380231/printable/print>

[69] <https://rsf.org/en/news/taliban-takeover-40-afghan-media-have-closed-80-women-journalists-have-lost-their-jobs>

[70] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/11/30/afghanistan-taliban-kill-disappear-ex-officials>



vacuum had led to extra-judicial killings, arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment of suspects. Twenty-eight countries, including the UK, jointly condemned the reported reprisals and called on the Taliban to enforce the general amnesty they had announced in August.

Following the Taliban takeover, UK ministers and officials continued to meet Afghan women, journalists and representatives from minority groups to understand their concerns and ensure FCDO activity aligned with their needs. Government officials met Taliban officials to press on our core concerns, including through the UK Mission to Afghanistan in Doha, established in September. The UK regularly raised human rights issues with the Taliban, including minorities, women's rights, girls' education and freedom of expression.

The UK also regularly raised human rights at the UN. A UK-supported Security Council Resolution agreed on 30 August reaffirmed the importance of upholding human rights. On 7 October, the UK supported a UN Human Rights Council (HRC) Special Rapporteur mandate to monitor human rights in Afghanistan. On 22 December, the UNSC agreed a UK-backed resolution to enable the delivery of humanitarian aid while preserving sanctions.

Between April and December, the UK brought around 7,900 Afghans to the UK under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy, including through military evacuation flights. The UK also welcomed around 1,000 further people particularly at risk, including journalists, members of the LGBT+ community, women's rights activists and judges.<sup>[71]</sup>

The UK Government will continue to press the Taliban on human rights and promote inclusive political dialogue, both through our bilateral engagement and working with the international community, including through the UN. We will also use our programmes to support Afghan civil society, women and girls, and minority and vulnerable groups.

## Bahrain

Bahrain took progressive steps in 2021, making improvements on juvenile justice and pressing ahead with the establishment of an inaugural National Human Rights Plan. The government extended the use of alternative sentencing legislation to enable judges to use it at the point of sentencing and to allow all prisoners to apply for non-custodial sentences irrespective of time served. Bahrain's measures to manage the COVID-19 pandemic

continued to ensure that more vulnerable elements of society were treated equitably. The UK's main concerns remained around restrictions on media freedom, including digital platforms and freedom of expression.

A new Restorative Justice Law for children was a significant step forward in juvenile protection in Bahrain. The new legislation came into force in August 2021 and raised the age of criminal responsibility to 15 years (from seven). The legislation also established a judicial committee to review the cases of all juveniles currently in detention. The UK continued to support the Government of Bahrain's efforts to ensure the new legislation is implemented effectively.

Alternative sentencing provides a practical alternative to detention with more than 3,800 people benefiting from this law since it came into effect in 2017. Activist Hasan Mushaima was offered an alternative sentence in September 2021 but chose to decline.

Despite the challenges COVID-19 presented, Bahrain effectively and sensitively managed its impact, including on vulnerable groups such as migrant workers and prisoners. The government made vaccinations available to all, including those in detention. It also took steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in prisons, releasing over 900 prisoners on alternative sentences. National human rights oversight bodies continued to monitor access to medical facilities and family contacts, conducting investigations into any human rights complaints.

On 17 April, a disturbance in Jau Prison provoked concerns for prisoners' welfare, access to family contact and medical provisions from NGOs and family members. The UK swiftly raised the matter with both the Bahraini government and the Ombudsman. Our Ambassador to Bahrain visited Jau prison on 3 May.



Operation Pitting: A UK soldier welcomes an Afghan girl to the UK, August 2021. UK MOD © Crown copyright 2021

[71] The Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme, launched on 6 January 2022, will resettle up to 20,000 Afghans, including those who have stood up for values such as democracy and human rights in Afghanistan, and members of vulnerable groups.

The visit allowed the Ambassador and other international partners to see at first-hand the prevailing conditions in the prison, and its medical facilities, as well as providing clarity around the COVID-19 measures implemented.

Bahrain is proud of its freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) traditions, which it extols as a core tenet of its society and is enshrined in the constitution. The total population (including expatriates) is roughly 74% Muslim, 10% Hindu, 9% Christian and 7% other. Islam is the official religion under the Constitution and Sharia is the main source for family law, but space is provided for all other religions.

Unusually in the region, many religions are catered for in Bahrain: a synagogue with an active small Jewish community; a 200 year old Hindu Temple, which caters for a sizeable community, providing cultural and educational activities; the Lady of Arabia' cathedral opened last year and joins the Anglican 'St Christopher's' cathedral and several other churches. The King Hamad Global Centre for Peaceful Coexistence was created by Royal decree, is well-funded and is charged with representing all faiths in Bahrain. It provides a platform for dialogue and debate related to freedom of religion or belief and co-existence to counter extremism, violence, terrorism and hatred.

Bahrain engages actively in FoRB initiatives worldwide and in January 2021, Bahrain co-hosted the International Holocaust Remembrance Day commemorations with the Simon Wiesenthal Centre, attended virtually by Israeli President Herzog.

While in principle Bahrain's constitution guarantees freedom of expression, the UK continues to have concerns around the ability to exercise this right. Bahrain ranked 168 out of 180 countries in the 2021 World Press Freedom Index.<sup>[72]</sup> Though attempts to reform the press

law appear to have stalled, the UK understands revised legislation may be presented to the new Parliament in 2022. However, it is not yet clear how or if this will improve press freedoms, especially concerning the use of social media. The Bahraini government also continues to restrict access for international journalists. The UK continued to raise our concerns around freedom of expression, including press freedom, with senior interlocutors in the Bahraini government.

Bahrain retains the death penalty, in common with other countries in the Middle East region. In 2021, no death penalty sentences were issued. However, 26 prisoners remain on death row. The UK continued to voice our opposition to this, including at senior levels both privately and publicly.

Bahrain established an inaugural National Human Rights Plan, published in July 2022. The UK fed into the consultation phase involving Bahraini civil society, NGOs, the UN, and other international partners.

## Bangladesh

There was no significant change in the human rights situation in Bangladesh in 2021. Key concerns included restrictions of freedom of expression, especially the use of the Digital Security Act (DSA), violence against women and girls, and instances of attacks on religious minorities. Minister for Human Rights, Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon, discussed human rights issues with government and civil society during his November visit to Bangladesh. Human rights concerns were raised during the annual bilateral Strategic Dialogue in London in September and in regular discussions with the government.

There was violence around elections and political assembly, with Chattogram City elections marred by allegations of voter intimidation and attacks on

candidates. Opposition parties alleged acts of intimidation by the government and claimed increasing difficulties in operating. Local human rights groups assessed that there were at least 932 reported instances of political violence, which injured 10,833 people and caused 157 deaths.

In March, opposition leader Begum Khaleda Zia's jail sentence was suspended for a further six months, with continued restrictions preventing foreign travel. Zia received hospital treatment and returned to her residence, remaining there under travel restrictions.

Extra judicial killings and enforced disappearances continued, including allegations against the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB). US sanctions targeted RAB and associated individuals for reported human rights violations. Local human rights groups estimated that law enforcement agencies were responsible for custodial deaths and incidents of torture, including 80 extra-judicial killings.

Media freedom remained under pressure. Bangladesh dropped one point to rank 152 out of 180 countries in the *Reporters Without Borders* Press Freedom Index.<sup>[73]</sup> Hundreds of further cases were filed under the Digital Security Act. Writer Mushtaq Ahmed, held under the DSA for allegedly publishing offensive or false information, died in custody in February. Our High Commissioner joined an OECD statement calling on the government to conduct an independent inquiry into allegations of torture leading to Ahmed's death. Local human rights groups noted 210 reports of journalists experiencing harassment by December. UK funding supported the training and education of investigative and female journalists in Bangladesh.

UK funds and policy interventions also supported human rights priorities on democratic governance and tackling modern slavery. Programme support included local

[72] [www.rsf.org/en/bahrain](http://www.rsf.org/en/bahrain)

[73] Bangladesh | RSF

conflict resolution and protections for migrant workers. The UK-funded Death Penalty Project examined socio-economic profiles of death row prisoners and supported lobbying on these cases. Justice programmes encouraged humane treatment of prisoners, while political participation programmes developed grassroots mitigations against violence.

The Government of Bangladesh continued to support its constitutional commitment to freedom of religion or belief. However, religious minorities, including the Hindu community, experienced harassment and attacks, including in October when violence, vandalism, and intimidation was directed against Hindu Durga Puja celebrations. In Comilla, crowds attacked Hindu worshippers. The government responded firmly, detaining hundreds across the country.

The UK expressed concerns over these incidents and supported citizen groups to resolve grievances, mitigate violence, and advocate for inclusive and peaceful co-existence. Following the violence against those celebrating Durga Puja, our High Commissioner called for calm and solidarity, while Lord Tariq Ahmad raised freedom of religion or belief during his visit in November.

Violence against women and girls remained a major concern in Bangladesh. According to a leading human rights organisation, there were reports of rape of at least 1,321 women and girls, and 224 women murdered due to domestic violence. Human rights and civil society organisations demanded the formulation of rape and sexual harassment laws in line with human rights standards.<sup>[74]</sup> However, little progress was made towards this.

The UK continued to work with partners to press for better implementation of legislation to protect women and girls. UK-funded organisations have led nationwide

advocacy against sexual violence towards women and children and demanded justice for survivors.

The UK commended Bangladesh's continued hosting of approximately one million Rohingya refugees displaced from Myanmar in camps in Cox's Bazar. COVID-19 restrictions on NGOs and UN agencies reduced protection services, leading to reported increases in levels of sexual assault, rape and abduction. The influence of criminal armed groups within the camps, and infighting between them, grew worse. This resulted in increased violence among the Rohingya, including sexual assaults of women and girls, particularly at night. In September, Mohibullah, a civil society leader and chair of the Arakan Rohingya Society for Peace and Human Rights, was murdered. In March, 11 refugees died in a fire which destroyed thousands of shelters.

The government relocated approximately 17,000 refugees to Bhasan Char, an island in the Bay of Bengal, as part of plans to relocate up to 100,000 refugees. The UK acknowledged the government and UN's Memorandum of Understanding, underpinning the UN's assistance and engagement on Bhasan Char. Human Rights Watch expressed concerns including access to assistance, the voluntariness of relocations, and the ability of the Rohingya to move between the island and Cox's Bazar for welfare visits.

The UK will continue to raise human rights concerns through diplomatic engagement and development programming, including working with NGOs.

## Belarus

The human rights situation in Belarus related to the conflict in Ukraine will be covered in the 2022 Annual Human Rights and Democracy Report, to be published in 2023.

The human rights situation in Belarus continued to deteriorate throughout 2021 as Belarusian authorities systematically targeted political opponents and their supporters, non-state media and civil society. Widespread violence and repression were evident, alongside the toughening of the Law on Mass Gatherings and the Mass Media Law, and hundreds of criminal charges handed down, all with the aim of silencing opposition voices. By the end of the year, human rights organisations had registered 969 people as political prisoners.

Non-state media and journalists continued to be targeted by the Belarusian authorities, either imprisoned or forced to flee abroad, with non-state media within Belarus being almost completely shut down. In 2021, according to the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ), 13 media outlets were declared extremist, including Belarus' leading independent news outlet tut.by. There were 133 incidents of journalists being detained, and 29 administrative arrests. In total, non-state journalists spent 8,733 days in prison and received cumulative fines of \$30,000. At the end of 2021, 32 journalists remained in prison.<sup>[75]</sup>

On 23 May, Ryanair flight 4978, travelling from Athens to Vilnius, was forced to divert and land in Minsk, where two passengers were arrested. The UK took immediate and decisive action in response, banning Belarusian airlines from UK airspace and advising UK airlines against overflying Belarus.

The UK initiated a G7 statement and joined international partners in NATO, the OSCE and the Media Freedom Coalition in unequivocally condemning this attack on human rights, media freedom and civil air travel. The UK welcomed the fact-finding investigation by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO).

[74] Source: Media coverage of civil society advocacy (<https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/news/ten-reforms-we-need-end-impunity-rape-2057173>)

[75] <https://baj.by/en/analytics/figures-year-repression-media-and-journalists-belarus-2021>

In July, President Lukashenko signed into force amendments to the laws on Media and Mass Events, further undermining the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of the media. Belarusian authorities further increased pressure on civil society and human rights organisations, carrying out searches of offices and homes, detaining and launching criminal cases against individuals and organisations. By the end of 2021, more than 300 civil society organisations had been, or were in the process of being, liquidated.

Belarusian security forces continued to act with impunity. While hundreds of criminal cases were launched against members of the opposition, civil society and human rights defenders, there is no indication that the authorities will investigate the thousands of well-documented reports of police brutality, torture and deaths.

In 2021, the UK, alongside the EU, US and Canada, imposed further sanctions, including trade, financial and aviation sanctions, on Belarus. By the end of the year, the UK had announced more than 100 designations in response to the fraudulent election and subsequent human rights violations, including in response to unlawful diversion of Ryanair flight 4978.

Given the lack of progress by the Belarusian authorities on the recommendations set out in the OSCE Moscow Mechanism report (2020), the UK, alongside 34 participating states, triggered the OSCE Vienna Mechanism, setting out a series of questions to Belarus about human rights violations.

The UK continued to financially support civil society and media freedom in Belarus; in 2021 the UK spent significantly more on Belarus-related programming funding compared to pre-crisis levels in 2019. The UK continues to support mechanisms through the UN and independent NGOs in the International Accountability Platform

on Belarus (IAPB) to investigate human rights violations in Belarus and hold those responsible to account.

The UK continued to show our solidarity with the opposition and civil society. Embassy staff frequently attended trials and engaged with the families of political prisoners. The then Prime Minister, then Foreign Secretary, then Minister for Europe and the UK's International Ambassador for Human Rights, Rita French, all met Sviatlana Tskikhanouskaya, a prominent member of the Belarusian opposition in 2021, making the UK's commitment to fresh and fair elections in Belarus clear to her.

Rita French additionally met Alex Bialiatski, chairperson of Viasna, a prominent human rights organisation in Belarus – and 2022 Nobel Peace Prize award winner. He has unfortunately been detained for political reasons due to his human rights work; the UK continues to make our solidarity with him clear.

Belarus remained the only country in Europe to retain and administer the death penalty. In 2021, there were unsubstantiated reports of two executions. It is believed that three people remain on death row.

The UK will continue to raise its concerns about human rights directly with the Belarusian authorities and in multilateral forums, including the OSCE and the UN. The UK will also continue to support work on accountability and justice for the victims of human rights violations and shall continue to call on the Belarusian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all those held on political grounds. Additionally, the UK will continue to respond strongly to the Belarusian regime's illegal actions in supporting Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The UK condemned the Belarusian regime's actions in engineering a migrant crisis to try to undermine Poland and others in the region for

political purposes, highlighting their disregard for international norms.

## Central African Republic

2021 saw renewed conflict in the Central African Republic (CAR). In December 2020, non-state armed groups formed the Coalition for the Patriots of Change (CPC). Following the re-election of the incumbent President in the same month, CPC advanced on the capital, Bangui, to overthrow the new government. In response, the government requested Russian and Rwandan bilateral forces and the Russian mercenary group, Wagner, to work alongside the CAR Armed Forces (FACA) to repel the CPC.

The subsequent government fight back against the CPC has resulted in allegations of human rights and international humanitarian law violations by CARs forces. In March 2021, a group of independent UN experts expressed alarm at the increased recruitment and use of private military and foreign security contractors by the Government of Central African Republic. The alleged violations and abuses included mass summary executions, arbitrary detention, torture during interrogation and the forced displacement of the civilian population. The experts also reported increased attacks on humanitarian organisations, as well as enforced disappearances.<sup>[76]</sup>

In June, a UN report found that the FACA, internal security forces and other security personnel, were responsible for 240 violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law (46% of total number of recorded violations), involving 491 victims (40% of the documented 1221 victims).<sup>[77]</sup> The report also found that the armed groups affiliated to the CPC were responsible for the majority of abuses and victims, with 286 (54%) of the reported human rights violations and 730 (60%) of documented victims.

[76] <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26961&LangID=E>

[77] [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/CF/report\\_abuses\\_violations\\_HR\\_InternationalHumanitarianLaw\\_Elections\\_CAR\\_EN.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/CF/report_abuses_violations_HR_InternationalHumanitarianLaw_Elections_CAR_EN.pdf)

The same UN report flagged that armed groups, state security forces including FACA, Internal Security Forces and other security forces were responsible for human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law. These included killings, conflict-related sexual violence, attacks against humanitarian personnel and UN peacekeepers, denial of humanitarian assistance, and recruitment of children into armed groups.

The COVID-19 pandemic and continued security concerns reduced monitoring of human rights violations and abuses. Further, the increased use of explosive ordinances disrupted the delivery of humanitarian assistance, particularly in the western prefectures of Nana-Mambéré, Mambéré-Kadéi, Ouham-Pendé.<sup>[78]</sup>

The UK worked closely with international partners in support of our ambition to end violence and build stability in the country. The UN, through its peacekeeping mission in the CAR (MINUSCA), remained central to this effort and the UK contributed approximately £40 million to MINUSCA in 2021.

