



Human Rights & Democracy

The 2022 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office Report

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

July 2023



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Cover image: A group of children walking with the Ukrainian flag in the foreground.

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Preface by the Foreign Secretary, James Cleverly

Seventy-five years on from the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UK continues to stand with our partners to secure a stable and peaceful international order. Our resolve to ensure that everyone can enjoy their rights is unwavering.

With Russia waging its brutal war against freedom in Ukraine, we need to take hope from the international community coming together to demand justice. We have shown that actions have consequences and those responsible for human rights violations must pay the price.

As we survey the global human rights landscape in 2022, we should be emboldened by positive developments. Peaceful elections happen because brave individuals have called for change. We welcome every win on the human rights frontier.

But we must not be complacent. The overall trend is still bleak; the world is more volatile and polarised. Authoritarianism is on the rise and unscrupulous actors are working together to weaken agreed international norms.

The UK continues to speak out for truth. We have maximised the impact of all our diplomatic and development tools to protect fundamental freedoms. We make a positive and tangible impact on people's lives around the globe every day.

The multilateral system is the bedrock of global peace and prosperity. The international human rights institutions are a remarkable force for good. We use our influence in fora such as the UN, Council of Europe and G7 to highlight human rights violations and to galvanise swift action.

In response to the monstrous attack on Ukraine, the UK led efforts to suspend Russia from the Human Rights Council and the Council of Europe. We pressed the UN to

establish a Commission of Inquiry, which found that war crimes had been committed in Ukraine, and referred Russia to the International Criminal Court.

In Iran, there are reports of more than 22,000 people detained, including children. There are harrowing reports of torture and abuse in regime prisons. Iran's crackdown on protestors led to over 500 deaths, including 70 children. We will not shirk our responsibility to ensure the guilty are held accountable. In concert with our partners, we have coordinated sanctions on Iranian officials.

With violent conflict continuing to devastate the lives of innocent Sudanese people, the UK is working with our international partners to support the path to lasting and genuine peace. We continue to support the Sudanese in their path to democracy. Those who have committed human rights abuses must be held to account.

Stepping up our life saving humanitarian work is one of the themes of our International Development Strategy. We prioritise those in greatest need to prevent the worst forms of human suffering and drive a more effective international response to humanitarian crises. It is no coincidence that this is often in countries with bitter human rights crises, such as Afghanistan and Yemen.

We know the changing context means we have to go further and faster to reinvigorate progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, as set out in the Integrated Review Refresh. We are delivering reliable investment through up to £8 billion of UK-backed financing a year by 2025, while helping to build a bigger, better and fairer international financial system that rises to meet development challenges. We provide countries with the means needed to lift themselves out of poverty. We help them build accountable, effective and



inclusive state institutions that seek to protect the human rights of their whole population.

Women and girls should be free to reach their full potential. We will not tolerate efforts to reverse hard-won gains on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Our new Women and Girls Strategy shows how we are building a global network of partners committed to progressing gender equality. Women and girls will remain firmly at the centre of the FCDO's operations and investments. We will always strive to amplify their voice.

The report details some encouraging progress in many countries on LGBT+ rights, but it also identifies where many others are slipping backwards. The UK Government respects that all countries are on their own path. However, we will continue to stand against prejudice and support LGBT+ communities in the face of discrimination, as we have by co-chairing the Equal Rights Coalition with Argentina for three years, and we will continue to play a key role in its work.

We are proud of the UK's heritage and culture on human rights and democracy. But no country has all the answers to these global challenges. Every country can and must improve. We will continue to engage others with humility about our ongoing journey on these issues.

We will continue to work with old allies and new friends to make the vision of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights a reality.

When we work together, we see justice served. And we can give every person the freedom to thrive and prosper.

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

In the aftermath of the Second World War, countries came together vowing that such atrocities should never happen again. From that global exercise, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was born.

Over the subsequent decades, countries have worked together to strengthen the world's human rights architecture through a collection of agreements that guarantee the rights of every individual.

However, as we detail in this 2022 Annual Human Rights and Democracy Report, for far too many people, the hatred, depravity and atrocities of the Second World War have not been consigned to history. Too many repressive governments have chosen to disregard their international commitments, and rule through discrimination, persecution and violence.

The UK Government holds an unwavering conviction that the human rights of every person still matter. Our Annual Report details how we are working with our allies to stand up for the marginalised and repressed across the full range of our human rights work.

Turning to 2022, I wanted to highlight some key aspects of our work and programmes. As the Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, I am particularly proud of what we have achieved in 2022. We hosted a landmark international conference to intensify global action and signal our sustained resolve to tackle these crimes. During the last 6 years, I have been determined to ensure survivors are at the heart of our approach, as such, survivors were central to our conference and led discussions across all areas. The UK also announced our new three-year strategy, backed by up to £12.5 million of new funding that will help save and rebuild countless lives.

We also formally launched the Murad Code at the UN Security Council to advance the interests of survivors.

I would like specially to thank Kolbassia Haoussou and Nadine Tunasi; two courageous survivors for their support and engagement.

In October, I visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo, together with HRH The Duchess of Edinburgh, who has also inspired so many through her direct engagement, campaigning and commitment to preventing sexual violence in conflict. During our visit, we met with our dear friend, Nobel laureate, Dr Denis Mukwege, who through his courageous and exemplary leadership at the Panzi Hospital has helped survivors to rebuild their lives, both physically and through providing vital emotional support and mental health provisions.

We also witnessed the vital efforts of TRIAL International to enhance survivor access to justice, and the far-reaching impact of UK funded support to survivors, delivered by the Global Survivors Fund.

In relation to media freedom, the UK Government has also continued to focus on the importance of protecting journalists and media organisations as a key pillar of the human rights infrastructure. The media freedom coalition we launched with Canada in 2019 welcomed Norway and Sweden into its membership, and I was pleased to attend the meeting of the coalition in Estonia.

Turning to Freedom of Religion or Belief, in July I was honoured to host the 3rd International Ministerial Conference in London. Around 50 countries attended the conference to coordinate and strengthen global action, which again demonstrated the UK's strong leadership on this important and fundamental human rights issue.

We also continue to focus on and implement the recommendations of the Truro Report to ensure the FCDO's architecture is aligned to



deliver, and coordinate with my friend and colleague, Fiona Bruce MP, the UK FoRB Envoy, in her role as Chair of the International Freedom of Religion or Belief Alliance.

The UK has demonstrated its commitment and focus on human rights across the world. The two conferences we convened in 2022 also reflected our ability to pull together not just governments, but civil society, leaders, and survivors to strengthen our collective responses.

Across the full range of human rights, when discrimination is not identified and addressed, we often witness marginalisation, persecution, worse still, violence and attacks on individuals and communities. Therefore, it is important to act.

We should also acknowledge and recognise that different countries move at different speeds. Some face quite unique challenges. I believe we should be cognisant of where progress is being made and, as a constructive partner, lean in and share expertise and insight in order to accelerate further progress. There are occasions where I have seen private, effective, diplomacy unlock issues and cases. There are of course other times where through collaboration, and collective and public action, we have called out the most serious human rights violations.

Whatever the approach or the issue, and accepting that protecting and strengthening human rights poses difficult challenges, we can affect change through our advocacy and perseverance. Ultimately, if our work leads to changing the trajectory for the better for the lives of individuals and communities, then it's worth every second of our time.

CHAPTER 1: Democracy

Democracy and Democratic Freedoms

The UK supports a rules-based open international order, a world where democracy and freedoms grow and where autocracy is challenged. As Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said “We’re a country that stands up for our values...that defends democracy by actions not just words.”^[1]

However, 2022 saw ongoing authoritarian practices challenging the international order, and continuing the global decline in democratic freedoms. The NGO Freedom House^[2] recorded that global freedom had declined for the 17th consecutive year.

Throughout 2022, the UK continued to deliver on the Integrated Review commitment to “increase our efforts to protect open societies and democratic values where they [were] being undermined”. As the Foreign Secretary set out in his speech on Human Rights Day in December 2022,^[3] transparent, democratic governance is in the interests of all people, all economies and the long-term stability of every nation.

The UK took action to strengthen and protect democracy and freedom around the world, including through its policy and programme work on democratic governance, and through its funding of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy which uses expertise to support people around the world to strengthen democracy in their communities. Much of this work involves engagement with civil society partners

on issues including elections, transparency and open government, women’s political empowerment and digital democracy.

The UK worked with partners through the German G7 Presidency to underscore the enduring importance of democratic values. This culminated in the 2022 Resilient Democracies Statement, which was strongly supported by the UK, and built on the outcomes of the UK G7 Presidency in 2021 and its focus on open societies and democracy.

The UK is committed to taking a long-term approach to addressing the causes of democratic decline and to championing democratic governance. The Government’s Strategy for International Development,^[4] published in May, outlines this patient approach to development which affirms our support to freedom and democracy and the effective institutions which underpin development.

In light of the potential risks posed by authoritarianism, the UK launched a Ministerial Taskforce on Defending Democracy in November. This taskforce will look at foreign threats to our elections and electoral processes; disinformation; physical and cyber threats to our democratic institutions and those who represent them; foreign interference in public office, political parties and universities; and transnational repression in the UK.

Digital Democracy

Increasingly, people exercise their rights, access and share information,

express views and hold governments to account in the digital and online space. The UK worked with international partners to strengthen international norms around human rights and fundamental freedoms in the digital age and to reinforce support for a free, open, interoperable, secure and pluralistic internet that enables inclusive participation in democracy and where people can exercise their human rights. This included the UK’s active membership of the Freedom Online Coalition (FOC), in which the UK contributed to the Ottawa Agenda, a new set of recommendations for the promotion of internet freedom in the next decade.^[5]

Countering politically motivated internet shutdowns and restrictions was a key priority. There were 187 internet shutdowns across 35 countries in 2022.^[6] The UK joined the FOC Taskforce on Internet Shutdowns. At RightsCon and the United Nations (UN) Internet Governance Forum, the UK brought together countries, industry and the private sector to explore ways to address the challenges. The UK is proud to be chairing the FOC Taskforce on Internet Shutdowns in 2023, alongside the NGOs Access Now and the Global Network Initiative.

In October, the FOC issued a joint statement condemning the measures undertaken by Iran to restrict access to the internet following nationwide protests over the killing of Mahsa Amini. This was the first FOC statement to focus on shutdowns and restrictions in just one country,

[1] Prime Minister’s Mansion House speech, November 2022

[2] https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/FIW_2023_50Years_DigitalPDF.pdf

[3] Human Rights Day 2022: Foreign Secretary’s speech – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

[4] The UK Government’s Strategy for International Development – CP 676 (publishing.service.gov.uk)

[5] The Ottawa Agenda: Recommendations for Freedom Online (2023) <https://freedomonlinecoalition.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/FOC-Ottawa-Agenda.pdf>

[6] Access Now, “Weapons of Control, Shields of Impunity” (2023) <https://www.accessnow.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/2022-KIO-Report-final.pdf>

and the UK pushed hard for it to be approved by consensus, in order to set an important precedent.

At the Tallinn Digital Summit in October, with Estonia and NGO Access Now, the UK publicly launched its Technology for Democracy Cohort as part of the US-led second Summit for Democracy process. This brought together over 150 civil society, government and private sector participants to work on three priority areas: internet shutdowns and restrictions; emerging technology and democracy, and technology for good governance.

On 4 November, the UK announced that it would host the annual UNESCO

celebration on the importance of universal access to information in 2023, which will focus on the important nexus between internet connectivity and access to information, both of which are essential to the free flow of information and exercise of rights online.

In 2023, the UK will continue to champion digital democracy as part of its work to support healthy information ecosystems. The UK will advocate for a global internet that is open to all, and for human rights and fundamental freedoms to be at the centre of the development and use of digital technologies. Working with international partners, the UK will address internet shutdowns and restrictions through co-chairing of the

FOC Taskforce on Internet Shutdowns, co-leadership of the Technology for Democracy Cohort, and through multilateral fora including the G7 and UN Internet Governance Forum. The UK will also continue to work actively with its partners in the Council of Europe on the development of a new treaty on artificial intelligence and human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Elections

Democratic and open societies cannot flourish without credible and inclusive elections. Elections are a key test of a functioning democracy. They enable voters to hold those in public office to account. The UK

Kenya Elections – August 2022

UK support began early in the election cycle and included ODA spend of £7.5 million over two-and-a-half-years through the Kenya Elections Support Programme. Technical assistance to the Independent Elections and Boundary Commission helped it improve elections planning, management, and strategic communications. Training for the judiciary focused on dispute resolution processes, while support to police and security services was designed to improve training, organisation, operating procedures, and inter-agency cooperation.

In addition to these programmatic interventions, the UK pursued a busy and proactive diplomatic effort, both bilaterally and in concert with the wider international community. The UK took a lead role coordinating donor activities and messaging, encouraging both presidential candidates and their supporters to engage constructively in the electoral process and respect the rule of law. As election day approached, the UK team on the ground supported monitoring activities in constituencies across the country and in the central tallying centre.

Election day was largely peaceful. On 15 August, William Ruto was announced as the winner of the presidential race, a result which was subsequently challenged by his opponent, Raila Odinga. The Supreme Court upheld the result, rejecting all the claims put forward as justification for nullifying the result.

Despite a highly contested presidential election, both domestic and international observation missions highlighted some significant improvements in process. Long-term, tailored and effective UK technical support and political engagement contributed to this. However, the most impressive contribution came from the Kenyan people themselves in their commitment to, and respect for, a peaceful democratic process.



Staff from the British High Commission in Nairobi talking to Kenyan security officers on election day in August.

helped to support democracy by providing assistance to electoral processes.

Election observation helps support strong, transparent and accountable political processes and institutions overseas. The UK continued to support election observation missions run by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). In the course of the year, the UK funded observers to OSCE missions in **Hungary, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina** and **Kazakhstan**.

Parliamentary elections were held in **Bahrain** in 2022 and were monitored by Bahrain-based civil society groups. The elections were peaceful and orderly, with an increased turnout and proportion of elected women MPs and representatives from across society. However, no international observers were allowed, and the UK continues to encourage Bahrain to consider inviting observers for future elections. Some political societies also remained banned, leading to criticism from international rights groups that there was a continuing “environment of political repression”.

Community of Democracies

The Community of Democracies (CoD) was established in 2000. Its founding document, the Warsaw Declaration, defines the essential practices and norms for the effective establishment of democracy, and emphasises the interdependence between peace, development, human rights and democracy. The Governing Council comprises 28 Member states including **Canada, Chile, India, Mexico, Morocco, Nigeria, the Republic of Korea** and the **USA**. Member states commit to abide by the common democratic values and standards outlined in the Warsaw Declaration, and to make tangible contributions to strengthening the Community of Democracies.

On 17 November 2022, the UK and a number of other Governing Council Member states, including Argentina, Canada, Estonia, Finland, the

Republic of Korea and the USA, supported a CoD statement expressing solidarity with the people of Iran, especially women, protesting against oppression by the Iranian authorities, including gender-based discrimination, human rights violations and abuses, and disproportionate use of force.

In November, the Minister for Human Rights, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, confirmed to the CoD that the UK wished to renew its membership of the organisation’s Governing Council. He reaffirmed the UK’s commitment to working with the other 27 participating states and to the democratic values and standards outlined in the Warsaw Declaration. The UK’s membership is an important platform to support its Integrated Review commitment to democratic values.

The UK will continue to work with other member states and the CoD civil society pillar, the International Steering Committee, to support and strengthen democracy worldwide and to speak out where democracy and civil society are repressed.

Westminster Foundation for Democracy

The Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) is the UK public body dedicated to strengthening democracy overseas. It is an arms-length body funded by, but operating independently from, the FCDO who provided £6.5 million grant-in-aid in FY2022-2023. Last year was WFD’s 30th anniversary, and it continued to work with parliaments, political parties, electoral bodies, and civil society in over 40 countries and territories to build inclusion, accountability, and stronger democratic practices.

WFD contributed to tackling both the climate crisis and rising authoritarianism around the world. WFD helped to advance crucial climate change legislation in **Indonesia** and **Georgia**.

It developed tools that assisted parliaments to scrutinise policy decisions on public debt, including work with county assemblies in

Kenya and in the **Solomon Islands** on financial oversight and scrutiny. Its work to support the Verkhovna Rada (Supreme Council) of **Ukraine** has continued throughout the Russian invasion.

WFD continued its work to protect the vulnerable and marginalised. Its campaign to eradicate violence against women in politics in **Montenegro** reached more than two-thirds of the population. Through its Global Equality Project, WFD also worked with local partners to help ensure the protection of the rights of LGBT+ people, women, girls, and other individuals belonging to marginalised groups, through reforms in policy and legislation.

WFD’s work to support electoral systems and processes around the world included analysis of and/or support for elections in **Kenya, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, the Occupied Palestinian Territories** and **Nepal**. WFD recruited election observers for observation missions to **Serbia, Hungary, Bosnia and Herzegovina** and **Kazakhstan**. Additionally, following WFD support, **Sierra Leone’s** parliament topped the Open Parliament Index on public accountability in West Africa.

WFD also worked with **Indonesia** in holding the Bali Democracy Forum, with a particular focus on civil society engagement. The FCDO also attended at senior official level as part of the UK’s overall efforts to support regional democracy initiatives and underscore the universality of democratic values.