In July, the UK's International Ambassador for Human Rights, Rita French, addressed the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) during the Independent Expert's oral update on Central African Republic. She noted the overwhelming evidence that parties to the conflict committed widespread and multiple human rights violations and abuses, and violations of international humanitarian law, including acts of sexual violence and prevention of humanitarian access, and called on all parties to the conflict to cease all forms of violence immediately.<sup>[79]</sup>

In September, during the 48th session of the HRC, the UK co-sponsored a resolution on technical

assistance and capacity-building for human rights in CAR, which was adopted by the HRC on 11 October. The resolution renewed the mandate of the UN Independent Expert for one year and called for a high-level interactive dialogue to assess human rights developments, placing special emphasis on the reconciliation process and the implementation of guarantees of non-repetition.<sup>[80]</sup>

In October, the UK welcomed the announcement of a ceasefire by President Touadéra. The then Minister for Africa, Vicky Ford MP, spoke with President Touadéra on 1 November welcoming his call for the unilateral ceasefire and underlining the importance of an inclusive peace-building process.

In November, the UK voted in support of the UN Security Council (UNSC) adopting resolution 2605 (2021), renewing MINUSCA's for a further 12 months. The resolution, for the first time, holds the Government of CAR, as well as armed groups, responsible for the escalating human rights and international humanitarian law violations.

In December, the UN added the leader of the Unité pour la Paix en Centrafrique, Ali Darassa,<sup>[81]</sup> to its sanctions list. This followed the UK vote, with other UNSC members, for a one-year renewal of the CAR sanctions regime in July. Along with targeted sanctions, the regime also includes an arms embargo to prevent armed groups accessing weaponry. The UK continued to press the Government of CAR to work to achieve the benchmarks set by the UNSC so that the sanctions regime can be lifted.

The UK will support efforts to promote peace and stability in CAR by encouraging the Government of CAR to make progress on the implementation of the peace agreement. The UK will continue to

welcome the Republican Dialogue for reconciliation as a way to reduce violence and alleviate the deepening humanitarian crisis across the country.

## China

The human rights situation in China continued to deteriorate in 2021. The evidence of widespread, systematic human rights violations and abuses in Xinjiang grew. Extensive restrictions continued to be imposed on media freedom, freedom of religion or belief and rule of law. Restrictions on LGBT+ and gender rights also persisted, as did those impeding civil society from operating freely. In Hong Kong, civil liberties have been curtailed, particularly freedom of speech.

China's authorities continued to pursue policies which violated human rights, including the extra-judicial detention of Uyghur Muslims and other minorities in political re-education camps and, increasingly, in region's expanding prison network. Further credible and compelling evidence emerged of invasive surveillance of minorities, forced labour and forced birth control.

Systematic restrictions on Uyghur culture and Islam persisted. Visits to Xinjiang by British diplomats continued to corroborate open-source reporting. Uyghurs outside of China continued to report harassment and intimidation by China's authorities. China persisted in refusing free and unfettered access to Xinjiang to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and continued to use large-scale propaganda and disinformation campaigns to support its policies in Xinjiang.

China's authorities continued the implementation of advanced technologies in ways which violated human rights. Mass surveillance and

[78] <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/car/card/30CQKXi7pF/>

[79] <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/un-human-rights-council-interactive-dialogue-with-the-independent-experts-oral-update-on-central-african-republic>

[80] <https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/RES/48/19>

[81] Security Council 2127 Committee concerning Central African Republic Adds One Entry to Its Sanctions List | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases

'predictive policing' algorithms were used to enable repression in Xinjiang. Media reporting indicated the use of similar technologies elsewhere in China, such as software to track 'suspicious people', facial recognition software targeting specific ethnicities, and social media analysis to monitor Chinese citizens living overseas. In response to COVID-19, the authorities have increased surveillance, monitoring, and tracking of China's population.<sup>[82]</sup> There have been reports that 'health code' apps have been manipulated to restrict the movement of human rights defenders.<sup>[83]</sup>

China's media environment remained highly constrained; proposals to substantially scale-up restrictions on private news-media operations were announced. Foreign journalists and their Chinese-national staff reported unprecedented levels of harassment and intimidation,<sup>[84]</sup> including when reporting on the July Henan floods and from Xinjiang. China continues to have the world's highest number of detained journalists, including Zhang Zhan, whose health deteriorated seriously due to a hunger strike; and Fang Bin, whose whereabouts remain unknown. Human rights reporter Zhou Weilin was sentenced to three and a half years in jail for "picking quarrels and provoking trouble" in July.

Extensive online censorship also continued, blocking international outlets and commentary deemed critical or otherwise "sensitive", and draft proposals to substantially scale-up restrictions on private news media operations were announced.

Respect for the rule of law remained a significant concern. New data indicated that China's use of 'Residential Surveillance in a Designated Location' (RSDL) – in which individuals may be detained without access to a lawyer and in solitary confinement outside of the formal judicial system – continues

to grow. Thousands of people are estimated to be detained annually in RSDL.<sup>[85]</sup> Estimates continue to indicate that China executes more people than the rest of the world combined. Canadian nationals Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor were released in September after over 1,000 days in detention.

Lawyers working on issues deemed 'sensitive' by the authorities, including human rights, continued to be harassed, detained, and have their professional licences to practise law revoked. Lawyers Tang Jitian and Guo Feixiong went missing in the run-up to Human Rights Day on 10 December. Other lawyers, including Chang Weiping, Xu Zhiyong, and Ding Jiayi continued to be detained. Many human rights defenders (HRDs) continued to face difficulties in meeting lawyers of their choosing, were held in detention for long periods, and often faced secret trials. In August, staff at the Chinese anti-discrimination NGO Changsha Funeng, were sentenced to between two and five years in a secret trial. Reports of torture and deaths in detention continued.

Further restrictions on freedom of religion or belief continued, including through policies designed to "sinicise" religions. Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, and Falun Gong practitioners and others remained at risk of persecution on the grounds of their religion or belief. In Tibet, new research uncovered a large network of boarding schools, where students are subjected to highly politicised education with restrictions placed on cultural practices and Tibetan language. Increased reports on the mistreatment and deaths of Tibetans in custody added further to our concerns. Access to Tibet for foreign nationals – including diplomats and journalists – remained highly restricted.

There was a marked uptick of pressure on LGBT+ organisations,

including through shutdowns of social media accounts and police interference, leading many organisations to cease activity or close entirely. Censorship of LGBT+ content intensified. Women's human rights defender Li Qiaochu was detained in February; China's highest profile #MeToo case to reach court was dismissed; tennis player Peng Shuai's accusations of sexual assault against a high-ranking official were entirely censored; and #MeToo journalist Sophia Huang was arrested alongside labour activist Wang Jianbing in September. However, draft revisions to the Women's Rights and Interests Protection Law released in December promised improved rights for women in China – but without protection of freedom of expression for women's HRDs.

In March, China introduced radical changes to Hong Kong's electoral systems, further reducing the space for democracy with the result that there was no meaningful opposition in the December legislative elections. In response, the UK declared a breach of the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration. This was the third breach in a period of fewer than nine months and resulted in the UK declaring China to be in an ongoing state of non-compliance with the agreement.

The Hong Kong and Chinese authorities continued to undermine rights and freedoms, in a clear and systematic effort to suppress opposition voices. Pressure against pro-democracy supporters increased, with hundreds arrested, including nearly all pro-democratic legislators.

Journalists were arrested and accused of foreign collusion and sedition, resulting in the closure of many pro-democracy media outlets, including the newspaper Apple Daily and the website Stand News. Prominent civil society organisations including Hong Kong's largest trade

[82] China's Covid-Era Controls May Outlast the Coronavirus – The New York Times (nytimes.com)

[83] Digital Authoritarianism, China and COVID (lowyinstitute.org)

[84] <https://fccchina.org/2021/03/10/media-freedoms-report-2020-track-trace-expel-reporting-on-china-amid-a-pandemic/>

[85] Latest figures relate to 2020. Microsoft Word – Liuzhi\_SubmissionUNSP\_22June2021\_SD.docx (safeguarddefenders.com)

unions, student groups and NGOs were forced to disband, accused of national security crimes, while some others took the decision to close pre-emptively. This included the organisations responsible for organising protest marches and the annual commemoration of the Tiananmen Square massacre. Amnesty International closed its Hong Kong office, citing the National Security Law.

The UK took further robust action in response to human rights concerns in China. In respect of Xinjiang, the UK announced measures in January to help ensure no UK organisations are complicit in the human rights violations in Xinjiang through their supply chains. In March, the UK imposed asset freezes and travel bans on senior Chinese government officials and one entity responsible for human rights violations in the region. This action was taken alongside the US, Canada and the EU.

The then Prime Minister and then Foreign Secretary raised their concerns directly with their Chinese counterparts. In June and October, global UK diplomatic efforts helped to secure the support of over 40 countries for statements at the UN on Xinjiang, Hong Kong and Tibet. In response to the National Security Law in Hong Kong, the UK launched its visa for British Nationals (Overseas) in January 2021.

More broadly, the UK continued to fund projects to strengthen human rights in China, working with NGOs and institutions both inside and outside the country. Diplomats also conducted visits to Xinjiang and other ethnic minority areas and tried to attend trials of HRDs. The UK Government announced that no ministers or officials would attend the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics to demonstrate our concerns about human rights.

The UK and its partners will continue to play a leading role in holding China to account on issues of concern,

including Hong Kong and Xinjiang. The UK will also continue to support efforts to establish greater transparency about the human rights situation in Xinjiang, including by funding research and pressing China to allow urgent and unfettered access to Xinjiang for independent observers, including the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. The UK will also work to ensure a robust international response to the long-awaited report on Xinjiang by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

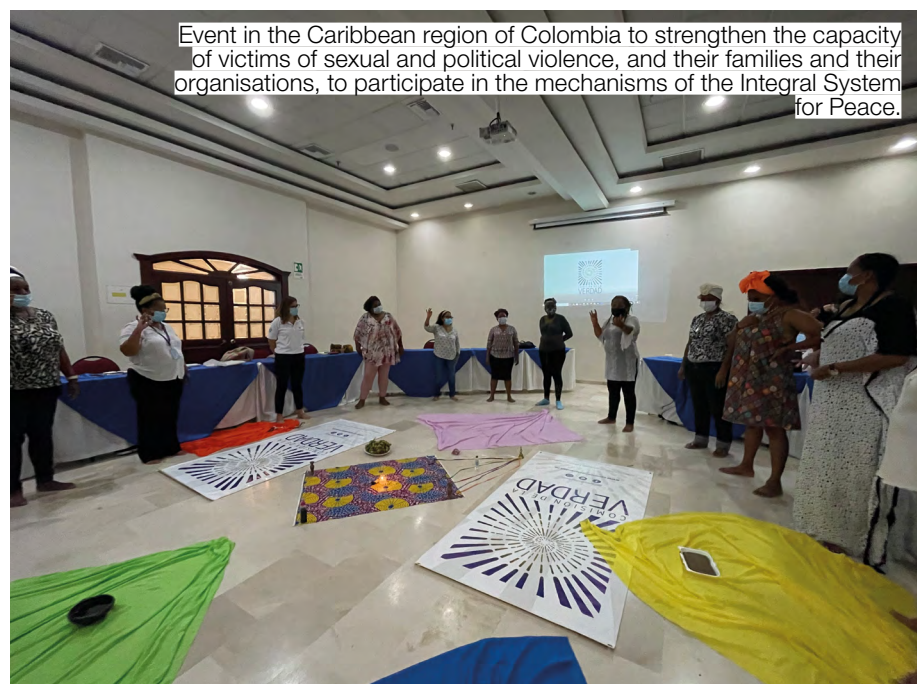
## Colombia

Five years after the Colombian state signed a landmark peace agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the protection of human rights continued to be hampered by successive governments' struggle to increase security and improve state presence in conflict-affected areas. Illegal armed groups continued to threaten, attack and murder former FARC-combatants, human rights defenders (HRDs) and social leaders. The excessive use of force by some members of the police, as well as allegations of sexual violence and

press censorship were also of particular concern in 2021.

Illegal armed groups continued to fight for control of coca cultivation, drug trafficking, illegal mining and other illicit activities in areas formerly occupied by the FARC, which remain without permanent government presence. The economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the humanitarian crisis in neighbouring Venezuela, further increased opportunities for illegal armed groups to commit human rights abuses. Within this context, former FARC combatants, HRDs and social leaders, including environment leaders and those from indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, continued to be at risk.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) verified 100 HRDs were killed in 2021, linked to their work defending human rights.<sup>[86]</sup> Violence was particularly concentrated in areas with high levels of multidimensional poverty, where the state had little presence. The security situation for former FARC combatants also remains a concern. Of the 300 former FARC combatants killed since the signing



Event in the Caribbean region of Colombia to strengthen the capacity of victims of sexual and political violence, and their families and their organisations, to participate in the mechanisms of the Integral System for Peace.

[86] [https://www.hchr.org.co/wp/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/03-03-2022A\\_HRC\\_49\\_19\\_AdvanceUneditedVersion.pdf](https://www.hchr.org.co/wp/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/03-03-2022A_HRC_49_19_AdvanceUneditedVersion.pdf)

of the Peace Agreement, 43 were killed in 2021.<sup>[87]</sup>

Through the UK's Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF), the UK continued its commitment to strengthening the capacity of the Transitional Justice mechanisms. This included programmes related to the participation of victims, the design of Truth Commission strategies, and access to justice.

The CSSF provided support to strengthen OHCHR's capacities and resources to promote state actions to protect, prevent and investigate killings and provide technical advice to HRDs. Through the UN's Multi-Partner Trust Fund, the UK and other donors worked with the Colombian government and civil society to improve self-protection and human rights defence programmes.

Under the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI), the UK continued to help Colombia address its legacy of conflict-related sexual violence. In 2021, the UK supported survivors of sexual violence in Colombia through programmes covering psychosocial and legal support and guidance to access justice. This included support to male and LGBT+ survivors to overcome the specific barriers they face in their pursuit of justice and accountability. The UK also funded programmes strengthening the implementation of The Hague Principles on Sexual Violence in Colombia.

Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon, the Minister for Human Rights, and Rita French, the UK's International Ambassador for Human Rights, visited Colombia (virtually) in February 2021. The Ambassador met the UN Resident Coordinator, Ministry of Justice, Transitional Justice Court, civil society and HRDs. She raised key concerns around the killing of HRDs, media freedom, PSVI and transitional justice.

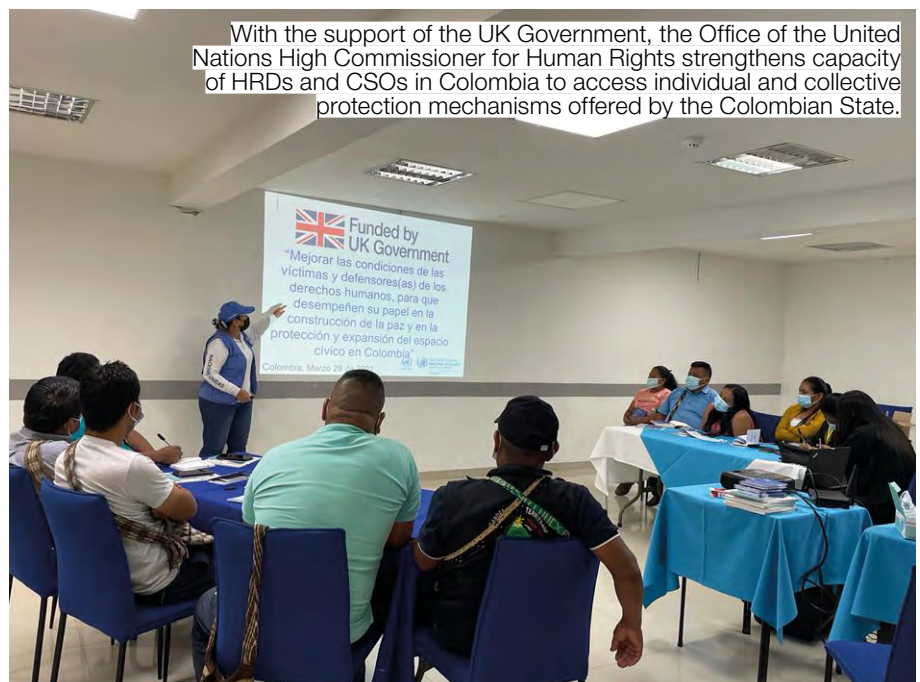
In April, following the announcement of a tax reform bill, tens of thousands

of people across the country joined, mostly peaceful, protests during a national strike. Over the following months the protests expanded to encompass wider discontent with government policies on health, education and wider social issues. Some protests led to violent clashes between the public security forces and protesters, and alleged violations by public security forces. At least 46 people died during the protests,<sup>[88]</sup> amid widespread reports of human rights violations. The UK welcomed the Colombian government's commitment to investigate human rights violations. UK support to the OHCHR and to the Organization of American States' Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia (MAPP OAS) helped these institutions to monitor protests, as well as facilitate dialogue in the cities most affected by the protests.

In 2021, Colombia fell four places in the Reporters without Borders Media Freedom Index, ranking 134 out of 180 countries.<sup>[89]</sup> The threat and fear of violence, including police intimidation, leading to self-censorship, was cited as a reason for the decline.

In November, the then FCDO Minister for the Americas, Wendy Morton, joined President Duque and the UN Secretary-General to mark the fifth anniversary of the peace agreement. Whilst recognising progress in terms of delivery of reintegration, transitional justice and Territorially Focused Development Plans (PDET in Spanish), challenges remain. During her visit, Minister Morton spoke to activists and institutional representatives of the transitional justice mechanisms in Colombia covering HRDs, media freedom and PSVI.