Women’s Political Empowerment

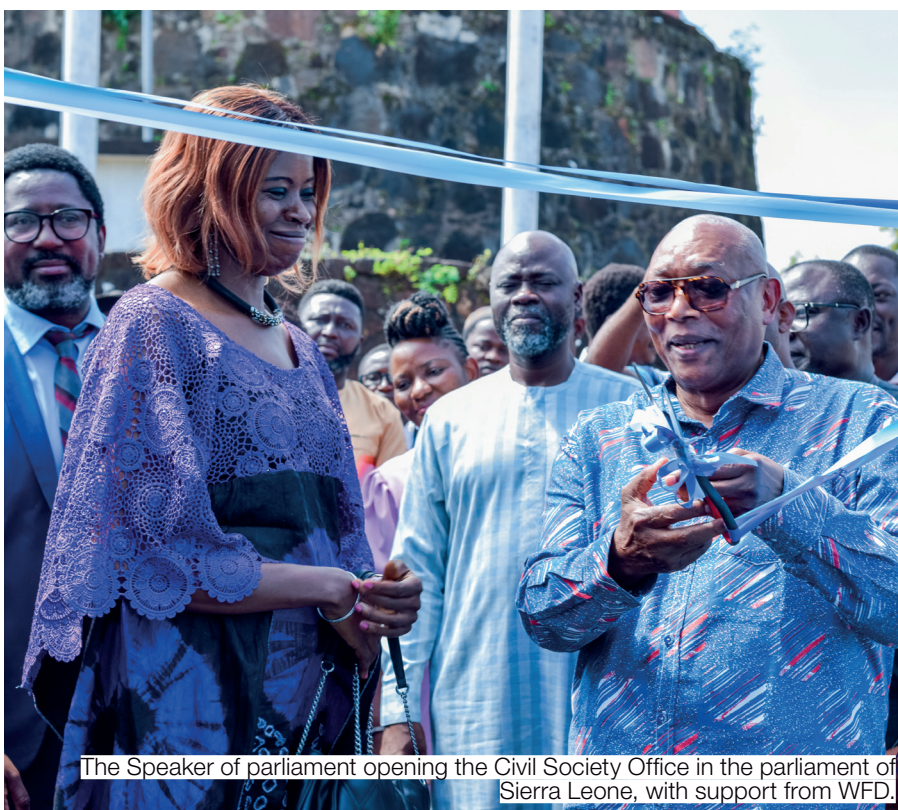
Women and girls have the right to participate in political and civic processes without discrimination of any kind. Women’s and girls’ political empowerment is critical to, and a key indicator of, a peaceful, prosperous and democratic society.

The UK’s International Development Strategy calls for a world where all girls and women will be empowered to have voice, choice and control over their lives, free from the threat of

violence. The UK's International Women & Girls Strategy, due to be published in 2023, will put women and girls at the heart of the UK's work, and will recognise the importance of women's leadership, perspectives and knowledge local, national and global progress.

Throughout 2022, the FCDO supported the political empowerment of women around the world. This included commissioning a local organisation to monitor hate speech and cyberbullying against female candidates standing in parliamentary elections in **Zambia**.

Through WFD, the UK supported female MPs in **Nepal** to scrutinise legislation and represent their constituencies more effectively, including supporting women parliamentarians in their efforts to advance a motion requiring a 50/50 gender balance in all candidate lists. The UK also worked with women MPs in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao in the **Philippines** to develop gender responsive budgets, including within



The Speaker of parliament opening the Civil Society Office in the parliament of Sierra Leone, with support from WFD.

Covid recovery plans, and helped women legislators in **Morocco** to advance their parliament's use of gender analysis.

In March, the UK joined the Global Partnership for Action on Online Gender-based Harassment and Abuse. The UK worked with others to understand better what works to address the growing problem of technology facilitated gender-based violence and will report on progress at the US-led Summit for Democracy in March 2023.

Looking ahead to 2023, the UK will begin implementation of its Women and Girls Strategy. This will include amplifying the work of diverse grassroots women's organisations and movements, championing their role as critical agents for change, and strengthening the political, economic and social systems that play a critical role in protecting and empowering women and girls.

UK Programming on Women's Political Empowerment in Malaysia

In Malaysia, the British High Commission in Kuala Lumpur funded a project to support budget equity and gender equality. The project facilitated training, networking opportunities and resources for parliamentarians, ministry officials and women's rights organisations from across seven countries to strategically advocate for and enact measures to achieve gender-responsive budgeting. Programme participants identified priorities, including increasing decision makers' use of sex disaggregated data. This led to practical outcomes such as a redrafted gender data toolkit to support Malaysian ministries engaged in budgeting.

CHAPTER 2: Equality, Gender and Inclusion

Gender Equality

Women's and Girls' Rights

In 2022, the UK continued to champion gender equality and stand firm in the face of systematic attempts by regressive actors to roll back on women's and girls' rights.

The UK used its membership of the UN Human Rights Council and other multilateral bodies to promote women's and girls' rights and the broader equalities agenda. This included advocating for comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights, the protection of LGBT+ rights, girls' education and ending all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls in particular. The UK made use of its diplomatic influence and convening power to increase international support for women's rights and gender equality. For example, in September 2022, former Minister of State for Development, Vicky Ford, spoke at the launch of the Alliance for Feminist Movements, where she endorsed the critical role of women's rights organisations in tackling global issues.

To celebrate International Day of the Girl on 11 October, the FCDO hosted a high-level reception alongside the Latvian Ambassador to the UK, Ivita Burmestre, to showcase the commitment the FCDO places on the empowerment and protection of girls. At the event, Ambassadors, High Commissioners and Chargés d'Affaires were accompanied by young women, chosen from a range of backgrounds from across the UK, who acted as 'Ambassadors for the Day'. This initiative gives girls aged 19 to 29 the opportunity to accompany an Ambassador for a day, in order to promote female leadership and empowerment in young women. British

Embassies across the world took part in this initiative, including in **Brazil, Denmark, Lebanon** and **Turkey**.

In 2023, the FCDO will publish the UK's first International Women and Girls Strategy which will reflect the Government's commitment to use all its combined levers to stand up for women and girls. The UK is clear that women and girls should face no constraints on realising their full potential. They should have control over their own bodies and control their own choices.

Ending Violence against Women and Girls

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is rooted in gender inequality and sustained by the harmful social norms that uphold unequal power dynamics within society. Data and research suggest that the prevalence and magnitude of VAWG has remained largely unchanged over the last decade and, in some contexts, is worsening due to conflict, the impacts of climate change and food insecurity.^[7]



The FCDO hosted a reception to celebrate International Day of the Girl in October 2022, where former Minister of State for Development, Vicky Ford, the Latvian Ambassador and HRH Princess Beatrice provided remarks.



Alicia Herbert OBE, Special Envoy for Gender Equality, visiting the Council of Europe in December 2022 to mark the UK ratifying the Istanbul Convention.

[7] Devastatingly pervasive: 1 in 3 women globally experience violence (who.int) Violence Against Women Prevalence Estimates (who.int) What Works – What works to prevent violence against women and girls in conflict and humanitarian crisis: Synthesis Brief

The UK takes a long-term approach that builds strong and resilient women's rights organisations that can prevent and respond to gender-based violence both in times of peace and conflict.

In 2022, the UK used its position in multilateral fora to uphold protections on ending violence towards women and girls. The UK ratified both the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women (Istanbul Convention) and the International Labour Organisation's Convention C190 on violence and harassment in the world of work. In July, the UK co-sponsored the Canadian-led UN Human Rights Council resolution renewing the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, which expanded it to include girls.

In **Mongolia**, the UK's contribution to the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women has helped support women's rights organisations to provide disability-inclusive services to survivors of intimate partner violence.

The FCDO has supported projects around the world, including providing £7.3 million to the Stopping Abuse and Female Exploitation programme in **Zimbabwe**. The programme continued to devise a cost-effective and scalable intervention to reduce and respond to VAWG and reach those at greatest risk, including women with disabilities. The UK also supported the Golees Foundation in **Costa Rica**, which works to empower young women and girls from vulnerable communities through social transformation projects.

In March 2022, the UK became a founding member of the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-based Online Abuse and Harassment, to drive forward solutions to address and prevent the growing scourge of technology-facilitated gender-based violence, in collaboration with other likeminded actors.

Tackling gender-based violence will remain a priority for the UK's work overseas. In 2023 the UK will continue to support and amplify the work of women's rights organisations

to prevent and respond to this violence around the world.

Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative

The global scale of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) is appalling. The international community has made progress, but sexual violence continues in conflict-affected areas on a shocking scale, and impunity has continued to be the norm for perpetrators. The UK is a global leader on action to tackle CRSV,

which is a key government priority. The UK has committed £60 million to PSVI since it was launched in 2012.

The UK has worked closely with the government of **Ukraine** to respond to reports of CRSV committed by Russian forces. This has included deploying UK experts to support the Office of the Prosecutor General's CRSV strategy, war crimes training for prosecutors, police and judges, and procuring 30,000 kits to enable forensic examination of CRSV cases.



The UK's Global Ambassador for Human Rights, Rita French, meeting with the Golees Foundation in Costa Rica, November 2022.



Helen Grant MP, the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Girls' Education, and Alicia Herbert OBE, Special Envoy for Gender Equality, visiting South Sudan in February. They met with activists who use art to illustrate the impacts of gender-based violence on women and girls.

The Murad Code

In April 2022, the Prime Minister’s Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict and Minister for Human Rights, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, jointly launched the Murad Code at the UN Security Council with Nadia Murad, a Yazidi human rights activist and CRSV survivor. The Murad Code – developed by the Institute for International Criminal Investigations – is a code of conduct for documenting the experiences of CRSV survivors ethically and effectively. It has been translated into Ukrainian, as well as other languages.



Lord (Tariq) Ahmad and HRH Duchess of Edinburgh during their visit to the DRC in October.

In **Colombia**, UK funding supported the All Survivors Project to advocate successfully for the Special Jurisdiction for Peace to open a macro-case into CRSV committed by armed groups and government forces that recognises men and children as victims as well as women. This was an important step in the transitional justice process that will strengthen accountability for CRSV in **Colombia**.

In December, the UK introduced sanctions which included 18 designations targeting individuals involved in violations and abuses of human rights, six of whom were perpetrators responsible for conflict-related sexual violence and related crimes, from **Mali, Myanmar** and **South Sudan**. The UK will continue to build on this in 2023 and demonstrate a commitment to take action against those that seek to suppress women or use sexual violence as a weapon of war.

In October, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad, accompanied Her Royal Highness, the Duchess of Edinburgh, on a visit to the Democratic Republic of the

Congo. The visit raised awareness of the need to address sexual violence in conflict and gain a practical insight into experiences of tackling it. This visit was part of Her Royal Highness’ long-standing commitment to championing PSVI.

Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment

The FCDO is focused on safeguarding against sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment (SEAH) in the international aid sector. The UK’s goal is to ensure all those involved in poverty reduction take all reasonable steps to prevent harm, particularly SEAH, from occurring; listen to those who are affected; respond sensitively but robustly when harm or allegations of harm occur; and learn from every case. The UK strategy on safeguarding against SEAH in the aid sector sets out the detail of this goal, and how the UK will realise it^[8]

Many of the actions the UK took to safeguard people against SEAH are

captured in the 2021 to 2022 FCDO Progress Report on Safeguarding Against SEAH in the International Aid Sector.^[9] This included funding programmes to prevent and improve the response to SEAH.

The UK trained specialised investigators through the Investigations Qualification Training Scheme and made it easier to take action against perpetrators through Project Soteria.^[10]

The UK also built the capacity of hundreds of organisations through the Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub and funded international bodies and local women’s rights organisations to provide support to hundreds of survivors and victims of SEAH.^[11]

The FCDO continued to convene international stakeholders who made commitments at the 2018 Safeguarding Summit, including donors, multilateral, civil society and private sector representatives, to track, discuss and report on progress through quarterly meetings

[8] UK strategy: safeguarding against sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment within the aid sector – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

[9] Safeguarding against sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment in the international aid sector: FCDO progress report 2021 to 2022 – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

[10] Investigator Qualification Training Scheme | CHS Alliance

[11] Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub (safeguardingsupporthub.org)

Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative Conference

From 28 to 29 November 2022, the UK hosted the international Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) Conference in London. Over 1,000 delegates attended, including survivors, civil society, multilateral partners and representatives from at least 57 countries. Following the launch of PSVI 10 years ago, the conference and its headline initiatives set out below sent a strong message of sustained international resolve to tackle this global scourge.

- » The UK launched a new Political Declaration which clearly signals that these heinous crimes must end and outlines the steps needed to achieve this. The Political Declaration was endorsed by 53 countries and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General Patten, with 40 countries making national commitments detailing the tangible actions they will take to tackle CRSV.
- » The Foreign Secretary launched the UK's new PSVI Strategy, backed by up to £12.5 million of new funding, which includes up to £8.6 million for a new initiative on survivor-centred accountability – “ACT for Survivors”. The strategy focuses on what the UK will do to deliver a strengthened global response, prevent sexual violence in conflict, promote justice, and support survivors. It outlines the UK's ambition to use diplomacy, development and defence levers to tackle these appalling crimes.
- » Ahead of the conference, the Foreign Secretary announced a further £3.45 million for the UN Population Fund, to boost survivor centred gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health services in Ukraine and the nearby region, and to ensure continued access to expert support for survivors of sexual assault.
- » Lord (Tariq) Ahmad launched a new partnership between the UK and the International Criminal Court to explore how new technologies, such as virtual reality, could help to address some of the challenges faced by CRSV survivors when seeking justice. This could include a virtual reality introduction to the courtroom to help survivors familiarise themselves with the setting, reducing stress and managing expectations.
- » Lord (Tariq) Ahmad also launched a Platform for Action Promoting the Rights and Wellbeing of Children Born of CRSV – a framework outlining steps the UK and partners will take to empower this vulnerable group. For example, the Democratic Republic of the Congo committed to review its laws, policies and practices to understand how it could help children born of CRSV, while the UK committed to use a PSVI team of experts to support this review.
- » To help maintain the momentum generated by the conference, the UK launched an International Alliance on PSVI, comprised of governments, civil society and survivors. This will be a key forum for coordinating international action to prevent and respond to CRSV. The International Alliance, which has 20 members, has UN support. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict will participate in Alliance meetings and UN Women have confirmed their membership.
- » A side event on The Declaration of Humanity by Leaders of Faith and Leaders of Belief helped to drive the total number of signatories to the Declaration to 766. This UK initiative unites multiple faiths in a commitment to work within their communities to denounce CRSV and tackle the stigma faced by survivors. Signatories include faith leaders, NGOs and civil society actors in countries including Iraq, Kosovo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and The Vatican.



Lord (Tariq) Ahmad speaking at the PSVI Conference.



The Foreign Secretary, James Cleverly, meeting with Olena Zelenska, First Lady of Ukraine at the PSVI Conference.



HRH The Duchess of Edinburgh talking with Dr Denis Mukwege at the PSVI Conference.

and the cross-sector annual progress report.^[12]

The UK continued to advocate for Peacekeeping Mission mandates to contain language on sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA). Throughout all renewals, the UK worked with partners to successfully maintain SEA text. The Ministry of Defence introduced a new policy,^[13] supported by an awareness raising and training campaign, to direct efforts to prevent and address sexual exploitation or abuse by service personnel and civilian employees conducting defence activity. The policy outlines appropriate assistance and redress available to victims and includes a prohibition on transactional sex at all times when conducting defence activity outside of the UK.

The UK will continue to work in partnership with others to develop a Global Framework for Preventing and Responding to SEAH in development and peacekeeping. The UK will use its diplomatic levers and programmes to drive up standards, from investigative capacity to recruitment in the aid sector. Internally, the UK will continue to build capability of staff and partners.

Female Genital Mutilation

Female Genital Mutilation (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 2022, continued UK support to the Africa-Led Movement to End FGM included engagement with communities in **Kenya**, and expansion into **Senegal, Ethiopia** and **Somalia** to provide a safe space

and platform to speak about FGM and rights violations – an important step towards changing behaviours on FGM at the local level. This included engaging men in community dialogues and facilitating boys' and girls' clubs in schools to discuss these issues, which has already resulted in a shift in attitude in these communities in Kenya. UK support also helped grassroots organisations who are leading advocacy efforts, to champion women's rights around FGM. The UK funded a study by the World Health Organisation that highlighted the health and economic costs of FGM, which was published in the BMJ.^[14]

The UK also continued programme work to end FGM in **Sudan** and supported the UN Joint Programme on the Elimination of FGM to help countries develop costed plans for ending FGM for example in **Eritrea**.

Ending FGM remains a priority for the UK and is a key component of the FCDO's Women and Girls Strategy. The UK will continue to support and amplify the work of grassroots organisations and local champions who are leading the fight to end FGM in their communities.

Women, Peace and Security

In line with the objectives in the UK's Women, Peace and Security (WPS) 2018 to 2022 National Action Plan (NAP),^[15] the UK continued to focus on promoting women's full, equal and meaningful participation in peace processes.

In **Afghanistan**, the UK continued to raise the rights of women and girls in its political engagement with the Taliban. The UK provided platforms for Afghan women to speak out, including a roundtable hosted by

Lord (Tariq) Ahmad, to advocate for their full inclusion in society.