In 2022, Colombia will undertake Congressional and Presidential elections. The UK will continue to support a political participation programme to help communities prepare to put forward candidates for the newly introduced 16 special seats for victims in Congress. The UK remains fully committed to supporting the transitional justice mechanisms, including the Truth Commission, whose mandate has been extended by nine months. Our support to the OHCHR and the MAPP OAS in monitoring the situation for HRDs and wider



With the support of the UK Government, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights strengthens capacity of HRDs and CSOs in Colombia to access individual and collective protection mechanisms offered by the Colombian State.

[87] <https://indepaz.org.co/lideres-sociales-y-defensores-de-derechos-humanos-asesinados-en-2021>

[88] <https://www.hchr.org.co/index.php/informes-y-documentos/documentos/10246-documento-lecciones-aprendidas-paro-nacional-colombia-2021-juliette-de-rivero-representante-de-la-alta-comisionada>

[89] <https://rsf.org/en/colombia>



security issues will also help protect those at risk.

## Democratic People's Republic of Korea

There was no improvement in the dire human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in 2021. The DPRK government continued to deny allegations of human rights violations and failed to address reports from the UN and NGOs on human rights violations in the country. The DPRK remained the subject of country specific human rights resolutions at the UN. Border closures and tight restrictions on internal movement introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 remained in place throughout 2021, severely affecting the distribution of support and aid and leading to the departure of all remaining UN agencies and NGOs from the country.

The DPRK remained top of Open Doors' annual ranking of the 50 countries in which Christians experience extreme persecution,<sup>[90]</sup> and in penultimate place out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index.<sup>[91]</sup> In principle, freedoms of speech, religion or belief, the press, association, and peaceful demonstration were guaranteed by the DPRK's Constitution. However, it is clear that in reality, North Koreans enjoyed none of these freedoms. Human rights violations remained widespread and systematic in the DPRK with perpetrators not held to account.

The DPRK authorities continued to refuse to cooperate with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) or with the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in North Korea, Tomás Ojea Quintana. The regime continued to refuse to act on the 2014 UN Commission of

Inquiry report, which had concluded that the wide-ranging and continuing human rights violations taking place in the DPRK may amount to "crimes against humanity". Reports by the UN Secretary General and the Special Rapporteur during 2021 added to the growing body of information and deep concern about human rights violations in the DPRK.

Throughout 2021 the UK raised and challenged the DPRK's human rights record in multilateral forums. In December, the UN Security Council (UNSC) discussed human rights violations in the DPRK as a threat to international peace and security. The UK joined like-minded partners in a press statement afterwards calling for the DPRK's human rights violations to be discussed by the UNSC in an open session. At the UN General Assembly in November, the UK reminded the DPRK that measures used to contain COVID-19 should be proportionate and should not be used unnecessarily to further restrict the freedom of citizens.

The UK co-sponsored resolutions on the human rights situation in the DPRK adopted by the UN General Assembly and the UN Human Rights Council (HRC). The resolutions recalled the DPRK's responsibility to protect its population from human rights violations, including gender-based violence, and urged the DPRK to cooperate fully with the UN Special Rapporteur by giving him unrestricted access to the country.

In July, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on North Korea published a report on its inquiry into human rights violations in the DPRK between 2014 and 2021 which gathered evidence of human rights violations and shared recommendations for action. In October, Korea Future Initiative published its second report documenting religious freedom violations in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea which contained disturbing accounts of human rights

violations against those who have attempted to practise their religion or belief.

The UK continued to use its bilateral relationship to engage with the DPRK government on its human rights record. With the temporary closure of the British Embassy Pyongyang continuing throughout 2021 due to COVID-19, and with border restrictions on entry to the country making it impossible to sustain its operations, our Ambassador to the DPRK engaged with the DPRK Embassy in London and with UN human rights actors on human rights issues.

The UK will continue to raise the human rights situation in the DPRK and use multilateral fora to urge the regime to cooperate fully with relevant UN human rights mandate holders and allow them immediate and unhindered access to the country. The UK will also keep under review the use of UK autonomous global human rights sanctions, following the designations made under the Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime in 2020. When conditions allow, the UK will seek to return our embassy staff to Pyongyang and explore new opportunities for greater engagement between the international community and the DPRK authorities on human rights.

## Democratic Republic of the Congo

The human rights situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) remained deeply concerning in 2021. The UN Joint Human Rights Office documented 6,989 violations and abuses,<sup>[92]</sup> including acts of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), restrictions on freedom of expression, arbitrary arrests and detentions, and extrajudicial killings.

Human rights violations and abuses continued to be concentrated in

[90] Serving Persecuted Christians Worldwide – Open Doors' World Watch List 2021 is now live – Open Doors UK & Ireland

[91] North Korea | RSF

[92] United Nations Joint Human Rights Office in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (UNJHRO) MONUSCO – OHCHR – Analysis of the human rights situation in 2021

conflict-affected provinces, with both state agents and armed groups being responsible. The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Portal documented 5,213 conflict-related deaths in DRC in 2021.

In May, the DRC government introduced a state of siege in Ituri and North Kivu provinces, putting military leaders in charge, to tackle armed groups. While this emergency measure had an initial duration of 30 days, it has since been extended repeatedly. The UK has said that the state of siege must be assessed on a regular basis, respond to clearly defined objectives, and implemented with full respect for international human rights and humanitarian law. In November, Uganda and DRC launched joint military operations against Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), whose attacks on civilians intensified. These operations carry significant risks for the protection of civilians and safety of dependants. The UK will continue to monitor the situation.

The UK supported efforts to build stability and reduce violence in DRC, through diplomatic efforts and funding. In the financial year 2021/22, the UK contributed approximately £45 million and three staff officers to the UN Peacekeeping Mission in DRC (MONUSCO). In December the UK ensured that protection of civilians remained central to MONUSCO's mandate, and strengthened language on women, peace and security, including combatting sexual violence.

Through its six-year, £70 million, UK Aid programme, the UK continued to support the UN Joint Human Rights Office and the DRC Stabilisation Coherence Fund. The Fund supports local-level mediation and recovery in communities affected by violence and works to challenge impunity of security actors through mobile courts, support to prosecution cells, and sensitisation campaigns.

Congolese women continued to experience human rights abuses and threats to their rights, and at least 762 people suffered Sexual

and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV). The UK provided funding to the Nobel Peace Laureates Dr Denis Mukwege and Nadia Murad's Global Survivors Fund in DRC. The UK also supported Dr Mukwege's Panzi Foundation to help survivors of SGBV access justice and help communities to re-build cohesion. UK funding to TRIAL International ensured the provision of legal assistance and tailored support to survivors of SGBV. Education and health programmes funded by the UK helped enable schools to respond to SGBV incidents and provide post-exposure prophylaxis kits. The UK also funded community dialogues on the principles of the Declaration of Humanity to tackle stigmatisation of survivors of sexual violence.

Alongside our international partners, the UK lobbied the DRC government to uphold women's rights. The UK asked the government to withdraw from the Geneva Consensus, which contradicts the rights set out in the Maputo Protocol (signed by DRC in 2018) and seeks to undermine many hard-fought for sexual and reproductive rights.

Civil and political rights in DRC were restricted and political tensions increased. There were constraints on the right to peaceful protest and increased censorship of political media and activists. Those who publicly criticised state authorities risked arrest, denial of their right to a fair trial and lengthy prison sentences. Two rappers were jailed for ten and two years respectively and a political activist from Ensemble, a party within the President's coalition, was imprisoned for two years. The UK continued to work with international partners to urge the DRC government to protect civic space. The UK expressed our concerns about repression of journalists, human rights defenders (HRDs) and civil society actors at the 48th session of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in October.

Modern slavery, particularly in artisanal mining, continued to be a

problem. The UK monitored trends in the DRC mining sector, including by working closely with partners such as the UN Joint Human Rights Office. The UK also regularly raised our concerns about human rights and labour conditions in DRC's mining sector with the government. Through our programming efforts the UK brought together stakeholders to understand the supply chain risks and develop commitments on due diligence, increasing the evidence base around the drivers of modern slavery in the mining sector.

The UK will continue to support the President's focus on stability, while calling for a clear, time-limited exit strategy from the state of siege. The UK will carry on monitoring the Uganda/DRC joint operations and reiterate the need for coordination, to ensure the protection of civilians and humanitarian access to the affected region. The UK will increase pressure on the DRC government to uphold women's rights and freedom of expression and meet with HRDs to discuss progress, and will continue working with stakeholders to endeavour to support the delivery of credible, inclusive and timely elections in 2023.

## Egypt

In Egypt, 2021 saw ongoing challenges for civil society; restrictions on freedom of expression, including media and digital freedom; the application of anti-terrorism legislation against peaceful critics; no improvement in prison conditions; and a sharp rise in the number of executions, including during the Holy Month of Ramadan. However, there was progress as some high-profile human rights defenders (HRDs) were released, the State of Emergency was lifted and, in September, a new Human Rights Strategy was published.

To highlight these concerns and others, at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in March, the UK joined 31 countries, including the US, France and Germany, in an HRC

statement on Egypt,<sup>[93]</sup> the first such statement on Egypt since 2014. The statement reflected the UK's human rights concerns around restrictions on media and digital freedom, the limited space for civil society and HRDs, and obstructions to justice, including the broad application of anti-terrorism legislation.

The operating environment for civil society organisations remained challenging. In January, Egypt released executive regulations for a new NGO Law, which gave the authorities wide scope to control NGOs' activities. While a process began to drop charges against several human rights groups in a decade-old Foreign Funding Case, several other groups and individuals were still under investigation, and travel bans and asset freezes imposed on civil society workers remained in place.

Many HRDs remained in pre-trial detention, as the state continued to use anti-terrorism legislation to keep HRDs detained for the two-year limit, at which point new charges were introduced. In December, following two years in pre-trial detention, HRDs Alaa Abdel Fatah,<sup>[94]</sup> Mohamed al-Baqer and Mohamed Ibrahim (also known as 'Mohamed Oxygen'), were given sentences from four to five years, with no right to appeal. Following the verdict, the UK issued a public statement,<sup>[95]</sup> expressing regret at the decision.

There were, however, some welcome releases: prominent activist Esraa Abdel Fattah was freed in July; Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) researcher Patrick Zaki was released, pending a future trial, and journalists Solafa Magdy and her husband Hossam Al-Sayyad were released. Despite these welcome releases, many of those freed remained subject to asset freezes and travel bans, including EIPR's

Karim Ennarah. The UK continued to lobby on this, and other cases

Freedom of expression, including media freedom, remained limited. EIPR's Hossam Baghat faced a criminal hearing and fine for criticising a member of the Egyptian Judiciary in a tweet. Hundreds of websites remained blocked, with over 600 inaccessible for ordinary Egyptians.

At the end of 2021, Egypt retained its 2020 rank of 166 out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index.<sup>[96]</sup> According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, it had the third highest number of journalists in prison globally.

There was a sharp increase in the number of executions. Although difficult to verify, Egyptian lawyers documented at least 83 executions in 2021. This included executions during Ramadan and, in some cases, the families of those executed were not told until after they had been killed. At the September session of the HRC, the UK raised the increased use of the death penalty in its Item 4 statement. The Minister for the Middle East and North Africa, James Cleverly, also expressed his concerns about the death penalty directly with the Egyptian Ambassador to the UK.

There were some improvements in the area of freedom of religion or belief. The number of licenses issued under the 2016 Church Building Law, to churches already built, continued to increase, with over 2,000 church buildings receiving licenses by the end of the year. However, permits for building new churches were limited. Broader challenges remained including prosecutions for 'blasphemy' or 'contempt of religions' and non-recognition of minority Islamic Communities faiths, including Shia Muslims.

There continued to be some progress on gender equality, including the appointment of female

judges at two male-dominated judicial bodies and harsher penalties for sexual harassment offences and female genital mutilation (FGM) were introduced, though enforcement remained a challenge. However, a number of women social media influencers continued to be detained or prosecuted on the charge of 'violating Egyptian family values'.

Campaigners reported that the LGBT+ community continued to be under constant risk of arrest on charges of debauchery, immorality or blasphemy. Government discrimination and a lack of access to gender affirming health care for transgender people was blamed for the death in August of 26 year old transgender man Ezz Eldin, also known as Ahmed Fares, following a gender-reassignment surgery conducted at an underground clinic.

Capitalising on the welcome decision by the Egyptian government to end its State of Emergency and to publish a new Human Rights Strategy, the UK will continue to engage and encourage progress on human rights in Egypt. UK priorities are to assist human rights defenders and NGOs to operate freely in Egypt, push for improvements in prison conditions, and encourage better access to justice.

## Eritrea

The human rights situation deteriorated drastically during 2021. There were widespread, credible reports of human rights and humanitarian law violations by Eritrean troops involved in the conflict in Ethiopia.<sup>[97]</sup> In Eritrea, some religious detainees were released at the beginning of the year, but arbitrary detentions, indefinite national service, and restrictions on freedom of expression continued to be areas of concern. No progress was made by Eritrea on its

[93] <https://reliefweb.int/report/egypt/46th-session-United-Nations-human-rights-council-general-debate-item-4-human-rights>

[94] In December 2021 Mr Alaa Abdel Fatah was granted British citizenship.

[95] <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/statement-on-court-verdict-against-ala-a-abdel-fatah-mohamed-al-baqer-and-mohamed-oxygen>

[96] Egypt | RSF

[97] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/09/16/ethiopia-eritrean-refugees-targeted-tigray>, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G21/106/21/PDF/G2110621.pdf?OpenElement> <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/ET/OHCHR-EHRC-Tigray-Report.pdf>,

implementation of Universal Periodic Review recommendations.

During 2021, Eritrean troops continued to operate in northern Ethiopia. The report by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) joint investigation team (JIT),<sup>[98]</sup> of 3 November, detailed many serious violations and abuses of international human rights, humanitarian, and refugee law by all parties to the conflict, including the Eritrean Defence Force (EDF).

The JIT found that the EDF had: violated the principle of non-refoulement by forcibly returning some Eritrean refugees to Eritrea; committed acts of rape and sexual violence; subjected victims to torture, and other ill-treatment; and looted public and private property, including objects indispensable for the survival of the civilian population in Tigray, for example medicines from health centres and livestock. The UK supported a Special Session of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) on 17 December, condemning violations and abuses on all sides and creating a new international Commission of Human Rights Experts to investigate and report to the HRC.<sup>[99]</sup>

On 14 October, Eritrea was re-elected to the HRC for the 2022-2024 term. The UK's statement at the 25 October interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Eritrea set out the need for "drastic improvements in the promotion and protection of human rights". The UK continued to support the mandate of the Special Rapporteur and remained disappointed with the Government of Eritrea's continued refusal to allow any rapporteur to visit.

Eritrea continued to operate a system of universal and compulsory national service, spanning both military

and civilian roles. For many, service continued to be open-ended and many Eritreans avoid it by leaving the country, often by perilous means. During 2021 there was little sign of reform, with ongoing conflict in the Tigray region of Ethiopia being used as justification.

Activity by adherents of religions other than those permitted by the Government of Eritrea (Orthodox Christianity, Catholicism, Lutheran Protestantism, and Sunni Islam), continued to be suppressed and many remained in detention due to their religion. During January and February, the UK welcomed the release of a total of 70 Evangelical and Orthodox Christians and three Jehovah's Witnesses from detention. However, the UK continued to call on the Eritrean government to release the many worshippers who remain in detention, through our Ambassador in Asmara, and our statements during the June and October interactive dialogues with the Special Rapporteur. The UK continued to call for the release, from many years under house arrest, of Patriarch Abune Antonios, head of the Eritrean Orthodox Church.<sup>[100]</sup>

Eritrea was ranked bottom of the World Press Freedom Index out of 180 countries,<sup>[101]</sup> with all internal media operated by the state. 16 journalists, arbitrarily detained without a fair trial during the 2000s, remained incarcerated. Access to the internet remained limited to internet cafes and there was no 3G in Eritrea.

High profile political figures, some held for over 20 years following criticism of the President, remained in detention with no access to justice. The government continued to deny access to places of detention of political figures and shared no information on detainees. Eritrea had no constitutional government or national elections.

The UK will continue to call for the withdrawal of Eritrean troops from Ethiopia and will support the new international commission of human rights experts, which will report on alleged violations and abuses of international human rights, humanitarian, and refugee law committed during the conflict in Ethiopia. The UK will continue to raise freedom of expression, freedom of religion or belief, the use of arbitrary detention and national service reform with the government and at the HRC.

## Iran

Iranian authorities continued to commit multiple human right violations in 2021. Protests were suppressed, mass arrests occurred, and many detainees faced limited access to justice and little due process, particularly dual nationals. The use of the death penalty was widespread, and many trials were marred by irregularities. Violations of the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief continued, and women remained unable to participate fully in society.

It remained difficult to monitor accurately how many executions were carried out in Iran, as not all were made public. Credible estimates suggest that Iran may have executed more people in 2021 than it did in 2020 – with at least 314 people executed in 2021 according to Amnesty International. This means that Iran continues to rank as one of the most prolific users of the death penalty globally.<sup>[102]</sup>

The 2021 figure included Arman Abdolali, a juvenile offender who was under 18 years of age at the time of his reported crimes. This constitutes a breach of Iran's obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The UK repeatedly stated its opposition to

[98] <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/ET/OHCHR-EHRC-Tigray-Report.pdf>

[99] [https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/HRC/RES/S-33/1&Lang=E](https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/HRC/RES/S-33/1&Lang=E)

[100] Patriarch Abune Antonios died on 5 February 2022

[101] Eritrea | RSF

[102] Amnesty International, 'Death penalty 2020', *Amnesty International*, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/04/death-penalty-2020-despite-covid-19-some-countries-ruthlessly-pursued-death-sentences-and-executions/>, (accessed 18 February 2022).