In **Ukraine**, as part of the UK's £220 million of humanitarian assistance and longer-term development programming, the UK worked to prioritise protection and inclusion of the most vulnerable – particularly women, girls and marginalised groups at increased risk of abuse, neglect and violence.

The UK's 2023 to 2027 National Action Plan includes a gendered approach to the way the UK tackles transnational threats^[16] and the use of new technologies and digital spaces by belligerent actors. It also has a gendered approach to climate insecurity.

Educating Girls

The UK continued to stand up for the right of every girl to achieve 12 years of quality education. The UK focused on reaching the most marginalised children, including girls, those with disabilities, and those in crises, and advocated for the universal endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration.^[17]

The UK continued to champion the global objectives of 40 million more girls in education and 20 million more reading by age 10, by 2026. In 2022, the UK funded a baseline report to monitor progress and highlight challenges in respect of the G7 Global Objectives on Girls' Education.^[18] The UK's Girls' Education Challenge programme supported up to 1.6 million marginalised girls across 17 countries.

The Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Girls' Education, Helen Grant OBE MP, continued to champion the right for every girl to have access to 12

[12] Safeguarding Summit: commitments – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk); Safeguarding against sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment: cross-sector progress report 2021 to 2022 – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

[13] JSP 769: Zero Tolerance to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

[14] <https://gh.bmj.com/content/7/2/e004512>

[15] UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2018 to 2022 – GOV.UK(www.gov.uk)

[16] UK women, peace and security national action plan 2023 to 2027 – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

[17] https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/documents/documents_safe_schools_declaration-final.pdf

[18] United Nations Girls' Education Initiative, "G7 Global Objectives on Girls' Education: Baseline Report" (2022) <https://www.ungei.org/publication/g7-global-objectives-girls-education>

years of quality education, through her engagement with governments, civil society, young people, and parliamentarians in the UK and abroad.

Russia's invasion of **Ukraine** has disrupted the education of 5.7 million children, disproportionately impacting girls and marginalised groups such as children with disabilities. The UK is providing £15 million to the UNICEF Ukraine Humanitarian Action for Children Appeal, which has engaged 1.45 million children in formal or non-formal education. UK funding to the global education in emergencies fund, Education Cannot Wait, has supported over 150,000 Ukrainian children to access education and psychosocial support. In partnership with Poland, the UK is also providing £20 million to Ukrainian refugees displaced to **Poland** – 90% of whom are women and children – including for education.

The UK continued to lobby the Taliban to reverse the decision to ban women and girls from accessing secondary and tertiary education and banning female NGO workers from delivering education in **Afghanistan**.

During the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative Conference in November, the UK highlighted the role of education in preventing conflict-related sexual violence and supporting survivors. The UK also endorsed the Freetown Manifesto, which commits to accelerating support for education systems to become gender equal. The Freetown Manifesto was launched under the auspices of the Gender at the Centre Initiative (GCI) which the UK funds and continues to support.

The UK will continue to champion gender equality in and through education, increasing political will and momentum around this agenda and developing the evidence base of what works.

Gender and Climate Change

The UK remained committed to advancing gender equality and social inclusion within international climate and nature action. Women and girls in all their diversity often experience the greatest impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss, which amplifies existing gender and other social inequalities and can undermine the enjoyment of human rights.

The UK took an inclusive approach to its COP26 Presidency. It promoted the implementation of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change Gender Action Plan and the Glasgow Climate Pact, to ensure gender-responsive implementation and the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in climate action. At the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP15), the UK committed to ensure gender equality through the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and agreed a comprehensive Gender Plan of Action.

People with disabilities, especially women and girls with disabilities, are more likely to be impacted by climate change. The UK is committed to disability inclusive climate action amongst other thematic areas, through the FCDO's Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy.^[19] In 2022, the UK also set out a new framework of priority actions to build school systems that are more resilient to climate and environmental changes, and to ensure that children have the knowledge, skills, and agency to support climate action.^[20]

The UK will continue to champion gender-responsive climate and nature action, amplifying the voices of those whose views are often the most marginalised, and empowering them as decision-makers, advocates and leaders.

Women's Economic Empowerment

The UK supports women's economic empowerment throughout its economic development and social protection portfolio. In 2022, the UK supported women working in global value chains into safer, more sustainable and productive work through the Work and Opportunities for Women (WOW) programme. The UK increased women's access to, and control over, income, assets, savings and decision-making through its social protection programmes.

In the International Development Strategy, the UK announced a new Green and Inclusive Growth Centre of Expertise. This will be the hub for UK technical expertise and policy advice on women's economic empowerment. It complements the investments made by the UK's development finance institution, British International Investment, which has committed to at least 25% of all new investments under its current strategy period from 2022 to 2026 having a gender lens, in line with the '2X Challenge'.

As part of the innovative multi-donor Private Infrastructure Development Group, the UK has committed to adopting a deliberate gender lens in all its infrastructure investments. In 2022, FCDO funding to the Financial Sector Deepening Africa (FSD Africa) development agency resulted in the first ever gender bond being listed on an exchange in Africa. UK funding to FSD Africa also contributed to the April 2022 issuance of NMB Bank's £25 million Jasiri gender bond in **Tanzania**, raising funds for women-owned micro, medium and small enterprises.

Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People

The UK is proud to champion the human rights and dignity of all lesbian, gay, bisexual and

[19] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1074127/Disability-Inclusion-and-Rights-Strategy-2022.pdf

[20] Addressing the climate, environment, and biodiversity crises in and through girls' education: An FCDO Position Paper (publishing.service.gov.uk)



The UN in Geneva held its first-ever Pride event in June 2022, co-hosted by the UK Mission.

transgender (LGBT+) people, irrespective of their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or variations in sex characteristics.

In 2022, many countries continued to make progress on the implementation of human rights compliant laws and policies that protect LGBT+ people from violence and discrimination. Four countries, **Antigua and Barbuda, St Kitts and Nevis, Singapore and Barbados**, announced measures to decriminalise consensual same-sex relationships. Several countries, including **Cuba, Slovenia and Mexico**, extended marriage to same-sex couples. **Kenya** also introduced new laws aimed at recognising and protecting intersex people.

While many countries took steps to improve human rights and equality, there was a concerning rise in violence or discrimination against LGBT+ people. Several countries have taken regressive steps that will violate the human rights and freedoms of LGBT+ people.

In **Russia**, the government has sought to violate, suppress and deny the human rights of individuals by implementing new legislation to broaden “anti-propaganda” laws which undermine the freedom of expression of all Russians, particularly those who are LGBT+. In countries such as **Ghana** and

latterly **Uganda**, rising homophobic rhetoric has been used by parliamentarians to justify “anti-gay bills” that would violate human rights and undermine freedoms. In **Indonesia**, legislation restricting the rights of unmarried persons is likely to have a disproportionate impact on LGBT+ people, effectively criminalising same-sex relationships.

In every corner of the world, particularly where freedoms are under threat, LGBT+ communities often become one of the key targets. Increased attempts by state and non-state actors to undermine social attitudes towards LGBT+ people have corresponded with a significant rise in anti-LGBT+ hate crime, including

the horrific attacks on LGBT+ people in **Norway** (Oslo), **Slovakia** (Bratislava) and the **USA** (Colorado Springs).

In 2022, the UK continued to play an important role in defending the human rights and freedoms of LGBT+ people around the world. While much of this work was through discreet diplomacy, UK diplomatic missions have continued to visibly demonstrate their support around key dates, such as the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia, local Pride events, and international events such as the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in June.