Iran's use of the death penalty in bilateral and multilateral fora.

There were restrictions on freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. The authorities used excessive force in response to peaceful protests on water shortages in July and labour strikes throughout the year. Journalists continued to be arrested and foreign-based media outlets noticed an upward trend in the frequency of threats to their staff and to their relatives in Iran.

The Iranian authorities continued to violate the right to freedom of religion or belief. Members of religious minorities faced restrictions for peacefully practising their beliefs. Baha'is continued to be denied access to mainstream education. Baha'is have also faced the expropriation of their land, which Minister for Human Rights, Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon, condemned in a statement in February, as well as other forms of harassment. While Christians notionally benefitted from constitutional recognition and protection, they continued to be persecuted, especially converts. At the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) session in March, the UK highlighted to Iran that such persistent human rights violations were unacceptable. The targeting of ethnic minorities also continued. People from the Baluch, Kurdish and Ahawazi Arab minorities have been targeted with harassment, arbitrary detention and execution.

In January the Iranian government approved a bill on protecting women against violence, as recommended by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, although the bill stalled in the Iranian Parliament and therefore could not be implemented. Women in Iran continued to be denied the same rights and privileges as men, including unequal rights in marriage, divorce and child custody.

Human rights defenders and activists continued to be given severe jail terms. Nasrin Sotoudeh, a human rights lawyer who was imprisoned in

2018, remained in Qarchak prison despite concerns about her deteriorating health. Narges Mohammadi, another human rights activist, was rearrested at the end of 2021.<sup>[103]</sup>

Iran continued to deny consular access to dual British nationals in detention. The UK raised our dual national detainee cases with Iran throughout 2021, including through the then Foreign Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs<sup>[104]</sup>.

It remains in Iran's gift to release any British national who has been unfairly detained. The UK calls for humane treatment of detained British nationals. Their welfare remains a top priority. The UK lobbies on specific health concerns and mistreatment allegations when individuals ask it to do so, and where they judge it is in the best interests of the individual.

The UK urges the Government of Iran to call time on its practice of unfairly detaining British and other foreign nationals and will continue to work with likeminded partners to that end. The UK will also continue to hold Iran to account on a wide range of human rights issues, both by holding Iran directly to account where appropriate, and by using its membership of the HRC, working with its likeminded partners.

## Iraq

The human rights situation in Iraq remained concerning throughout the year. There was no meaningful accountability for the loss of life and casualties of protesters during the 2019 to 2020 demonstrations. Armed groups continued to operate with impunity and targeted killings of political activists persisted. Civil society space and freedom of expression was constrained in both Federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). Continued use of the death penalty, torture, forced returns of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and high reported

rates of gender-based violence remained significant concerns.

After widespread violence towards largely peaceful protesters in 2019-2020, the government failed to deliver on its promises to hold to account those responsible for the arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances and violence that resulted in the deaths of almost 600 protesters. The committee established by Prime Minister Kadhimi in 2020 had not yet released the findings of its investigations. Elections in October were largely peaceful, although there was some candidate intimidation. For example, armed groups attempted to assassinate the Prime Minister in his home using armed drones.

The space for independent journalism remained limited. In the KRI, media outlets were closed without a legitimate legal basis, and journalists faced harassment and intimidation by government forces. The Erbil Criminal Court sentenced three journalists and two activists to six years in prison, based on proceedings that the United Nations Assistance Mission to Iraq (UNAMI) and Human Rights Watch concluded were marred by serious fair trial violations. The UK called on the Kurdistan Regional Government to investigate allegations of criminal violence and to demonstrate respect for fair trials.

Open conflict with Daesh finished in 2017, yet the areas directly affected, in north and west Iraq, remained unstable. Of the 6 million people internally displaced, 4.8 million had returned home by the end of 2021. The remaining 1.2 million live in camps or informal settlements. People returning from displacement often found themselves ostracised and denied their social, political, and legal rights, which caused increased susceptibility to extremist ideology. Daesh, and other violent groups, were active and recruited within disaffected populations. The UK remains one of the largest humanitarian donors in Iraq,

[103] As of early 2022 Narges Mohammadi received a further 8 years in prison and 70 lashes, as well as a two year ban on talking with the press.

[104] In March 2022, after years of unfair and unjust detention by the Government of Iran, British Nationals Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and Anoosheh Ashoori were allowed to return to the UK.

providing over £278 million in humanitarian assistance since 2014. The UK continued to lobby the government and worked closely with UN agencies to ensure there were national government-led efforts to reintegrate Iraq's remaining IDPs.

The widespread use of torture to extract forced confessions in the criminal justice system continued. UNAMI reported a consistent lack of respect for the conditions of a fair trial in the KRI and Federal Iraq,<sup>[105]</sup> noting that procedural safeguards were routinely not respected. Widespread and indiscriminate use of the death penalty against Daesh suspects continued. The UK lobbied against use of the death penalty, for better conditions in prisons, and for due process and transparency in investigations and trials.

There was progress on legislation to provide reparations for survivors of Daesh crimes. In March, the Iraqi Parliament passed the Yazidi Survivors Law, which formally recognised Daesh atrocities as genocide and crimes against humanity and established a reparations framework for female survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. The UK contributed to implementation and worked with the government and partners to press for full financial provision of the law. The UK also supported the provision of psychosocial support services for female survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.

Through UK funding to UNAMI and other UN agencies, the UK also continued to support the work of the UN Investigative Team for the Accountability of Daesh (UNITAD).

Women and girls continued to be marginalised by conservative social, religious and tribal norms. However, there was progress following October elections, where female MPs exceeded a 25% quota for the first

time since 2003, securing nearly 30% of parliamentary seats.

Discriminatory laws continued to expose women to violence. COVID-19 exacerbated the socio-economic inequality and gender disparities that have long existed. UN agencies reported an increase in reported incidents of gender-based violence since 2019. Iraq ranked 166 out of 170 countries on the 2021/22 Global Women, Peace and Security Index,<sup>[106]</sup> and 154 of 156 on the Global Gender Gap Report.<sup>[107]</sup> The 2021 WPS Index estimates that intimate partner violence occurs in 45% of Iraqi households, the highest figure of partner violence globally.<sup>[108]</sup> Honour killings and violence against women, girls and LGBT+ people continued, often unreported.

Through freedom of religion or belief programming, the UK promoted understanding and respect of minority groups through a more diverse religious educational curriculum in the KRI. Iraq's religious and ethnic minority populations have significantly declined since 2003 due to exclusion, sectarianism and conflict, and many continued to face extreme challenges. The UK welcomed the very positive steps made by the government, including Prime Minister Kadhim's call for a National Dialogue following the Papal visit in March.

The UK will continue to lobby against human rights violations and abuses and support the Government of Iraq to safeguard the human rights of all Iraqis.

## Libya

The human rights situation in Libya remained constant following the end of hostilities between the then Government of National Accord (GNA) and the Libyan National Army, brought about by the October 2020

ceasefire agreement. Human rights violations and abuses decreased following the end of direct hostilities, but breaches of international humanitarian law and human rights law continued, including arbitrary and unlawful detention, torture, and cruel and degrading treatment.

Migrants and asylum seekers remained extremely vulnerable. Discrimination against women and girls, and restrictions on freedom of expression, freedom of religion or belief, and civil society, undermined Libya's electoral process. The UK supported UN-led efforts to secure sustainable peace in Libya, including through free, fair, and inclusive Parliamentary and Presidential elections scheduled for 24 December. However, elections were delayed due to the highly volatile political climate in which disputes over the electoral laws and the eligibility of candidates undermined the ability of the Libyan High National Elections Commission to hold elections.

Despite the cessation of hostilities, Libyan authorities continued to uncover mass graves in Tarhuna throughout 2021.<sup>[109]</sup> In May, the UK imposed sanctions on the al-Kaniyat militia and its leaders, Mohamed al-Kani and Abdurahem al-Kani, who oversaw Tarhuna, including enforced disappearances, torture, and the killing of civilians. The sanctions designations sent a clear message that those responsible for serious human rights violations and abuses or breaches of international humanitarian law in Libya would face consequences, and that the persistent climate of impunity in Libya must be addressed and justice provided for the victims. In September, the UK supported the renewal of the Independent Fact-Finding Mission to investigate violations and abuses in Libya –

[105] [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IQ/UNAMI\\_Report\\_Freedom\\_Expression\\_EN.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IQ/UNAMI_Report_Freedom_Expression_EN.pdf)

[106] <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/WPS-Index-2021.pdf>

[107] [https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2021.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf)

[108] <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/WPS-Index-2021.pdf>

[109] <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/interactive/2021/libya-tarhuna-kaniyat-mass-graves/>

a much-needed step towards accountability.<sup>[110]</sup>

The security and justice sector continued to be dysfunctional and dominated by armed groups and militias, who were responsible for systemic human rights abuses in Libya.<sup>[111]</sup> Human rights organisations and the International Criminal Court Prosecutor documented evidence of the widespread use of violence by militias, including torture, physical violence, gender-based violence, forced labour, deprivation of food and water, and the murder of detainees.<sup>[112]</sup> Militias and armed groups often used detention as a punitive measure for perceived affiliation with an adversary. Refugees and asylum seekers were disproportionately affected, experiencing torture and cruel and degrading treatment in both official and unofficial detention centres.

The UK consistently urged the interim Government of National Unity (GNU) to put an end to crimes committed in detention centres and investigate crimes committed at facilities, such as Mitiga Prison and the Gernada detention facility. The UK has also pressed the GNU to investigate and address violence against women and girls, including the fates of tens of female detainees at Al-Kuweifya detention centre, which remain unknown.

Widespread restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, and restrictions on media freedom continued in 2021.<sup>[113]</sup> The Civil Society Commission, established by the GNA to register and approve civic organisations, has continued to impose arbitrary legal restrictions that contravene international standards for freedom of association. Indiscriminate attacks and the

silencing of journalists, activists and human rights defenders (HRDs) continued to take place.

Amnesty International noted that “armed groups and militias repeatedly repressed dissenting voices, restricted civil society and attacked election officials in the lead-up to the now postponed elections”.<sup>[114]</sup> Libya has adopted a cybercrime law which human rights activists perceive will significantly limit freedom of expression online and enable Libyan authorities to target and oppress activists and restrict press freedom. Women continued to remain under-represented in all governance institutions and processes: women made up less than 20% of politicians in Libya in 2021.

UK-funded Conflict, Stability and Security Fund programmes trained women peacebuilders, and supported civil society and the promotion of impartial and accurate online media content, including respect for freedom of expression and tolerance of diversity. The UK consistently called on Libyan authorities to act to protect journalists against violence and enable civil society to operate without undue restrictions. This is critical to enabling free, fair and inclusive elections.

Through diplomatic and programmatic engagement, the UK will demonstrate our support for Libya’s political process, including the holding of free, fair, and inclusive national parliamentary and presidential elections. The UK will support Libyan civil society, including women, youth and vulnerable groups, and promote human rights and greater protection of civic space for activists and HRDs. The UK will also work to boost Libyan capacity to counter serious organised crime

and organised immigration crime. The UK will continue to urge the Libyan government to cooperate with the ICC Prosecutor in the ongoing investigations, to address the persistent climate of impunity in Libya through national reconciliation and accountability, and to cooperate more closely with the Fact-Finding Mission.

## Mali

The human rights situation deteriorated in 2021, with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights highlighting a cycle of impunity and threats to the protection of civilians.<sup>[115]</sup> Malians continued to suffer at the hands of terrorist groups and national defence and security forces, and the rights of women and children continued to be overlooked. Actions and decisions taken by the transitional authorities did not provide hope for improvements in 2022.

In May, a second coup d’état in nine months took place with the arrest of the former President and Prime Minister. Towards the end of the year, reports emerged of political repression including arbitrary arrests and alleged torture of those expressing dissent against the regime. Human Rights Watch reported that six men, charged with plotting a coup against the transitional authorities, were allegedly tortured and held incommunicado in September and October 2021.<sup>[116]</sup> The deployment by the Malian transitional authorities of private military company Wagner Group was also confirmed. UK ministers called for democratic rule to be restored and condemned the deployment of mercenaries whose track record of committing human rights abuses is well-documented in other conflict settings.

[110] <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/un-human-rights-council-48-uk-statement-for-the-interactive-dialogue-with-the-fact-finding-mission-on-libya>

[111] <https://www.hrw.org/middle-east/n-africa/libya>

[112] <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sc14710.doc.htm>

[113] <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/12/libya-address-rights-violations-after-election-postponed/>

[114] *ibid*

[115] <https://www.ohchr.org/en/2021/06/mali-rampant-impunity-human-rights-violations-poses-grave-risk-protection-civilians?LangID=E&NewsID=27232>

[116] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/12/15/mali-security-suspects-allegedly-tortured>

UK troops out on patrol, in support of the UN Peacekeeping Mission in Mali. UK MOD © Crown copyright 2021



Mali.<sup>[117]</sup> On 8 November, the Malian authorities announced that three cases implicating members of the armed forces were being considered by the Military Tribunal in Bamako. However, despite this positive step, little other progress was made to tackle impunity. The UK provided International Humanitarian Law training to the Malian armed forces and supported greater representation of women in the police component of the regional counter-terrorism force, the G5 Sahel Joint Force.

Descent-based slavery continued to be practised throughout Mali with no formal criminalisation. Rita French, the UK's International Ambassador for Human Rights, raised the issue with the Minister of Justice, Mr Mahamadou Kassogue, during her visit in November. The UK also provided funding to Mali's National Human Rights Commission to help combat the practice of slavery.

Women and children continued to be the most affected by the escalating insecurity. With over 400,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) as of December, 64% were children, and 55% women and girls.<sup>[118]</sup> At the start of the school year in November, conflict and the presence of IDPs seeking shelter in schools prevented large numbers of children from returning to the

Attacks against civilians by Al-Qaeda and Islamic State affiliated groups occurred at a consistently high frequency and scale throughout the year. While not officially claimed by any group, significant attacks against civilians included the massacre of over 50 inhabitants across three villages in the Gao region in August, and the killing of over 30 civilians in the Mopti region in December when militants shot at and set fire to a bus.

The blockading of entire villages became an increasingly common tactic used by terrorist groups, disrupting livelihoods and hindering humanitarian access. While the negotiation of unofficial non-aggression pacts between communities and terrorist groups limited violence in certain areas, such agreements involved the enforcement of restrictive measures including the segregation of boys and girls in the classroom and limitations on women's freedom.

The UK provided £12.5 million of humanitarian aid to those in need. In the weeks following the August attack in the Gao region, UK troops deployed to the UN Peacekeeping

Mission in Mali, MINUSMA, supported the UN's human rights investigation. They collected evidence and witness accounts and helped deter further attacks through their sustained presence.

Violations by state actors, particularly in the context of counter-terrorism operations, continued. Human Rights Watch documented a spate of alleged summary executions, enforced disappearances, and incommunicado detentions by government security forces in central



The UK's International Ambassador for Human Rights, Rita French, meeting with women leaders who are supporting the peace process in Mali, in November 2021.

[117] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/10/22/mali-alleged-disappearances-executions-security-forces>

[118] [https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S\\_2021\\_1117.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_2021_1117.pdf)



classroom.<sup>[119]</sup> Gender-based violence continued to be reported. The signing by Plateforme, one of the signatory parties to Mali's Peace Agreement, of Action Plans to end the recruitment and use of children and other grave violations was, however, positive.<sup>[120]</sup>

As well as its contribution to the provision of education in crises, the UK used its programme funding to support women's participation in peace building. The UK helped upskill women representatives of the Signatory Armed Groups to Mali's Peace Agreement so that they could more effectively take part in negotiations and policy discussions. During her visit, Rita French pushed the Malian transitional authorities to make progress on the adoption of a law that would criminalise gender-based violence.

The UK will monitor political and security developments closely, pushing for a return to constitutional order as soon as possible and continuing to raise awareness about the possible impact of mercenary activity on human rights. The UK will continue to prioritise stabilisation, conflict resolution and human rights compliance, as well as supporting the rights of women and children.

## Myanmar (Burma)

On 1 February, the Myanmar military seized power from the democratically elected government in a coup d'état. The coup had severe social, political and economic impacts on Myanmar, leading to mass human rights violations, including serious violations against children. The UK secured a

UN Security Council (UNSC) Presidential Statement on 10 March, the first on the political situation in Myanmar since 2008.<sup>[121]</sup>

On 31 December, a total of 8,338 people were arbitrarily detained;<sup>[122]</sup> including Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Myint. The UK secured a UNSC Press Statement on 8 December calling for the release of all those in arbitrary detention.<sup>[123]</sup>

At least 2,100 people had been killed since the coup – mostly peaceful protestors.<sup>[124]</sup> Conflict between the military and Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) increased, with credible reports of military attacks hitting civilian targets including schools, religious buildings and hospitals. The emergence of armed opposition groups, calling themselves People's Defence Forces (PDF), also contributed to increased violence. Over 320,900 have been displaced across Myanmar since the coup, bringing the total number of IDPs to 660,000.