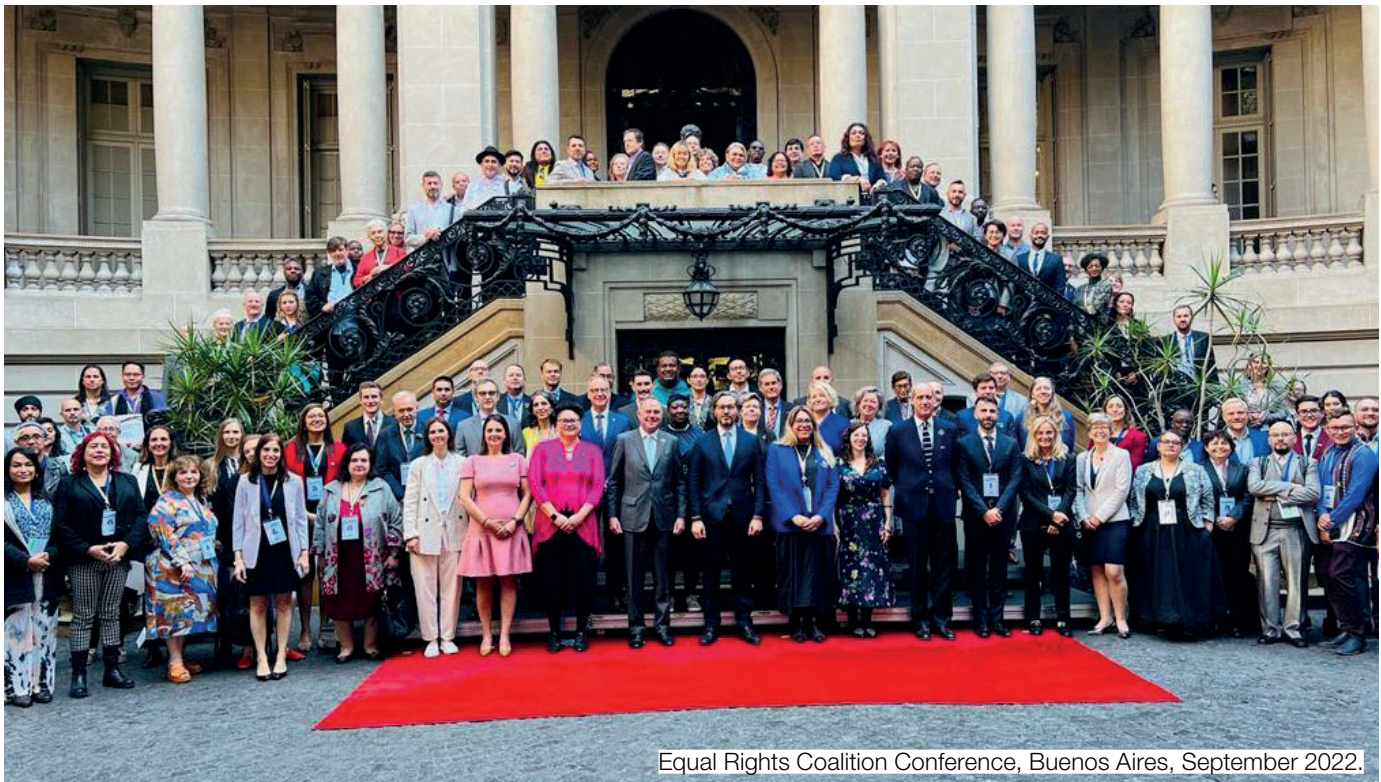
At the Human Rights Council in June, the UK Mission, together with its Equal Rights Coalition partners, co-hosted the first-ever Pride event at the UN with over 100 States and numerous civil society organisations present. The UK worked closely with colleagues from Latin America, and other regions, who spearheaded the mandate renewal of the UN Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in June.

The UK also worked with local stakeholders to give visibility to LGBT+ issues. The British Embassy in Brasilia collaborated with NGO ABGLT to gather data on LGBT+ human rights defenders in **Brazil** and the challenges they face,^[21] in order



The Prime Minister’s Special Envoy for LGBT+ Rights, Lord Herbert of South Downs, attending joint Warsaw-Kyiv Pride in June 2022.

[21] Associação Brasileira de Lésbicas, Gays, Bissexuais, Travestis, Transexuais e Intersexo



to strengthen support networks for the defenders. The project generated data in areas where there is little information at a national and regional level and will also support possible follow up projects and increase the UK's profile on LGBT+ rights in Brazil.

The Prime Minister's Special Envoy for LGBT+ rights, Lord Herbert of South Downs, has continued to strengthen UK cooperation on LGBT+ rights through his engagement with governments, civil society and parliamentarians. This has included co-hosting the Council of Europe's European LGBTI Focal Points Conference with **Cyprus**, attending the joint Warsaw and Kyiv Pride in **Poland**, and visiting **Germany** and **Argentina** to strengthen cooperation within the Equal Rights Coalition.

The UK continued to work closely with likeminded countries to promote the inclusion of LGBT+ people in multilateral fora such as the United Nations, the G7 and the Council of Europe.

At the 50th Session of the UN Human Rights Council, the UK

supported the renewal of the mandate of the Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, and its vital work to ensure that existing human rights are applied equally to all individuals around the world. The UK worked closely with diplomatic partners – both in the global north and south – to defeat numerous hostile amendments that would have stripped the resolution of its focus and undermined the human rights of LGBT+ persons. The creation of the role in 2016 was a major achievement of the Council. Furthermore, at the Third Committee, the UK continued to ensure that the resolution on extra-judicial killings retained a reference to sexual orientation and gender identity.

As co-chairs of the Equal Rights Coalition, the UK and **Argentina** concluded their three-year tenure by gathering 42 countries and over 120 civil society organisations in Buenos Aires. The conference was an important opportunity to review progress of the Coalition's strategy and five-year implementation plan, and to agree coordinated action to make progress on human rights and

equality for LGBT+ people around the world. The conference concluded by handing over the role of co-chair to **Germany** and **Mexico**.

The UK has continued to fund research and initiatives to address the challenges faced by LGBT+ people globally. In March, Protection Approaches launched a new report on 'Queering Atrocity Prevention'—funded by the UK Conflict Security and Stability Fund.^[22] In September, the UK launched a new report on 'What Works to Prevent Violence Against LGBTQI+ people'.^[23] The initiative led to a new partnership with the **USA**, and a \$3 million investment by USAID aimed at supporting effective approaches to prevent violence against LGBT+ people.

The UK is committed to continuing to work together with our international partners to end the violence and discrimination that persists today.

[22] <https://protectionapproaches.org/queeringap>

[23] <https://ww2preventvawg.org/evidence-hub/ending-violence-against-lgbtqi-people-report>

Rights of People with Disabilities

Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy

The FCDO launched the Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy at the second Global Disability Summit in February, alongside a range of other commitments. It sets out ambitious objectives to guide the UK's work with, and for, people with disabilities until 2030. It focuses on four concrete outcomes:

1. People with disabilities in all their diversity have full and equal enjoyment of all rights and fundamental freedoms.
2. Full and meaningful participation and leadership of people with disabilities.
3. People with disabilities have more choice and control in all aspects of their lives.
4. Greater visibility of people with disabilities through quality comprehensive data and evidence.

Global challenges – including conflict, natural disasters, climate change and COVID-19 – are disproportionately affecting marginalised people, trapping them in cycles of poverty and vulnerability. As one of the most excluded groups in society, people with disabilities are more likely to be impacted by these shocks.

The UK continued to implement a 'twin track approach' in 2022 – mainstreaming a disability inclusive and human rights perspective across all its work, while providing targeted support to people with disabilities through disability-specific initiatives. The FCDO drew on its development and diplomatic expertise and prioritised active and meaningful participation of people with disabilities in its work.

The UK continued to be a strong international voice in support of the rights of people with disabilities, proactively championing disability inclusion at the UN and the Human Rights Council.

The UK continued to play a key role in the Global Action on Disability Network of donors, tackling a range of issues from education to humanitarian response, including as co-chairs of the inclusive health working group.

Using what it learnt from its leadership of the first Global Disability Summit in 2018, alongside **Kenya** and the International Disability Alliance, the UK advised **Norway** and **Ghana** on hosting the February 2022 Global Disability Summit.

The UK's programme work with partners around the world has demonstrated significant ongoing impact on disability inclusion. In **Malawi**, through the Disability Rights Fund, the UK supported the Federation of Disability Organisations to advocate for more inclusive legislation. This led to the government making 32 commitments at the Global Disability Summit in February, including to incorporate aspects of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, relating to mental health, non-discrimination, and affirmative action into domestic legislation.

In **Uganda**, the UK supported the National Union of Disabled Persons of Uganda to conduct training for management officers of the Uganda Prisons Service on disability inclusion and on the rights of inmates with disabilities. In September, Uganda Prisons Service committed to developing a disability policy in conjunction with grassroots disability organisations to improve prison facilities.

The Disability Rights Fund also supported a national coalition of disability organisations from **Indonesia** to attend the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in August. This allowed them to respond to the List of Issues for Indonesia and continue to hold their government to account for the delivery of disability rights.

In 2022, the Disability Inclusive Development Programme provided over 1,000 people with disabilities in **Nigeria** with access to eye health services, and over 800 people with disabilities (and a further 1,100 family members) in **Nepal** with access to inclusive sexual and reproductive health and rights services.

British embassies across the world worked hard to support the rights of people with disabilities. The British Embassy in **El Salvador** partnered with inclusive employers and organised a job fair to increase the chances of people from vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities, members of the LGBT+ community, and women, securing employment. The embassy also held an awards ceremony to celebrate organisations which actively promote the inclusion of people with disabilities.

Looking ahead to 2023, the UK will continue to deliver on the commitments made in the Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy, embedding the rights and needs of people with disabilities into all its work, including in education, humanitarian responses and healthcare.