Security forces continued to commit atrocities throughout the country, with credible reports of torture, sexual violence and mass killings. Military violence was particularly intense in north-west and south-east Myanmar. On 10 November, the UK secured a UNSC Press Statement on escalating violence,<sup>[125]</sup> and on 26 November led a coordinated statement highlighting the increasing risk of mass atrocities in north-west Myanmar.<sup>[126]</sup> The UK is providing direct funding to the UN's Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar and established the Myanmar Witness Programme, which

is gathering, verifying, and reporting information on human rights violations. The UK has continued to support the International Court of Justice process and its Provisional Measures Order.

The UK worked quickly with partners to impose ten rounds of sanctions, targeting the military leadership as well as its access to revenue, arms and equipment. The UK also secured high level commitments from multiple countries to prevent the flow of arms to Myanmar.

Freedom of expression was significantly restricted from the moment the military seized power, with those who criticised the junta risking arrest and prosecution. The military tried to shut down almost all independent media in Myanmar and arbitrarily detained over 100 journalists, with many still in detention.<sup>[127]</sup> Myanmar overtook Saudi Arabia and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the ranking of the world's biggest jailers of journalists.<sup>[128]</sup> There were multiple reports of torture and abuse, with at least one journalist known to have died in detention.<sup>[129]</sup> A reporter was also killed in a Myanmar military attack in December.<sup>[130]</sup>

The military used internet shutdowns to limit access to information and blocked access to hundreds of websites and social media applications. State-controlled media were used by the military to broadcast propaganda and disinformation.

The military continued to promote hardline Buddhist rhetoric and

[119] <https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/west-and-central-africa-weekly-regional-humanitarian-snapshot-16-22-november-2021>

[120] <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/2021/09/en-fr-mali-platform-signs-action-plans-to-end-and-prevent-recruitment-and-use-of-children-and-other-grave-violations/>

[121] Issuing Presidential Statement, Security Council Expresses Deep Concern about Developments in Myanmar | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases

[122] AAPP | Assistance Association for Political Prisoners » Blog Archive » Daily Briefing in Relation to the Military Coup (aappb.org)

[123] Security Council Press Statement on Myanmar | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases

[124] AAPP | Assistance Association for Political Prisoners » Blog Archive » Daily Briefing in Relation to the Military Coup (aappb.org)

[125] Security Council Press Statement on Myanmar | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases

[126] Joint Statement on increasing violence in Myanmar, November 2021 – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

[127] IN NUMBERS: Arrests of Journalists and Media Staff in Myanmar – Reporting ASEAN – Voices and views from within Southeast Asia

[128] Number of journalists in arbitrary detention surges 20% to 488, including 60 women | RSF

[129] Photojournalist in Myanmar dies in military custody a week after arrest | Myanmar | The Guardian

[130] Reporter killed in Myanmar military attack near Thai border | RSF

released the extremist Buddhist ideologue Ashin Wirathu from prison. Legislation continued to favour the Buddhist majority. At least two churches were destroyed by military operations in Chin State. Many mosques in Myanmar could not acquire permission to restore buildings. The Rohingya, an ethnic group comprised mostly of Muslims, but also Hindus and a small number of Christians, continued to be denied citizenship. They also faced restrictions on freedom of movement, access to health care and humanitarian aid. There is no evidence the military engaged with the International Court of Justice's Provisional Measures Order to protect the Rohingya.

The military continued to use sexual violence as a weapon of war. The UK mainstreamed services for survivors of gender-based violence across much of our programme portfolio. Military crackdowns resulted in the deaths of 93 women,<sup>[131]</sup> four of whom were tortured to death in interrogation centres. The UK raised these issues at the Human Rights Council (HRC) in September.

Myanmar's Penal Code criminalises same-sex sexual acts. Following the coup, hopes for legislative reforms and decriminalisation disappeared.

Over 76,000 children were forced to flee their homes.<sup>[132]</sup> Children were killed, seriously injured and arbitrarily detained without access to legal counsel. Attacks on schools increased and the intensified conflict created new drivers for increased recruitment of child soldiers. The UK secured a UNSC Press Statement on 29 December after four children were killed and their bodies burnt in Kayah State.<sup>[133]</sup> Risks of human trafficking and exploitation also increased in 2021. Through the UN LIFT Fund, the UK supported migrant information centres, and provided psychosocial support, shelter and training for vulnerable communities.

In 2021, the UK continued to push for an end to the violence and a resolution to the crisis. The UK shone the spotlight on human rights violations and supported efforts to preserve evidence for future prosecution. The UK also provided flexible support to local civil society organisations, with a focus on women and LGBT+ led organisations, so they could respond to urgent needs in their communities to protect the most vulnerable.

Since the coup, the military have attempted to silence opposition voices through their use of violent crackdowns on those who oppose the coup. The UK continues to support the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN) calls to end the crisis and implement the Five Point Consensus without delay. The UK will also continue to publicly call, including at the UN, for the ASEAN Special Envoy to Myanmar to be given access to all stakeholders in Myanmar.

## Nicaragua

The human rights situation in Nicaragua continued to decline markedly in 2021 as the Ortega Murillo regime sought to neutralise any credible opposition. They conducted a campaign of detention and persecution of members of the political opposition, independent journalists and government critics in the run up to the November elections. This repression continued after the elections took place.

In early 2021, a series of legal and constitutional reforms was passed, aimed at seriously curtailing actions by opposition figures, civil society and the media. On 18 January, the National Assembly passed a constitutional amendment allowing perpetrators of loosely defined "hate crimes" to be imprisoned for life. On 2 February, an amendment to the Penal Code allowed a person to be held for up to 90 days (previously

48 hours) without being charged. On 4 May a reform to Electoral Law was passed, further limiting political participation by facilitating the revocation of legal status of political parties. Again on 4 May the National Assembly elected the new Supreme Electoral Council, selecting members who were sympathetic to the Ortega regime.

The Nicaraguan authorities persisted in the systematic intimidation and persecution of independent media. Since 2020, Nicaragua dropped a further four places to rank 121 out of 179 countries in the Reporters Without Borders' 2021 World Press Freedom Index.<sup>[134]</sup> Freedom House rated Nicaragua as "not free" in its Freedom in the World 2021 index.

In response, a majority of OAS member states declared, in a 12 November resolution, that Nicaragua's 7 November elections lacked democratic legitimacy. The UK also repeatedly called for the immediate and unconditional release of all opposition leaders and other political prisoners in Nicaragua, and for the full restoration of all their civil and political rights, including through statements before and following the elections and alongside partners in the UN Human Rights Council (HRC). In December, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights gave an Oral Update on Nicaragua, following a Joint Statement and resolution adopted at the HRC on 22 June.

Nicaragua was added to the list of FCDO Human Rights Priority Countries in 2021. On 15 November, the UK imposed sanctions against eight senior Nicaraguan individuals. These imposed travel bans and asset freezes on a number of those people particularly responsible for undermining Nicaragua's democratic principles and institutions, commissioning serious human rights violations, and the repression of civil society. The list of individuals

[131] <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-59462503>

[132] <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/myanmar-more-76000-children-displaced-violence-coup-pregnant-women-forced-give-birth-forest>

[133] Security Council Press Statement on Situation in Myanmar | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases

[134] <https://rsf.org/en/nicaragua>

sanctioned included the Vice-President and First Lady of Nicaragua, Rosario Murillo, for her involvement in the state-backed repression of demonstrations, the discrediting of independent journalists and the exclusion of opposition candidates from elections.<sup>[135]</sup>

These UK actions were coordinated with the US and Canada, which imposed similar sanctions on leading Nicaraguan officials, to maximise pressure on the Ortega Murillo regime to change behaviour and end the repression of Nicaragua's citizens. The new sanctions added to the six that were carried over when the UK left the EU under the Nicaragua (Sanctions) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020 and one designation that the UK imposed on 26 April under the Global Anti-Corruption Sanctions Regulations 2021.

The UK will continue to work through the bilateral relationship and multilateral institutions to promote human rights, a free media, democracy and open society in Nicaragua.

## Occupied Palestinian Territories

This section covers the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. It includes the actions of Hamas, the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the Government of Israel (GoI). The UK continues to have a strong relationship with Israel which is an open democracy with a vibrant civil society.

2021 saw continued human rights abuses by Hamas, and by the PA. Violations by the GoI of human rights and international humanitarian law also continued in the OPTs. The UK has continued to make clear our views publicly, and directly to the GoI and the PA.

Tensions in Gaza worsened, including an 11-day violent conflict in May. According to the Israeli Security

Agency (ISA), 4,575 rockets and projectiles were launched into Israel in 2021, the vast majority during the May conflict. The UK repeatedly and strongly condemned these indiscriminate terrorist attacks by Hamas and other militant groups, and reiterated Israel's legitimate right to self-defence. During the conflict 261 Palestinians were killed including 66 children. Ten Israeli civilians, two foreign nationals and one soldier were also killed. The UK also urged proportion in Israel's use of force, with the conflict continuing to exacerbate the long-standing humanitarian crisis.

The humanitarian crisis in Gaza deteriorated significantly. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), during the conflict, 1,165 housing and commercial units were destroyed, while 58 education facilities, 9 hospitals and 19 health clinics were damaged. A Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (RDNA) conducted by the World Bank Group, UN and EU estimated the escalation had caused \$380 million of physical damage and \$190 million in economic losses in Gaza. The UK provided £9.37 million of vital humanitarian assistance to individuals affected by the crisis, including the provision of cash assistance to over 2,000 households, psychosocial support and rehabilitation services for 377 people, including people with disabilities.

The de facto administration in Gaza, Hamas, issued 16 death sentences in 2021. While the UK maintained a no-contact policy with Hamas, the UK continued to make clear our objections to its use of the death penalty including in the UK parliament. In November, the UK made Hamas in its entirety a proscribed terrorist organisation. Hamas continued to carry out arbitrary arrests of journalists and political activists, and to exercise strict control over civil society, including ruling in February that unmarried women could not travel without the permission of their male

'guardian'. Although the ruling was subsequently withdrawn, male family members are still able to request that the Sharia Court prevents unmarried women from travel over security or other concerns. Women's economic participation remains low, with over 60% of women in Gaza unemployed, with the percentage of women unemployed increasing over the course of 2021.

In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, violence increased, with OCHA reporting that 78 Palestinians were killed by Israeli forces in the West Bank. ISA recorded 2,062 violent attacks by Palestinians in the West Bank leading to three Israeli fatalities. OCHA recorded the highest monthly average of incidents perpetrated by settlers since records began in 2005, with 496 recorded incidents of violence and vandalism resulting in Palestinian casualties and/or property damage. Five Palestinians were killed in settler-related violent incidents. The UK continued to advocate for swift, transparent investigations into these incidents, for restraint in the use of live ammunition and for accountability for settler violence in the OPTs. The GoI also publicly condemned settler violence.

Human rights organisations documented continued breaches of fundamental freedoms by the PA. Lawyers for Justice recorded 340 politically motivated arrests, with rates of political arrests increasing after the postponement of national elections on 29 April, which were due to be the first since 2006. Opposition activist and human rights defender Nizar Banat died shortly after his arrest on 23 June after being beaten severely by members of the Palestinian Preventative Security Office. In the wake of his death, PA security forces responded with force to numerous peaceful protests. Demonstrators reported torture and mistreatment following their arrests and deliberate targeting of women protesters and journalists, including reports of female demonstrators being sexually assaulted. The UK

[135] <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-imposes-sanctions-on-senior-nicaraguan-individuals-following-rigged-elections>

urged a thorough and independent investigation into the death of Banat and the subsequent handling of protests. The military trial of the 14 officers charged with killing him began in September. The UK also continued to lobby the PA to establish a National Preventative Mechanism.

Despite continued verbal commitments from the PA, there was no progress on women's rights. As at the end of November 2021, the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling recorded 27 femicides across the OPTs. The Family Protection Bill, which would increase the protection of women's rights in law, was not ratified. A UK-funded project supported victims of Gender Based Violence (GBV); with 4,460 women and girls in the OPTs receiving protection interventions via partners' helplines. Women candidates in the cancelled national elections reported harassment and intimidation by the PA. In Gaza, rates of GBV are higher than in the West Bank. In 2021, the Georgetown Women, Peace and Security Index ranked the OPTs worst in the world for women's legal protections, with Palestinian women's economic participation also extremely low. Similarly, there was no progress in LGBT+ rights.

During 2021, a number of prominent Palestinian human rights defenders were targeted by Israeli authorities, including reported cases of harassment, arrests and raids on their homes and workplaces. The UK publicly and privately noted its concern and reiterated the importance of civil society. In October, the Government of Israel designated six Palestinian civil society organisations as terrorist organisations, restricting their ability to pursue activities aimed at protecting and promoting human rights in the OPTs. The UK does not support this decision and has not changed its approach towards these organisations. Israel has also

refused to renew visas to international employees of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) for over 18 months, severely hampering their ability to monitor human rights issues, and denied visas to employees of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (HRW), for reasons including supporting the Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement.

The Gol continued its policy of illegal settlement expansion. During 2021 Israel advanced plans for over 8,600 units, including in sensitive areas in and around Jerusalem. Construction began on 1,615 units. The UK continued to oppose settlement expansion and publicly reiterated that it is illegal under international law and seriously undermined the viability of a two-state solution.

According to OCHA, 898 structures in the OPTs were demolished or seized across the West Bank, including 220 donor-funded structures, and 1,173 Palestinians were displaced as a result, the highest figures since 2016. This included mass demolition events at Ras al-Tin and Humsa al-Baqai'a. The UK continued to fund protection including legal aid for Palestinians contesting eviction and demolition cases.<sup>[136]</sup>

Israel continued to hold Palestinian minors in detention, with 144 detained at the end of 2021. Israeli authorities continued the practice of administrative detention with 497 prisoners held at the end of 2021 without charge. According to the UN Secretary-General most Palestinian prisoners continued to be detained in Israel, rather than the OPTs, in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The UK will continue to oppose actions that constitute violations and abuses of international human rights law and international humanitarian law by the Gol, the PA and Hamas.

## Pakistan

The human rights situation remained challenging and in certain areas has deteriorated. Threats to media freedom persisted, with increased attacks against journalists. Discrimination against religious minorities intensified. Violence against women and girls continued and child labour remained prevalent. COVID-19 highlighted inequalities, especially in how women and marginalised groups accessed support from the government. There were some positive developments, however, including the National Commission for Human Rights resuming its work after a two-year hiatus.

Pakistan remained at 145 out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders' Press Freedom Index.<sup>[137]</sup> Civil society and technology companies called for the withdrawal of social media rules announced in October due to concerns they would allow the authorities to police content. A new federal Journalist Protection Act increased government responsibility to protect journalists, including the provision of legal assistance. However, concerns were raised by journalists that the Act could be misused to limit freedom of expression due to prohibitions on the type of information journalists are permitted to share.

The situation for religious minorities deteriorated. The Ahmadiyya Muslim community, Shia Muslims, Christians, Hindus, and Sikhs suffered violence and discrimination, including from denial of political participation, targeted killings, and damage to places of worship and desecration of graves. In December, a Sri Lankan was killed by a crowd of over 100 people after he was accused of blasphemy. Ahmadi Muslims continued to suffer from the use of cybercrime legislation, with electronic sharing of religious materials defined as "online blasphemy". School textbooks failed to represent minority faiths and

[136] According to OCHA, as of January 2022, at least 218 Palestinian households comprising 970 people in East Jerusalem are at risk of eviction from their homes.

[137] Pakistan | RSF

contained discriminatory material. Pakistan's National Commission for Minorities lacked autonomy, resources and investigative powers to carry out its remit effectively.

Violence and discrimination against women and girls remained common. Forced conversion and forced marriage continued; a draft federal Anti-Forced Conversion Bill that could have criminalised the practice was blocked. However, there were also positive developments, including the Federal Shariat Court declaration that setting a minimum age for girls' marriage was not against Islam, passing of legislation to establish special courts and crisis cells to expedite trials in rape cases and appointing a Chairperson for the National Commission on the Status of Women after a two-year gap. Additionally, the Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights established a minimum age of 18 for domestic employment in the Islamabad Capital Territory and approved stricter punishments for offenders under the Protection Against Harassment of Women at Workplace (Amendment) Bill.

Child labour – common in the textile, agricultural and waste sectors – remained prevalent. The establishment of Pakistan's first Child Protection Institute, which provides support to vulnerable children, was a positive development.

Same-sex relationships remained illegal, and reports of violence against transgender persons continued. In June, the Sindh High Court ordered the temporary blocking of TikTok, following a complaint that the platform was "spreading vulgarity" by celebrating Pride Month. Positively, however, the Punjab government inaugurated the first government-run school for transgender students in July.

Reports of torture and enforced disappearances continued. Human rights groups raised concerns that amendments to an Enforced Disappearances Bill could grant state actors impunity. The Senate unanimously passed a Bill against Torture and Custodial Death in July,

although it must still be passed by the National Assembly before being enacted into law.

Pakistan retained the death penalty for 27 offences. However, no executions were carried out in 2021 and in February, the Supreme Court revoked the death penalty for mentally ill prisoners, and implemented safeguarding measures. In October, the Senate rejected an amendment to Pakistan's Control of Narcotic Substances Act, which would have removed capital punishment for many drug offences.

The UK raised concerns about the human rights situation with the Government of Pakistan. The Minister for Human Rights, Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon, visited Pakistan in June and pressed then Prime Minister, Imran Khan, and other senior government representatives for action.

UK Government funding supported promotion of the rights of the most vulnerable members of Pakistani society. The Aawaz II programme established community forums promoting inclusive behaviours, addressing over 5,450 incidents related to early and forced marriages, faith-related conflicts and rights of minorities and vulnerable groups. The programme supported production of a Gender Parity Report in Punjab to help policymakers tackle gender inequalities, and helped the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab governments to make progress on the first Child Labour Survey for over 20 years.

In response to COVID-19, the UK helped provide community based mental health and psychosocial support to 280,812 vulnerable children and primary caregivers in these regions. The Sub-National Governance Programme supported social protection and economic recovery interventions following COVID-19 with a focus on marginalised communities.

In December, the UK imposed sanctions on Furqan Bangalzai, a former commander of terrorist organisation Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, for orchestrating the 2017 bombing

of a Sufi shrine, which killed over 70 worshippers.

The UK will continue to press for real and tangible progress on human rights, with a particular focus on freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief. Targeted programme funding will support promotion of social inclusion and the rights of women and girls, minorities, and other vulnerable people.

## Russia

The human rights situation in Russia related to the conflict in Ukraine will be covered in the 2022 Annual Human Rights and Democracy Report, to be published in 2023.

In 2021, democratic freedoms were further repressed and the human rights situation continued to deteriorate, with NGOs, independent media, political opposition and religious groups targeted by prosecutions and repressive legislation towards so-called 'undesirable' and 'extremist' organisations and 'foreign agents'. The human rights situation in both Chechnya and the illegally annexed Crimea remained particularly concerning.

In January, during the UK's G7 Presidency, G7 Foreign Ministers issued a statement in response to the arrest of opposition figure, Alexey Navalny. In February, Mr Navalny was sentenced to prison on the basis of politically motivated charges. Russia failed to comply with a European Court of Human Rights ruling that Mr Navalny be released with immediate effect. During subsequent demonstrations peaceful protestors and journalists were detained. The UK called for the immediate and unconditional release of Mr Navalny as well as protestors and journalists detained during protests. In August, the UK sanctioned seven Russian nationals directly responsible for planning the 2020 chemical weapons attack on Mr Navalny.

The September State Duma elections represented a serious step back for democratic freedoms, with measures taken by the authorities to

marginalise civil society, silence independent media and exclude genuine opposition candidates from participating under the ‘extremist’ law. Undue limitations were placed on election monitoring, including by international observers. The UK issued a statement expressing the view that the undemocratic manner in which the elections were run represented a serious step back for democratic freedoms in Russia.

Numerous journalists and independent media outlets were designated ‘foreign agents’ and ‘undesirable’, including Meduza, VTimes, The Insider, Moscow Digital Media, Bellingcat, and Caucasian Knot. In October, the UK issued a joint statement with members of the Media Freedom Coalition on the treatment of journalists in Russia.

The persecution of Jehovah’s Witnesses under the “extremist” law continued. This included the sentencing of Valentina Baranovskaya, Roman Baranovskiy and Aleksandr Ivshin in February. The UK raised concerns at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and continues to call on Russia to guarantee the right to freedom of religion or belief for all its citizens.

In December, the courts ordered the closure of International Memorial and the Memorial Human Rights Centre, two of Russia’s oldest NGOs, for allegedly violating Russia’s ‘foreign agent’ legislation. The decision was condemned by the then Foreign Secretary Liz Truss and the UK issued a joint statement with the US, EU, Australia and Canada.

The human rights situation in both Chechnya and the illegally annexed Crimea remained particularly concerning and LGBT+ persons in Chechnya have been subjected to systematic harassment, persecution, arbitrary arrests and detentions, torture, enforced disappearances and extra-judicial killings. There was no constructive response from Russian federal authorities to the

recommendations of the 2018 OSCE Moscow Mechanism report on human rights in Chechnya. New credible allegations of serious human rights violations in Chechnya continued to emerge, including the abduction and forced return of individuals from other regions of Russia to Chechnya.

In illegally-annexed Crimea the de facto Russian authorities continued to persecute dissidents and minorities, particularly ethnic and religious groups such as the Crimean Tatars. Their use of arbitrary arrests, detentions and intimidation violated fundamental freedoms, including the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief.<sup>[138]</sup>

Similarly, Russian interference in Georgia’s breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia resulted in a continuing deterioration in the human rights situation, with illegitimate detentions and reports of torture and ethnic discrimination. Extreme restrictions on freedom of movement through the closure of crossing points prevented residents from accessing healthcare during the pandemic.

In August, the UK, as part of the Media Freedom Coalition, expressed deep concern over the deteriorating media freedom situation in illegally-annexed Crimea. This included the case of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) reporter Vladislav Yesypenko, who had been held by de facto Russian authorities since March and reportedly tortured to extract a confession. In multilateral forums, including the UN and OSCE, the UK continued to raise our concerns about the de facto Russian authorities’ human rights violations and called for access to Crimea for international monitoring missions and organisations.

The UK will continue to use all the tools at its disposal to urge Russia to comply with its international human rights obligations. The UK remains committed to protecting human rights and civil society in Russia,

Ukraine and Georgia and will work with like-minded partners to send a strong, unified message to the Russian authorities.

## Saudi Arabia

Progress continued under the Vision 2030 social and economic programme, and legal rights also improved. Ambitious judicial reforms were announced that, if realised, will significantly improve the justice system. The position of women continued to improve as some female employment restrictions were lifted and prominent women’s right defenders were released. However, the clampdown on political activity and freedom of expression continued. State-control of the media and a culture of self-censorship prevented transparency and accountability. Application of the death penalty increased from 2020 levels; however, it remains significantly lower than in 2018 to 2019.

Female employment rates grew further as women undertook jobs as soldiers, footballers and security officers for the first time. The World Bank credited Saudi Arabia with eliminating restrictions on women’s right to work in industrial work, mining and manufacturing. Prominent Saudi women’s rights defenders Loujain al Hathloul and Nouf Abdelaziz were released. However, all female women’s rights defenders remained subject to lengthy travel bans. Guardianship laws have been significantly reformed but not abolished. Women still faced significant challenges such as legally requiring male consent to leave prison or to marry.

In 2021, 65 individuals were executed. This is an increase from 2020 levels (27) but a decrease from 184 executions in 2019. Death penalty reforms announced in 2020 (including the moratorium on the death penalty for drug-related offences and ‘discretionary’ crimes committed by juveniles) are likely to

[138] As of January 2022, at least 117 Ukrainian political prisoners remained in detention in Russia and Crimea, many subject to torture and ill-treatment and denied access to medical care.

have caused this downward trend. Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon, the Minister for Human Rights, raised specific high-profile juvenile cases with Dr Awwad al Awwad, the President of the Saudi Human Rights Commission in October. In the autumn, a cluster of high-profile juvenile death penalty charges were revoked, including that of Abdullah al-Howaiti. No public executions were reported in this period.

In February, Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman announced the development of an ambitious package of legal reform aimed at improving accountability, transparency and consistency. The package includes a Personal Status Law, a Civil Transactions Law, a Penal Code for Discretionary Sanctions and a Law of Evidence. In December, the Saudi Cabinet reportedly approved the Law of Evidence. Whilst welcome, the application and content of these measures is unknown, and there is minimal transparency, consistency or accountability in the justice system. Lord Tariq Ahmad expressed concern to the President of the Saudi Human Rights Commission in October that international observers continue to be unable to observe trials.

Thousands of detained Ethiopian migrants, previously reported to be held in poor conditions, were repatriated. Reforms to the 'Kafala' work sponsorship system came into effect. Expatriate workers now have the right to change employers and apply for their own exit visas. The US Annual Trafficking in Persons Report ranked Saudi Arabia in 'Tier 2', indicating the Kingdom is undertaking 'significant efforts' to become compliant with international norms. However, approximately 3.7 million domestic workers, who are particularly vulnerable to coercive labour practices, were excluded from the 'Kafala' reforms. The UK repeatedly asked at both ministerial and official level for the reforms to include domestic workers. The FCDO was concerned about reports of poor

conditions in migrant detention centres and the mass deportation of illegal migrants.

Political space and freedom of expression remained severely restricted, and there remained a culture of self-censorship and fear. In 2021, the World Press Freedom Index rated the Kingdom 170 out of 180 countries.<sup>[139]</sup> Political detainees arrested in 2017 are largely still in jail. Arrests and detentions continued, as did reports of torture, neglect, lack of medical care and solitary confinement. Dr Musa al Qarni, a cleric who was allegedly tortured and subjected to prolonged solitary confinement in prison, died in October.

Saudi government messaging on freedom of religion or belief supported private practice of non-Muslim faiths. The Saudi authorities employed language of tolerance and inclusion towards different beliefs; for example, the Muslim World League tweeted to mark Hanukkah. However, open practice of non-Muslim faiths remained prohibited. In June, the British Embassy in Riyadh hosted an Interfaith Dialogue. The aim of this event was to foster trust and respect between different faiths and to understand concerns of non-Muslim groups.

The UK will continue to engage closely with the Saudi authorities, particularly in areas where there is real Saudi appetite for change such as judicial reforms, women's rights and the death penalty. The UK will continue to raise individual cases of human rights concerns with Saudi counterparts at ministerial and official level and attempt to attend these trials.

## Somalia

The UK worked with the Somaliland government to support successful local and parliamentary elections in May, including funding an external election observation mission. While no female candidates were elected to Parliament, there was

progress that, for the first time in Somaliland's history, a member of a minority clan was elected. On freedom of religion or belief, the UK engaged with Somaliland's authorities on the trial of six Christian converts charged with apostasy and other related offences. The UK welcomed the court's decision to dismiss all charges and release the defendants in August.

The UK will prioritise pressing for the swift conclusion of credible elections and will launch a new security and justice programme focused on expanding access to justice for women and girls and minority clans to improve their protection. Through the Conflict, Security and Stability Fund, the UK will support a new Women-to-Women project to help empower women-led organisations to contribute to security issues while encouraging security actors to adopt a more gender-sensitive approach to community protection. The UK will also continue to provide media training to journalists and work with security actors to improve respect for media freedom.

Progress on human rights remained slow. The failure to conclude national elections reduced political focus on human rights challenges including gender-based violence, recruitment of children into armed groups and restrictions on media freedom. Terrorist group Al Shabaab capitalised on political instability and widespread insecurity to continue its insurgency and maintain its grip in many areas of Somalia.

The UK continued to call for greater protection of human rights in Somalia in international fora. This included: co-sponsoring a resolution with Somalia at the 48th session of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in October; engaging at Somalia's Universal Periodic Review in May; and, as pen-holder, renewing the UN Somalia sanctions regime at the UN Security Council (UNSC) in support of counter Al Shabaab efforts.

However, positively, three pilot local government elections successfully

[139] Saudi Arabia | RSF

took place in the Federal Member State of Puntland – the first direct, one-person, one-vote elections in Somalia since 1969, with gains for women’s representation and voter turnout. UK support included drafting of the Voter Registration Act, the purchase of biometric voter registration equipment and civil society observer missions.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV), including conflict-related sexual violence, educational disadvantage and limited political participation were among the challenges faced by women and girls, compounded by the global pandemic. Multiple actors, particularly Al Shabaab, continued to perpetrate high levels of sexual and gender-based violence, abduction and recruitment of children into armed conflict. Stigma and the use of traditional justice mechanisms meant that many GBV cases went unreported. Female Genital Mutilation remained widespread with 99% of women aged 15-49 experiencing it.<sup>[140]</sup> Somalia also remains one of the deadliest conflict areas for children.<sup>[141]</sup> Key pieces of legislation such as the Sexual Offences Bill and the Child Rights Bill stalled owing to the electoral crisis.

Working with UNICEF, the UK provided funding to support 520 GBV survivors with medical care, legal support, safe shelter and psychological first aid. The UK-funded Girls and Boys Empowerment Fora provided space for discussions on barriers to gender equality. Additionally, the UK’s Adolescent Girls Education in Somalia project raised awareness of educational rights for children with disabilities, engaging with community and religious leaders and schools to dispel misinformation on disabilities.

The project directly supported 927 girls with disabilities to attend school.

Somalia ranked 161 out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders 2021 World Press Freedom Index.<sup>[142]</sup> Harassment, arrests and terrorist attacks targeting journalists across Somalia remained endemic. The UK provided media training to journalists, including to 19 Somali journalists on raising awareness of climate issues ahead of the UN Climate Change Conference COP26.

The UK worked with the Somali authorities to reduce incidents of abuse and exploitation by Somali security forces. UK funding promoted respect for human rights in the Somali Police Force by mainstreaming human rights in training and supporting development of codes of conduct. The UK also invested in support to communities to improve access to justice services. This included a pilot project that brought together female community leaders, security officials and clan elders to improve awareness and women’s access to justice. Seventy-three percent of participating security officials reported a better understanding of the needs of women, men and children in the justice system.

## South Sudan

Although the 2018 Peace Agreement remains in place, parties to the agreement and other groups continued to perpetrate human rights abuses and violations in 2021. These included arbitrary killings and arrests, abductions, torture, conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), forced military conscription, and looting and destruction of civilian property. South Sudan also suffered from a

humanitarian and food insecurity crisis affecting millions of people.

The South Sudanese government committed to defending freedom of expression; however, during 2021 there was widespread repression of free speech and the right to peaceful assembly.<sup>[143]</sup> Protests in August led to harassment of journalists and media organisations, arrests of civil society representatives, and threats to use live ammunition.<sup>[144]</sup> In response, the UK lobbied the South Sudanese government and delivered a public Troika (UK, US, Norway) statement in September. Following these actions, all individuals who had been arbitrarily detained were released. Despite our lobbying, there was no progress on the investigation into the killing of journalist Christopher Allen in 2017. The UK continued funding media organisations to support the work and protection of journalists more broadly.

There were significant levels of sub-national conflict, with reported abuses and violations, including killings. All parties to the conflict continued to recruit children as soldiers.<sup>[145]</sup> Significant sub-national conflict took place in Jonglei. Here, UK-funded mediation between armed actors and community leaders helped reduce conflict, supported affected communities and enabled the return of abducted women and children. In Western Equatoria, the outbreak of sub-national conflict drove a spike in serious human rights abuses. Dozens of civilians were killed, homes were looted and burned, and fighting displaced 80,000 people.<sup>[146]</sup> The UK will continue to work with the South Sudanese government, and other actors including community leaders and armed groups, to urge them to

[140] [https://data.unicef.org/resources/data\\_explorer/unicef\\_f?ag=UNICEF&df=GLOBAL\\_DATAFLOW&ver=1.0&dq=SOM.PT\\_F\\_15-49\\_FGM.&startPeriod=1970&endPeriod=2022](https://data.unicef.org/resources/data_explorer/unicef_f?ag=UNICEF&df=GLOBAL_DATAFLOW&ver=1.0&dq=SOM.PT_F_15-49_FGM.&startPeriod=1970&endPeriod=2022)

[141] 2021 Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict

[142] <https://rsf.org/en/somalia>

[143] <https://twitter.com/MFASouthSudan/status/1419379653899325446>

[144] <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/09/south-sudan-end-new-wave-of-repression-against-peaceful-protests/>

[145] <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=27523&LangID=E>

[146] <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/12/south-sudan-survivors-describe-killings-mass-displacement-and-terror-amid-fighting-in-western-equatoria/>



address the causes of the conflict in Western Equatoria and other areas of South Sudan.

Parties to the 2018 Peace Agreement and other armed groups committed CSRV, including rape, gang-rape, forced nudity and humiliation.<sup>[147]</sup>

A UK-funded gender adviser in South Sudan's ceasefire monitoring body provided detailed reporting on CRSV in 2021. The UK also linked progress made by South Sudan's armed forces on their CRSV action plan as a benchmark for any future lifting of the UN Arms Embargo on South Sudan.

Despite welcome commitment from the South Sudanese government to tackle impunity for human rights violations, the Hybrid Court, intended to try the most serious crimes, was not established. The death penalty remained, an issue heightened by weak checks and balances within the justice system. 56 individuals were extra-judicially executed in Warrap and Lakes State as part of security crackdowns.<sup>[148]</sup> Individuals, arbitrarily detained in secret prisons, were also subjected to degrading treatment, including torture.<sup>[149]</sup>

Gender Based Violence (GBV) survivors struggled to access support and justice. The UK supported UN programmes to improve the effectiveness of South Sudan's GBV Court, access to legal aid, and support to the passage of an Anti-GBV Bill. The UK continued our six-year, £25 million programme with the International Medical Corps to provide support to GBV survivors. The UK also funded 2,154 instances of GBV care through the Health-Pooled Fund between April and December 2021.

Corruption and illicit flows continued to divert funds from citizens whilst fuelling human rights abuses and violations. In April, pursuant to the Global Anti-Corruption Sanctions Regulations 2021, the UK imposed a travel ban and asset freeze on Sudanese businessman Ashraf

Seed Ahmed Hussein Ali ('Al Cardinal'), for his involvement in the misappropriation of South Sudanese state assets.