The FCDO will also continue to work with partners, including organisations of persons with disabilities, to deliver quality, impactful programming, encouraging inclusion of people with disabilities in all their diversity and empowering the most marginalised and under-represented groups. This includes continuing to fund grassroots organisations of persons with disabilities to advocate for disability rights and hold governments to account for compliance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Rights of Older People

The UK aims to protect the rights of all individuals at all stages of their lives. This recognises the diverse experiences, requirements and priorities of older persons, many of whom also have disabilities which can impact upon their autonomy, dignity and participation in society. This approach is shaped by meaningful engagement with civil society, both domestically and internationally.

As a key stakeholder in the Titchfield City Group on Ageing, which is led by the Office for National Statistics, in 2022 the FCDO continued to collect and analyse results, demographic and socio-economic data disaggregated by age across a significant proportion of its Official Development Assistance portfolio.

The UK continued to be a co-sponsor and vocal supporter of the UN Open Ended Working Group on Ageing, and supported resolutions to improve the rights of older persons at the UN Human Rights Council.^[24]

The UK also continued to improve the availability of affordable assistive technology – including wheelchairs; hearing-aids; prosthetics and orthotics; digital devices and spectacles – in low- and middle-income countries, recognising its critical role for inclusion and the transformational impact for older persons and persons with disabilities. At the World Health Assembly, the UK successfully lobbied for the inclusion of assistive technology within the World Health resolution on strengthening rehabilitation in health systems.^[25]

During 2022, for the first time, the UK funded ATscale, the global partnership on assistive technology. The partnership made its first

significant in-country investments in **Kenya, Cambodia and Ukraine**. ATscale also developed a model for delivering hearing aids to older persons in lower-and middle-income countries.

The FCDO also funded the AT2030 research programme, led by the UK's Global Disability Innovation Hub. The programme seeks to improve access to affordable assistive technology. Throughout 2022, it supported five assistive technology ventures to begin to scale-up in Africa through the Assistive Technology Impact Fund. It also contributed over 100 papers to the World Health Organisation and UNICEF's Global Report on Assistive Technology,^[26] launched in April.

In 2023, the UK will contribute a £31 million uplift to the AT2030 programme which will develop, test and roll out more affordable assistive products.

Rights of the Child

In 2022, the UK remained steadfast in its commitment to protecting and promoting the rights of children around the world through our policy, programmatic and diplomatic leadership.

Children's rights were integrated across new strategies. In December, Minister, of State for Development and Africa, Andrew Mitchell, launched a new position paper, "Addressing the Climate, Environment and Biodiversity Crises in and through Girls' Education",^[27] which highlights the critical importance of fostering the knowledge, skills, and agency of young people for climate adaptation and mitigation.

At the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative International Conference in November, the UK

launched a Platform for Action Promoting the Rights and Wellbeing of Children Born of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence.^[28] The UK, along with partners, including **Canada, the Democratic Republic of Congo,** and the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, have committed to key actions under this platform to protect some of the most vulnerable and stigmatised children globally.

The online space continued to pose growing and serious threats to children. In response, the then Minister for Safeguarding at the Home Office pledged a further £16.5 million from 2022 to 2025 for the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children to help deliver a world in which every child can access and benefit from the digital world, safe from harm^[29]. In 2022, this funding supported the identification of over 1,200 child victims of online child sexual abuse and led to seven new countries establishing a national reporting mechanism to identify and remove child sexual abuse material, including **Argentina, Kenya, and Tunisia**.

The UK continued to apply diplomatic pressure in the UN Security Council Working Group on Children in Armed Conflict (CAAC). The UK responded to the UN Secretary-General's 2022 annual report and CAAC country-specific reports,^[30] which assess the grave violations that took place against children in conflict zones and list the governments and armed groups responsible for committing these grave violations.

The UK hosted a Wilton Park event with the Office of the UN Secretary General's Special Representative on CAAC, to mark the 25th anniversary of the CAAC mandate, and explore the challenges, barriers and opportunities for action.

[24] <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G22/522/19/PDF/G2252219.pdf?OpenElement>

[25] Strengthening rehabilitation in health systems (who.int)

[26] <https://www.unicef.org/reports/global-report-assistive-technology>

[27] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/addressing-the-climate-environment-and-biodiversity-crises-in-and-through-girls-education>

[28] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/platform-for-action-promoting-rights-and-wellbeing-of-children-born-of-conflict-related-sexual-violence>

[29] <https://www.end-violence.org/articles/uk-government-announces-ps165-million-investment-tackle-online-child-sexual-abuse-and>

[30] <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/344/71/PDF/N2234471.pdf?OpenElement>

The UK supported a number of child's rights resolutions in 2022, including the Kigali Declaration for Child Care and Protection Reform, passed at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in June. This resolution protected key language on the importance of replacing institutionalisation with quality alternative care for children. The UK continued to show leadership on tackling child marriage, and in November, supported a new resolution which focused particularly on supporting the most marginalised girls at risk of child marriage.

The UK remained committed to supporting the meaningful participation of young people in advocating for their rights. In March, the then Minister for Africa held a virtual roundtable with young people from conflict-affected countries to hear their experiences and recommendations on what more the UK could do to better protect children in conflict. They spoke about the importance of a childhood free from fear, and the right to go to school and access healthcare.

In 2023, the UK will continue to promote the rights of children around the world, including by amplifying their leadership and consulting them on the issues that affect them.

CHAPTER 3: Civic Space and Fundamental Freedoms

A vibrant and diverse civil society is a key pillar of open societies. The UK aims to be a champion of open, diverse, and pluralistic civic space globally, both online and offline. These 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. The UK is strongly committed to civic freedoms, which are important as they allow people to put forward their views publicly, influence policymaking and society more broadly, and help to promote accountability.

Strong governments promote pluralism within civil society and ensure that supportive and critical voices alike can be heard. However, civic action can be so powerful that many governments have come to see it as a threat. Civic space is therefore becoming increasingly restricted in many parts of the world, for example, Putin's action against an active civil society in Ukraine. The UK stood alongside civil society against these encroachments and supported the extraordinary bravery of human rights defenders (HRDs) and people who work for civil society organisations (CSOs) in Ukraine and in some of the world's most dangerous places.

Civil society faced many challenges in 2022 with governments trying to restrict civic space in various ways. Many countries passed restrictive legislation, making registration and financing of NGOs difficult. Countries also introduced measures restricting freedom of expression including censorship, internet shutdowns, surveillance and attacks on journalists, HRDs and academics.

Protests have flared up in countries with closed civic space and

autocratic regimes have tried to repress them. For example, in Iran the authorities have used lethal force to crack down on protesters, killing hundreds and arresting thousands more.^[31]

Transnational repression, where governments reach across national borders to coerce, intimidate, harass or harm perceived critics overseas, has become more visible in 2022. Freedom House recorded 79 incidents committed by 20 governments. The most prolific perpetrators of transnational repression remain the governments of **China, Turkey, Russia, Egypt, and Tajikistan**.^[32]

Governments have sought to discredit activists and CSOs by accusing them of acting on behalf of foreign powers. This has particularly affected groups advocating for women's rights and women HRDs, environmental groups, labour rights groups, LGBT+ people and young people. According to the findings of the CIVICUS Monitor, an international alliance dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society throughout the world, the world has faced further regression on civic space in 2022, with it worsening in 15 countries and improving in only 10.^[33]

In **India**, some NGOs continued to face difficulties due to the application of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act by the Indian authorities. In April, the foreign funding licence for the international NGO Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative was cancelled. The UK raised these issues directly with the Indian government, regularly engaging with the affected NGOs and continuing to support NGO partners in India, including through programmes.

The Government of **Mozambique** (GoM) has approved and submitted to its parliament a draft NGO bill, which risks adding stricter controls on international and national NGOs. The bill is due to be discussed in its parliament in 2023. The bill is part of the GoM's response to the Financial Action Task Force report that added Mozambique to a list of countries with significant vulnerabilities to money laundering and terrorism financing, including in the non-profit sector. Civil society has been critical of the bill, arguing that it was prepared without public consultation and goes against regional and international human rights standards. The UK is monitoring the situation closely.

Russia's invasion of **Ukraine** has had far-reaching and deeply negative domestic consequences, including for civil society. The Russian regime moved swiftly to crush opposition to the war, enacting laws that criminalised speaking out against the war or in some cases simply reporting factually about it. This environment has severely restricted the work of CSOs and independent media outlets. With international partners, the UK invoked the OSCE's Moscow Mechanism which evidenced Russia's efforts to wage a repressive war against its own people. The UK is taking forward the report's recommendations and remains committed to the protection and promotion of human rights and civil society in Russia.