The humanitarian situation deteriorated further with 8.3 million people in need of humanitarian assistance and famine-like conditions identified in parts of the country. South Sudan remained one of the most dangerous operating environments for humanitarian workers, with 25 humanitarian workers killed in 2021, out of 123 globally.<sup>[150]</sup> Conflict, bureaucratic impediments and widespread flooding reduced access to those in need. Attacks and detention of humanitarian workers, theft or destruction of assets and operational interference worsened the situation. In Pibor and Renk humanitarian activities had to be suspended whilst threats were addressed.

The UK worked with other donors, UN agencies, NGOs and the Red Cross movement to provide life-saving assistance and protection to civilians. The UK also implemented a revised protection, inclusion and access strategy to support the South Sudanese government as they help citizens and protect humanitarian workers.

The UK will continue to seek progress on human rights in South Sudan, underpinned by our efforts to support full implementation of the 2018 Peace Agreement. The UK will continue to support freedom of expression and encourage the South Sudanese government to uphold its commitments during the constitution-making process and in the run up to potential elections. The UK will also continue to support survivors of GBV and address the drivers of conflict through peacebuilding interventions.

## Sri Lanka

The overall human rights situation continued to deteriorate in 2021.

There was increased surveillance, harassment and intimidation of civil society, continued marginalisation of minority communities, several deaths in police custody, a number of lengthy detentions without charge, and further setbacks on post-conflict accountability.

Human rights groups, journalists and families of the disappeared reported increasing surveillance, harassment and intimidation by Sri Lankan security forces. In September, the UN's High Commissioner for Human Rights updated the Human Rights Council (HRC) that this intimidation had broadened to include students, academics, medical professionals and religious leaders critical of government policies. She highlighted concerns that new regulations under the Prevention of Terrorism Act were being drafted that could further restrict civic space, and allow for greater scrutiny of minority groups. A number of peaceful demonstrations were met with excessive use of force by the police, and the arrest or detention of protestors.

Marginalisation of minority groups continued. In February, the government lifted its ban on mandatory cremations for those deceased due to COVID-19 – a measure that impacted Muslim and some Christian minorities – but there were continued restrictions on where burials could take place. In April, the government approved a draft ban on face coverings such as the burqa and niqab. In February and April, the government proscribed a number of Tamil and Muslim groups under terrorism legislation, including groups de-proscribed under the previous government, and some local religious and welfare organisations.

Restrictions on Tamil commemorative spaces continued, with Tamil war memorials targeted by security forces. In October, the President appointed a new 'One Country One Law' taskforce led by controversial

[147] <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/situation-south-sudan-report-secretary-general-s20211015-enar>

[148] <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=27523&LangID=E>

[149] <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=27523&LangID=E>

[150] <https://aidworkersecurity.org>

Buddhist monk Gnanasara Thero who has been associated with alleged anti-Muslim campaigns and riots, and made inflammatory statements about Evangelical Christian groups.

Communities in the North and East voiced concern about alleged land grabs by government-led development schemes (Forestry Taskforce, Wildlife Taskforce and the Department of Archaeology) marginalising Tamil and Muslim communities, as well as the continued role of the military in land occupation and acquisition in the North. The militarisation of civilian functions continued, with the COVID-19 response and food security response led by the Ministry of Defence. More positively, in November, the government transferred the NGO Secretariat from the Ministry of Defence to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

At least six deaths in police custody were reported in 2021. In April and May, statements by the Bar Association of Sri Lanka decried excessive use of force and said several deaths in custody had “all the hallmarks of extrajudicial killings”. There were also allegations of mistreatment in detention.

The government expanded its use of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) despite longstanding calls from international partners for its replacement with human rights compliant counter-terrorism legislation. Arrests under the act continued, including of two opposition MPs and of Tamils memorialising individuals who died in the war. In March, the government announced new regulations under the PTA with powers to arrest and send individuals to a rehabilitation centre for up to two years to be “deradicalised” without judicial oversight. These regulations were temporarily suspended in August following an interim order from the Supreme Court.

Prominent individuals such as human rights lawyer Hejaz Hizbullah, arrested under the PTA in April 2020, remained in detention without charge. The UK continued to voice concerns about his case in statements to the UN Human Rights Council (HRC).<sup>[151]</sup> The UK welcomed the release on bail of Muslim poet Ahnaf Jazeem in December who had been detained for 18 months.

The UK raised concerns about the human rights situation with the Sri Lankan government, and at the HRC. In March, the HRC adopted resolution 46/1, led by the UK and Core Group partners, on promoting accountability, reconciliation and human rights in Sri Lanka. The Government of Sri Lanka opposed the resolution and continued to reverse progress on post-conflict accountability. Government appointments of figures associated with alleged human rights violations undermined the independence and credibility of transitional justice institutions such as the Office on Missing Persons and the Office of Reparations.

In December, the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions downgraded the Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission due to concerns about its compliance with international standards. There were several setbacks in emblematic human rights cases. In October, the Attorney General withdrew the indictment against former Navy Commander Admiral Wasantha Karannagoda in the “Navy 11” case involving the alleged enforced disappearance of eleven youths in 2008-2009. President Rajapaksa subsequently appointed Karannagoda as Governor of the North-Western Province in December.

The UK will continue to press for progress on human rights, gender equality, freedom of religion or belief and protection for minorities and vulnerable groups. The UK will invest in programmes that support conflict-affected communities and

promote the role of civil society, while underlining the continued importance of post-conflict reconciliation and accountability.

## Sudan

Human rights deteriorated substantially following the coup on 25 October and the subsequent political crisis. The military declared a State of Emergency, detained the Prime Minister and members of the civilian government, and restricted access to the internet. The Sudanese people’s rights to freedom of peaceful assembly, association and expression were severely limited; the security forces unlawfully detained hundreds of political actors and used violence against peaceful protestors. At least 52 protestors were killed between 25 October and 31 December, and there were allegations of sexual violence against women and girls by the security forces during demonstrations. In December, the military issued a decree ordering the restoration of powers of arrest and detention to the intelligence services.

Many of the media freedom gains since the 2019 revolution were reversed. The authorities replaced the heads of two state-media institutions, suspended radio outlets that criticised the coup, and harassed and intimidated journalists. Prior to the coup, UK funding to the Thomson Foundation trained journalists to understand and communicate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic accurately and ethically.

The former civilian-led government took some positive steps on human rights reforms as part of Sudan’s transition to democracy. In August, Sudan ratified the Convention Against Torture (CAT) and the International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED). There was some positive engagement between the Government of Sudan and the International Criminal Court (ICC), including a visit by the newly

[151] <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/un-human-rights-council-46-interactive-dialogue-with-the-high-commissioner-for-human-rights-on-sri-lanka>

appointed ICC Chief Prosecutor, which concluded with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding. Despite this, overall progress on delivering justice and accountability for past human rights violations and abuses was limited: the military postponed the investigation into the killing of protestors on 3 June 2019, and the ICC paused their investigative activities in Sudan as a result of insecurity following the coup. In November, the military agreed to investigate the killing and abuse of protestors since the coup, but this has not materialised.

Long-standing challenges persisted. Incidents of intercommunal violence dramatically increased across Sudan, with hundreds killed and 200,000 people displaced in Darfur across November and December alone. Despite the establishment of bodies such as the Permanent Ceasefire Committee in Darfur, the implementation of the Juba Peace Agreement (JPA) continued to face severe delays, as did the National Plan for the Protection of Civilians. Some JPA signatories also engaged in destabilising the transitional government and supporting the coup. The root causes of conflict continued to go unaddressed and the political instability only served to exacerbate the fragile situation in Darfur and other historically marginalised areas of Sudan.

Throughout 2021, the UK raised concerns about increasing levels of violence and reinforced the need for human rights to be respected at meetings of the UN Security Council (UNSC). Following the coup, the UK repeatedly called for the release of all those unlawfully detained and for the Sudanese people to be able to peacefully protest without fear of violence. The then Minister for Africa, Vicky Ford MP, condemned the actions of the military in the House

of Commons on the day of the coup, and the UK maintained pressure on the military to restore Sudan's transition to democracy through statements issued by the then Foreign Secretary,<sup>[152]</sup> the Troika (UK, Norway, US),<sup>[153]</sup> and the Quad (UK, Saudi Arabia, UAE, US).<sup>[154]</sup>

At the UN Human Rights Council, the UK led the effort to secure support for a resolution on Sudan,<sup>[155]</sup> which was unanimously adopted on 5 November, and designated an expert on human rights to monitor and report on the situation in cooperation with the UN Joint Human Rights Office. The then Foreign Secretary discussed Sudan with their G7 counterparts on 11 December and released a statement calling for accountability for human rights violations.<sup>[156]</sup>

Through programme work, the UK continued to support the Sudanese-led movement to eradicate Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), building on longstanding efforts to change social norms, support an improved legal environment, and strengthen systems combatting FGM. To promote freedom of peaceful assembly and association, the UK provided funding to support trade union reform. The UK also continued to provide support to the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS), mandated to assist the democratic transition by supporting institutional reforms and the promotion and protection of human rights.

The UK will continue to engage with all Sudanese parties to encourage dialogue and provide support to UN efforts to help find a lasting solution to the political crisis. The UK will continue to lobby Sudan to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and will also contribute to efforts concerning

Sudan at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC). The UK will urge the Sudanese authorities to continue the former civilian-led government's previous human rights trajectory to ensure hard-won gains are not lost.

## Syria

The dire human rights situation continued to deteriorate in 2021, due in no small part to the economic crisis caused by the Assad regime and COVID-19. The Assad regime continued to place severe restrictions on civil and political rights and bears the gravest responsibility for many of the crimes and abuses committed in Syria. Along with the regime and its backers, proscribed terrorist organisations and other armed groups continued to inflict arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, torture and sexual violence on Syria's people.

In its February report, the UN Commission of Inquiry (COI) noted the tenth anniversary of the conflict.<sup>[157]</sup> The report was a stark reminder of the scale of human rights violations and abuses Syrians have endured. Over half the population, approximately 11.5 million individuals, have been displaced; many have been forced to flee internally or seek asylum abroad due to war crimes and breaches of international humanitarian law. Syrians have suffered immensely from widespread aerial and artillery bombardments, they have endured chemical weapons attacks, modern day sieges, and severe restrictions on access to humanitarian aid. An estimated 13.4 million Syrians desperately require humanitarian assistance.

Human rights violations and abuses continued unchecked across regime-held territory, including assassinations of opposition figures,

[152] <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-condemns-military-coup-in-sudan>

[153] <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/sudan-troika-statement-october-2021--2>

[154] <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/sudan-quad-statement-november-2021>

[155] <https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/S-32/2>

[156] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/g7-foreign-and-development-ministers-meeting-11-12-december-2021-chairs-statements/g7-foreign-and-development-ministers-meeting-december-2021-chairs-statement>

[157] UN Commission of Inquiry Report Feb-Mar 2021

arbitrary arrests and detention. Within detention facilities, people suffered from cruel and inhumane treatment. Torture and executions were rampant. The COI documented the use of siege-like tactics by regime forces and its militias in flagrant violation of human rights, including access to adequate food, healthcare and freedom of movement, which may also amount to the war crime of collective punishment. The report also highlighted how regime forces resorted to the war crime of hostage-taking.

In Idlib and western Aleppo, armed hostilities continued to have a significant impact on civilians, despite a fragile ceasefire in place since March 2020. Sustained attacks from aerial and ground offensives devastated civilian infrastructure, including hospitals. The COI noted the dire living conditions at Al’Hawl and Al’ Rawj camps in north-east Syria. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that 90 individuals were murdered there in 2021.<sup>[158]</sup>

The UK plays a leading role in mobilising the international community on the situation in Syria. In March, the UK pledged at least £205 million at the Brussels Conference on “Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region”. The UK remained one of the largest donors to the Syrian crisis, committing over £3.7 billion in UK aid since 2012. The UK has supported millions of people, providing food, clean water and healthcare, and our funding will continue to do so. In 2021, the UK strongly supported efforts at the UN to ensure continued humanitarian access to the most vulnerable in Syria.

The UK sustained pressure to improve human rights in Syria, including through leadership on three Syria resolutions at the UN Human

Rights Council (HRC), which renewed the mandate of the COI. The UK repeatedly echoed the pleas of the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen, for meaningful action on the issue of detainees and missing persons.

The UK continued to support programmes to help address the impact of the conflict on civilians in Syria and violations of international humanitarian law (IHL) and human rights. The UK has contributed to efforts on accountability and justice by supporting human rights monitoring and documentation. Our efforts have enhanced evidence collection for war crimes committed by the regime and Daesh. Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is particularly widespread. UK assistance to the United Nations Population Fund has helped provide dedicated gender-based violence (GBV) assistance to 25,670 individuals, supplied 166,973 dignity kits and supported up to 62 Safe Spaces for women and girls to help survivors of GBV.

The UK continued to support the UN International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) to fulfil its mandate of investigating the most serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights violations and abuses committed during the conflict in Syria. The UK co-sponsored the UN General Assembly resolution, which established the IIIM, and have contributed £975,000 since its establishment in 2016.

The UK has imposed sanctions on the Assad regime in pursuit of an end to the violent repression of civilians in Syria, and to increase pressure for a negotiated political solution. On 15 March 2021, marking the tenth anniversary of the Syria conflict, the UK introduced six new designations on Assad regime

associates, all responsible for the repression of Syrians. UK Syria sanctions now impose asset freezes and travel bans on 352 designated persons (282 individuals and 70 entities).

The UK will continue pursuing accountability for the most serious crimes committed in Syria and support Geir Pedersen’s efforts to deliver peace. The UK firmly believes that UNSCR 2254 offers a clear path out of the conflict, which protects the rights of all Syrians.

## Turkmenistan

The overall human rights situation in Turkmenistan showed no improvement in 2021. Restrictions on freedom of expression and on freedom of religion or belief, allegations of torture, poor conditions in prisons, gender discrimination, and restrictions on the rights of LGBT+ people persisted. There were continued reports of victims of enforced disappearances being held in incommunicado detention. Given the likelihood of persecution in-country, most human rights defenders still worked from abroad.

Severe restrictions on freedom of expression remained. The media in Turkmenistan is under state control. Internet access was restricted and the authorities blocked the use of Virtual Private Networks (VPNs). Most social media sites were blocked. Foreign publications were prohibited. Reporters Without Borders ranked Turkmenistan 178 of 180 countries in its 2021 World Press Freedom Index.<sup>[159]</sup> Demonstrations or protests were not tolerated by the authorities. Individuals speaking out, even on such matters as employment disputes,<sup>[160]</sup> or COVID-19, faced harassment and arrest.<sup>[161]</sup>

Conditions in prisons were reported to be harsh with Human Rights

[158] UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Statement Jan 2022

[159] Turkmenistan | RSF

[160] Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 24 July, 2021: *The European Parliament Was Told Of Her Plight. Then This Turkmen Doctor Disappeared*, <https://www.rferl.org/a/turkmen-doctor-disappears/31374849.html>

[161] International Partnership for Human Rights, 5 October, 2021: *Turkmenistan’s government targets critics at home and abroad in its relentless crackdown on dissent*, <https://www.iphronline.org/turkmenistan-s-government-targets-critics-at-home-and-abroad-in-its-relentless-crackdown-on-dissent.html>

Watch stating that “torture and ill-treatment continue to be endemic within the prison system”.<sup>[162]</sup>

The ‘Prove They Are Alive!’ campaign claimed that there were a minimum of 72 prisoners subjected to enforced disappearance in the Turkmen prison system.<sup>[163]</sup>

More positively, the President of Turkmenistan approved the National Action Plan for Gender Equality in Turkmenistan for 2021 to 2025 at the end of 2020. By law, women have full legal equality with men. Nevertheless, women continued to experience discrimination due to cultural biases. Working with the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), the UK supported a project to promote a human-rights based and gender-transformative approach in the police and among young people. The project aimed to promote gender equality and inclusiveness and address entrenched discriminatory behaviours in the police and by users of social media.

Also positively, in April, Turkmenistan released a National Action Plan for Human Rights for the period 2021 to 2025. The Action Plan is wide-ranging and references UN standards and conventions. However, in 2021 there was little evidence of progress on the range of Universal Periodic Review (UPR) recommendations accepted by Turkmenistan in 2018. The mid-term progress report due in 2020 has yet to be submitted. There was no evidence that Turkmenistan worked in partnership with the International Labour Organisation to eliminate the use of forced labour in the cotton harvest, despite agreeing to a 2018 UPR recommendation. By the end of 2021, there was no evidence of action towards signing the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT) despite accepting

the recommendation to do so in the 2018 UPR.

Registration, or re-registration of a religious organisation in Turkmenistan continued to prove difficult. More positively, in May, as part of a wider Presidential pardon during Ramadan, 16 Jehovah’s Witnesses imprisoned for refusing compulsory military service were released. However, there continued to be no alternative to military service available for conscientious objectors, who face prison sentences of up to two years.

Turkmenistan’s legislation criminalising sexual intercourse between men, with a penalty of up to two years’ imprisonment, remained in force.

International human rights NGOs were not permitted to operate in, nor to visit Turkmenistan. There were reports that overseas-based activists had been subjected to intimidation by the Turkmen authorities.<sup>[164]</sup> Activists were detained in Turkey and Russia and then removed to Turkmenistan where they were held in incommunicado detention. Relatives of foreign-based activists were harassed by the authorities.

Organisations have raised concerns that Turkmenistan’s consulates abroad will not renew or replace passports, insisting citizens return to Turkmenistan to renew their identity documents.<sup>[165]</sup> Scheduled flights to Turkmenistan were halted in March 2020 to prevent the spread of COVID-19. As a result, many Turkmen migrants cannot return home and their documents have expired, restricting their ability to reside abroad legally.<sup>[166]</sup>

The UK will continue to promote human rights through our policy and project work and will engage with the Turkmen government for this purpose.

## Uzbekistan

2021 saw both positive and negative developments. The government continued its effort to eradicate forced and child labour. There were some positive initiatives tackling gender-based violence and harassment. Uzbekistan engaged with the international community through the UN Human Rights Council. However, there was backsliding on media freedom, a lack of support for independent civil society, and no progress on LGBT+ rights. Torture and mistreatment in some detention centres continued and investigations into allegations lacked transparency. An OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) Election Observation Mission welcomed electoral process improvements during October’s Presidential elections but highlighted significant shortcomings during the campaign and the vote itself.

The UK provided support to the Human Rights Commission of the Uzbek Parliament, and ODIHR’s Election Observation Mission. Our concerns were raised regularly, by the Minister for Human Rights, Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon, by Minister Wendy Morton, by the UK’s International Ambassador for Human Rights, Rita French, and by embassy officials.

Uzbekistan continued to make progress on eradicating forced and child labour. In 2021, the International Labour Organization reported that only 4% of workers were forced to take part in the 2020 cotton harvest. Attention has turned to Uzbekistan’s new Labour Code, to protect workers’ rights during the ongoing privatisation process.

Progress on gender equality and women’s rights was mixed. The enduring impact of the pandemic

[162] Human Rights Watch, World Report 2021, Turkmenistan, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/turkmenistan>

[163] Prove They Are Alive!, 1 December, 2021: Updated Report Documents 162 Cases of Enforced Disappearances in Turkmenistan, [https://provetheyarealive.org/disappeared\\_list\\_2021/](https://provetheyarealive.org/disappeared_list_2021/)

[164] World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), 5 November, 2021: *Turkey: Pressure on Turkmen nationals in the country must stop*, <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/statements/turkey-pressure-on-turkmen-nationals-in-the-country-must-stop>

[165] *Ibid*

[166] Aljazeera, 12 November, 2021: *Turkmenistan’s dissidents fear crackdown in Turkish exile*, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/12/turkmenistans-dissidents-fear-crackdown-in-turkish-exile>

continued to drive high rates of domestic violence and suicide amongst women. A high-profile sexual assault case involving a university student drew widespread condemnation, and law enforcement responded quickly. Uzbekistan developed a National Action Plan at the end of 2021. However, legal protection needed further improvement, including criminalising rape within marriage. According to official data, over 100 women face violence and harassment on average per day. Less than 20% of aggressors are involved in remedial programmes, and only 0.2% are prosecuted. The UK held a Gender Equality Week in Uzbekistan, highlighting the high rates of domestic violence and suicide amongst women in the country.

Media freedom worsened, with certain websites and social media outlets blocked, and journalists pressured into self-censorship or refused accreditation. One prominent foreign journalist was stripped of accreditation and forcibly removed from the country. The year saw an increase in criminal investigations and prosecutions of critical, independent voices. In July, access to TikTok, Twitter, VKontakte, WeChat and Skype messenger was blocked. In November, more social media platforms were temporarily blocked, notably YouTube and Telegram.

Despite being named a priority for Uzbekistan in President Mirziyoyev's inauguration speech in December, civil society support remains limited. The registration process for independent NGOs is opaque and arbitrarily restrictive – some were rejected repeatedly for minor grammatical errors in documentation.

LGBT+ rights remained non-existent. The proposed public consultation on decriminalising same-sex relations between men did not take place. One incident involved a violent physical attack and inflammatory online commentary against a blogger in April, with no subsequent legal action except against the victim. One Presidential candidate called for special “cure” medical treatment, as well as removal of citizenship and

deportation of homosexual citizens. Anecdotally, police continued to employ physical and psychological intimidation – including threats of outing and blackmail. There were reports of forced anal examinations of suspects, with results used as a basis for court decisions, and “corrective rape” against both men and women.

The government remained engaged on freedom of religion or belief, particularly with UN Special Rapporteurs on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Human Rights in Counter Terrorism. Relaxation of rules on wearing religious clothing led to an increase in practising Muslims outwardly expressing their religion. However, there were two media reports of practising Muslim men being forced to shave by local law enforcement. A new law “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations” entered into force in July but failed to take into account a number of important recommendations by the Venice Commission. The definition of terrorism-related offences in domestic law remains imprecise, leading to concerns about discrimination against religious minorities.

Positively, President Mirziyoyev announced in February that Uzbekistan would ratify the Optional Protocol of the 1984 UN Convention Against Torture. A Parliamentary Committee was set up to oversee the implementation of this and other human rights conventions. However, there remained no accountability for pre-2016 torture practices and other human rights violations, undermining confidence in the justice system. Many torture victims remained incarcerated for national security offences. Prison conditions saw improvements, with good practice on family access, medical and psychological services. Complaint boxes were installed, under the supervision of the Ombudsman. More action was needed to improve conditions: many prisons still have inadequate facilities, poor sanitation and food quality, with prisoners

experiencing ill-treatment and endemic health issues.

The UK encourages Uzbekistan to take an active role in the UN Human Rights Council (HRC). The British Embassy will work with the Ombudsman and prison authorities on penal reform; and continue its five-year project ‘Effective Governance for Economic Development’, supporting the Uzbek government to develop evidence-based policy formulation, implementation, and communication.

## Venezuela

Venezuela's human rights and humanitarian crises worsened, with civil society actors continuing to operate in a very challenging environment. The International Criminal Court (ICC) opened an investigation into crimes against humanity. The United Nations' International Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela (IIFFM) report detailed a politically controlled judicial system. Access to basic public services and food remained severely limited for many citizens. The authorities continue to deprioritise women's and LGBT+ issues. There was evidence of significant electoral irregularities in regional elections held in November.

During his mission to Caracas in November, the ICC Prosecutor, Karim Khan, announced the commencement of an investigation backed by a commitment from local authorities to cooperate. The decision to initiate the first ICC investigation in the Americas is the result of the Prosecutor finding reasonable grounds to believe that crimes against humanity had been committed and that the national judicial system had failed to investigate them adequately. Judicial reform was under discussion in the Mexico negotiations between the Maduro regime and the opposition before dialogue was suspended by the regime. The regime announced a number of laws to reform the judiciary in September and December; it remains

to be seen whether these will address core concerns.

The UN's IFFM identified that the justice system played a significant role in the State's repression of people perceived as opponents.<sup>[167]</sup> In May, authorities seized the headquarters of newspaper *El Nacional*, after the Supreme Court ordered it to pay an exorbitant sum for alleged defamation of National Assembly member Diosdado Cabello. National Assembly members were banned from leaving the country and 28 were disqualified from holding political office. Opposition leader Freddy Guevara spent a month detained before being released to participate in the talks in Mexico in August. Imprisonment conditions remain a concern – three political prisoners, including a former minister, died in custody.

Reported attacks against human rights defenders increased 145% compared with 2020.<sup>[168]</sup> In January, State intelligence officials detained five men from the public health NGO *Azul Positivo*; they were conditionally released a month later. In July, members of human rights NGO *FundaRedes* were detained after identifying links between Venezuelan authorities and armed groups in border state *Apure*. Two were released in October, but the Director remains imprisoned and in a precarious health situation. An administrative ruling with new measures to restrict international funding of NGOs came into effect in May. Through capacity building programme work, the UK provided support to Venezuelan civil society actors and has created safe spaces to share information regarding human rights violations.

The number of fatal security operations conducted by the authorities remained high and the majority followed patterns of previous extrajudicial killings. National Police Special Forces killed at least 14 young men in an operation in *Caracas* in January, and detained

and subsequently killed five people in *Apure* in March. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) cited some progress in enquires by the courts into cases of extrajudicial executions.

Difficulty accessing water, gas and petrol remained a concern, especially outside *Caracas*. After years of negotiations, the World Food Programmes (WFP) was granted approval to launch a school feeding programme, a milestone in responding to Venezuela's food insecurity crisis. The number of Venezuelans who have fled the country reached 6 million. The UK is a donor to the Humanitarian Response Plan for Venezuela and remained engaged in efforts to ensure access to vaccines, including by donating £250,000 to UNOCHA's Venezuelan Humanitarian Fund.

In February, Nicolas Maduro said LGBT+ rights were not a priority in his agenda and maintained the ban on same sex relationships within the military after reforming the Military Code. Venezuela lags behind other countries in the region on women's rights issues, such as the decriminalisation of abortion, which did not feature on public policy agendas. A UK-funded programme began in November to teach 350 girls outside the school system, and their guardians, about sexual health education and menstrual hygiene.

Regional elections took place in November. Observers identified some improvements in electoral conditions and structures, such as the newly appointed board of directors of the National Electoral Council with two opposition members, but there were serious shortcomings in the electoral process and evidence of significant electoral irregularities. Prior to the election, the UK provided capacity building for civil society organisations and journalists on conditions for free elections.

The UK will continue to prioritise LGBT+, girls' and women's rights.

The UK will continue to support civil society actors in Venezuela through capacity building and by calling out violations of human rights. The UK will continue working with UN agencies to support the implementation of the Humanitarian Response Plan.

## Yemen

The human rights situation in Yemen did not improve during 2021 and we remain concerned about worsening conditions in 2022. Human rights violations and abuses by all sides were reported, including attacks on women's rights, social and economic rights, humanitarian access, freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression. There were reports of continued recruitment of child soldiers, ongoing arbitrary detentions, torture and sexual violence.

The mandate of the UN Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen was not renewed in 2021. The Group's crucial role provided ongoing reporting on the conflict. The UK supported the Group's mandate renewal and urged the parties to investigate allegations and take action to promote and protect human rights. The UK continued to support the UN Special Envoy for Yemen and encouraged all parties to find a political solution to the conflict, to protect human rights and address the humanitarian crisis.

Increased hostilities during 2021 contributed to the deterioration in the human rights and humanitarian situation, notably the Houthi offensive on *Marib*. There were weekly Houthi attacks using short-range missiles. In October, the UK supported a UN Security Council (UNSC) press statement condemning Houthi attacks, in particular the 8 October attack on King Abdullah Airport and the drone attacks striking the *Abha* civilian airport. The Houthis obstructed humanitarian assistance, including by detaining UN staff and

[167] <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session48/Documents/A-HRC-48-69-EN.docx>

[168] Information provided by local NGO Centre for Human Rights Defenders and Justice. The report is not public yet but it will be available at <https://centrodefensores.org.ve/#:~:text=El%20Centro%20para%20los%20Defensores,en%20Venezuela%20conforme%20a%20las>

forcing female humanitarian workers to have a chaperone.

The UK continued to monitor allegations of international humanitarian law (IHL) violations relating to Coalition airstrikes in Yemen. The UK raised the importance of IHL and of conducting thorough investigations into alleged violations with Saudi Arabia. The UK provided training courses, advice, and guidance to support the Saudi military's compliance with IHL, including operational planning and Strategic Communications courses for the Saudi Ministry of Defence and senior visits to assess progress against IHL standards. The UK assessed that Saudi Arabia made significant improvements over recent years in incorporating international humanitarian law considerations, for example, leafleting the civilian population warning them in advance of airstrikes in Sana'a, and publishing satellite imagery demonstrating they were targeting legitimate military facilities.

Since the conflict began, there has been a significant increase in reports of gender-based violence (GBV). During 2021, the UK provided funding through the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund to support the UN to create a more inclusive political dialogue through non-governmental channels and civil society, particularly the inclusion of marginalised groups, including women.

As part of the UK's funding to UNICEF, the UK has supported over 2 million pregnant women and new mothers with nutrition counselling and education since 2018. The UK has also helped ensure 85,000 women have trained medical support during childbirth since 2018. In October, the UK co-hosted the international gender co-ordination group with the Netherlands to boost international efforts to tackle GBV in Yemen.

Persecution on religious grounds against Christians, Jews and the Baha'i continued including the ongoing imprisonment of one member of Yemen's Jewish community, Levi Marhabi, and

members of the Baha'i community. The UK monitored the treatment of the Baha'is, including meeting the Baha'i community in the UK.

Child soldier recruitment persisted, and the UN Panel of Experts reported that 562 children aged 10-17, who had been recruited by the Houthis, died in 2021. The Panel also reported the Houthis had used summer camps to indoctrinate children. The UK participated in the UNSC Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, which responded to the UN Secretary General's annual report on Children and Armed Conflict, negotiating and issuing recommendations to priority countries.

The UK has been one of the largest donors of humanitarian support since the crisis began, contributing more than £1 billion in aid. The UK provided £87 million in aid for the financial year 2021 – 2022. This provided at least 1.6 million people with access to clean drinking water, supported 400 clinics offering primary healthcare and fed 240,000 of the most vulnerable Yemenis every month. The UK worked with partners to ensure priority was given to those suffering the most from food insecurity, to marginalised communities and vulnerable displaced people, and to those living in conflict-affected areas.

An end to the conflict is needed to see any sustainable improvement in human rights in Yemen. The UK has continued to work with countries in the region and the wider international community to drive forwards peace efforts, in addition to the contribution of humanitarian assistance.

The UK will continue to engage with all parties in Yemen to promote and protect human rights by continuing to fund projects in Yemen under the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund.

## Zimbabwe

The human rights situation in Zimbabwe continued to be challenging in 2021. The human rights monitoring group, Zimbabwe Peace Project, recorded 2,391

human rights violations, a similar number to 2020. The most frequently recorded violations were intimidation and harassment of citizens, including by members of the ruling ZANU PF.

The government continued to use the legal system to impede opposition and hamper freedom of association, notably through partisan implementation of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions and lengthy pre-trial detentions. Opposition youth leader Makomborero Haruzivishe was held in pre-trial detention for nearly ten months pending appeal of his prison sentence for charges of inciting public violence. There was no conclusion to the trial of opposition members Joana Mamombe MP, Cecilia Chimhiri and Netsai Marova over a year after their arrest following their alleged abduction, torture and sexual assault.

A constitutional amendment in May granted the President the power to appoint judges to the Supreme and High Courts without public interview, further reducing the independence of the judiciary.

The government failed to increase security sector accountability through meaningful progress on implementation of the Motlanthe Commission of Inquiry recommendations following the violence on 1 August 2018, when members of the Zimbabwean security services opened fire on protesters, killing six and injuring many more. There was no progress on putting in place a meaningful independent complaints mechanism, despite a positive move in November 2020 to propose a new law. On 1 February, the UK used its autonomous Zimbabwe sanctions regime to hold to account four security officials responsible for some of the worst human rights violations committed under the Mnangagwa regime, including the August 2018 killings and a state-sponsored crackdown against protests in January 2019.

Inter-party violence intensified ahead of national elections in 2023. In October, opposition leader Nelson Chamisa's nationwide tour was met



with several incidents of intimidation and violent protest by ZANU-PF activists. The UK has not yet seen evidence of meaningful police investigations into these incidents.

The Media Institute of Southern Africa reported 23 human rights violations against journalists in 2021. Reporters Without Borders ranked Zimbabwe 130 out of 180 countries in 2021 in the World Press Freedom Index,<sup>[169]</sup> down four places from 2020. December's Data Protection Act introduced positive safeguards against cyber-bullying and harassment, criminalising child pornography and allowing admissibility of electronic evidence in courts. However, the Bill's lack of provisions for a data protection oversight mechanism and accountability measures for digital surveillance increased the scope for state control over freedom of expression. Eight community radio station licences were granted in September, but the majority were allocated to companies closely connected to the state and military.

Civil society operating space came under renewed threat. In November, the government tabled the Private and Voluntary Organisation Amendment Bill. If approved, the legislation will increase ministerial oversight and surveillance of civil society organisations (CSOs). There is a concern that the Bill's proposed prohibition of political lobbying and provisions against "supporting or opposing political parties" could be used to restrict the legitimate non-political activities of CSOs, including those working on human rights, humanitarian or development issues.

An estimated two million children did not have basic documentation in 2021, with the backlog increasing significantly due to constraints related to COVID-19. Gaps in basic documentation continued to be a major barrier to accessing social, economic and political rights, and have caused delays in planned

mobile voter registration work by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission.

Child marriage reportedly rose during the pandemic. Rates of gender-based violence (GBV) rose, while women's access to justice and essential services fell. The UK supported the government to prevent and respond to GBV and child protection violations through strengthening national systems and providing essential services for survivors.

Zimbabwe's healthcare system struggled with personnel shortages and a lack of basic supplies in 2021, undermining access to services for the poorest in society. Maternal mortality increased by 22% in the first eleven months of 2021 compared to the same period in 2020<sup>[170]</sup>. The UK continued to support the government with COVID-19 preparedness, as well as bolstering rural health care for sexual, reproductive, maternal, and child health. In June, the UK welcomed the launch of Zimbabwe's national disability policy.

The UK will continue to support the work of CSOs in Zimbabwe focussed on accountability, media freedom, access to justice and essential services, as well as the defence and promotion of human rights. The UK will hold the government to account by raising serious human rights violations publicly and privately. The UK will continue to provide development assistance to Zimbabwe with a focus on protecting the most vulnerable through humanitarian assistance and support to health, education, livelihoods and climate resilience.

[169] Zimbabwe | RSF

[170] Zimbabwe District Health Information Systems 2 (DHIS2) Monitoring Continuity of Essential Health Services Trend Data Analysis: November 2021.



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