Civil society faced unprecedented repression in **Belarus**, with freedom of association almost non-existent. The regime forced, or pressured, hundreds of CSOs to close. More than 1,000 CSOs have been lost since 2020. As of December 2022, at least 757 non-commercial

[31] Global Assessment on Protest Rights 2022 Protest Rights 2022 – Protest Rights 2022 (civicus.org)

[32] Yana Gorokhovskaia, Nate Schenkkan, Grady Vaughan, Still Not Safe: Transnational Repression in 2022, (Washington, DC: Freedom House, April 2023)

[33] GlobalFindings2022.pdf (contentfiles.net)

organisations were in the process of forced liquidation. The number of organisations that have opted for independent liquidation is also increasing, reaching 416 at the end of the year.

In 2022, the rights of the Sudanese people to freedom of speech, expression and assembly continued to be limited. Military and security forces used violence against peaceful demonstrators, with at least 68 protestors killed during 2022 and hundreds more sustaining serious injuries. Arbitrary detentions continued to be used to suppress opposition and dissent across Sudan. Hundreds of civilians and political activists were unlawfully arrested without charge or trial under emergency laws.

The UK continued to urge the **Sudanese** authorities to open and protect civic space and civil society. UK funding to the Thomson Foundation also helped deliver a digital learning WhatsApp course on disinformation and misinformation, which reached over 10,600 people in Sudan.

There were widespread reports of illegal and disproportionate use of force and human rights violations in Peru, in response to the protests which followed the change in government on 7 December. The UK Embassy in Lima and UK Ministers raised concerns with Peruvian counterparts about the handling of protests and alleged abuses by forces of law and order. The UK urged the authorities to ensure a proportional, legal response to protests, and the protection of human rights. The UK also called for protests in support of legitimate concerns to be peaceful, and for those who subvert legitimate peaceful protest to be brought to justice.

The Government of **South Sudan** continued to limit media freedom and civic space through the intimidation, harassment, illegal arrest and arbitrary detention of journalists, HRDs and critics. High profile cases included seven members of the People's Coalition of Civil Action being arrested, detained, and standing criminal trial following calls for peaceful protests. A Voice of America journalist was also arbitrarily detained, including time in prison, for their coverage of a protest in Juba where security agents shot at and beat protestors.^[34]

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. The UK co-sponsored an event hosted by Ireland, along with the Human Rights Council, and other member states and CSOs, at the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly, entitled 'Intimidation and Reprisals for Cooperation with the UN – Global Trends and Good Practices' to highlight and challenge this behaviour.

The UK worked to empower women engaged in peacebuilding and prioritised work to counter reprisals. UK contributions to the Urgent Action Fund made emergency grants available to women HRDs and peacebuilders facing intimidation or reprisals in conflict settings. The UK also supported the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to develop guidance on preventing reprisals, and to train UN staff to support women peacebuilders and HRDs facing these risks. The UK has also been elected to the UN Economic and Social Council NGO Committee, where it will continue to work to ensure a fair, open and transparent approach to NGO accreditation.

Human Rights Defenders

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.

HRDs play an important role in defending the full range of human rights, working tirelessly to stand up for those who were threatened, oppressed and silenced, often at great personal risk. According to the NGO Front Line Defenders, at least 401 HRDs were killed in 26 countries in 2022.^[35] Other HRDs were threatened, arbitrarily detained, placed under surveillance or disappeared.

The UK continued to stand with all those speaking out for rights and freedoms around the world and supported the courageous work of HRDs. In December, at an FCDO stakeholder event to mark Human Rights Day, the Minister for Human Rights, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, recognised the work of HRDs around the world, and the Foreign Secretary committed to continuing to support civil society and HRDs.

The 2019 publication on "UK support for Human Rights Defenders" sets out the importance of HRDs to the UK and what the UK Government does to support them, including through multilateral organisations and bilateral engagement.^[36] The UK diplomatic network continued to monitor cases, observe trials, and raise issues with host governments.

[34] South Sudan journalist Diing Magot arrested while covering protest for Voice of America – Committee to Protect Journalists (cpj.org)

[35] Frontline Defenders Global Analysis 2022 (https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/1535_fld_ga23_web.pdf)

[36] UK Support for Human Rights Defenders (publishing.service.gov.uk)



Lord (Tariq) Ahmad addressing UK human rights stakeholders at an event to mark Human Rights Day in December.

UK action to support HRDs in Venezuela

In Venezuela, the UK has supported HRDs to strengthen their networks and build capacity on human rights documentation and reporting. For example, to mark Democracy Day in Venezuela's restrictive environment, the British Embassy identified 40 young and rising leaders in the field of democracy, human rights, entrepreneurship and science that the Embassy had not engaged with before and held structured networking sessions for the young leaders to get to know each other's work. The event was valued by attendees who were able to identify complementary initiatives and spark collaboration in a country where visible activism is increasingly dangerous.

In **Thailand**, civic space remains challenged. Authorities used the *lèse majesté* law and other criminal charges to limit freedom of expression. At the end of 2022, more than 1,800 people were facing prosecution for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. The UK

continued to support HRDs through trial observation and activities in partnership with like-minded missions to defend HRDs at risk. The UK also provided project funding, including capacity building for journalists, on digital security skills and criminal justice procedures. This will strengthen their ability to work securely and to effectively document and report criminal cases against HRDs.

In 2023, the UK will explore a range of options to build on its existing guidance and support to HRDs, including via strengthened working with partner countries across the world. The UK's efforts will continue to reflect its guiding principle of doing no harm.

Media Freedom

The UK continued to highlight the importance of media freedom. Serious threats to journalists and media workers remained, with over 80 killed in 2022. The rate of impunity for crimes against journalists remained high at 86%.^[37] The UK deployed its diplomatic and development tools to support media freedom, to promote the safety of journalists and to improve media sustainability.

The Media Freedom Coalition, created by the UK and **Canada** in 2019, issued 11 statements on cases, situations of concern, and to mark key dates and events. The UK provided funding for a new Coalition secretariat, to support the work of the co-chairs. At the end of the UK's term as co-chair, it handed over its role to **The Netherlands**. The UK remained a member of the Media Freedom Coalition's Executive Group, was co-chair of its Media Development Working Group and, through UK Missions, worked with Coalition members at the local level.

Lord (Tariq) Ahmad co-hosted the second Ministerial meeting of the Media Freedom Coalition, held during the Third Global Conference on Media Freedom in February in **Estonia**. This brought together governments, civil society, multilateral institutions, academics, legal experts and journalists. The UK led sessions on misinformation and disinformation, and on media development. Lord (Tariq) Ahmad and Canadian Foreign Minister, Mélanie Joly, awarded the UK/**Canada** Media Freedom prize to Vietnamese journalist and human rights activist Pham Doan Trang, who is in prison for "disseminating anti-state propaganda".

UNESCO's Global Media Defence Fund, to which the UK committed £3 million over five years, has now raised approximately \$8 million and has funded more than 80 projects, helping over 3,000 journalists globally. The UK pledged an additional £250,000 to the Fund's Crisis Response Mechanism to support journalists in Ukraine.

The Protecting Independent Media for Effective Development programme, implemented by a consortium led by BBC Media Action, continued its work in **Ethiopia**, **Bangladesh** and **Sierra Leone** to support media outlets to become more resilient and to improve the wider media environment in those countries.

On World Press Freedom Day on 3 May, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad commended

[37] <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-killings-journalists-50-2022-half-targeted-duty>



Lord (Tariq) Ahmad at the Global Conference on Media Freedom in Tallinn, Estonia, February 2022

journalists who risked their lives to do their job, highlighting the Media Freedom Coalition statement and congratulating the Belarusian Association of Journalists, who won the UNESCO Guillermo Cano Prize for outstanding contributions to the defence and promotion of press freedom.

Building on their commitment under the UK's 2021 G7 presidency to media freedom, sustainability and the safety of journalists, G7 media ministers met for the first time on 19 June. They committed to ensuring media pluralism and freedom of expression in the context of globalisation and digital transformation.^[38]

At the 51st session of the UN Human Rights Council in September and October, the UK co-sponsored a

resolution on the Safety of Journalists. The text covered new threats to journalists and requested that the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights report to the Council on the legal and economic threats to the safety of journalists.

On 2 November, the UN International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists, the Foreign Secretary tweeted about the situation in **Ukraine**.^[39] Lord (Tariq) Ahmad highlighted the Media Freedom Coalition's statement^[40], UNESCO's powerful social media video on impunity^[41] and three individual cases in **China**. The UK's Global Ambassador for Human Rights, Rita French, signed a joint statement with her European counterparts highlighting threats to media professionals, particularly women,

and calling for accountability for crimes against journalists.

On 4 November, **Austria**, UNESCO and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, hosted a conference to mark the 10 Year Anniversary of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists. Lord (Tariq) Ahmad led the UK delegation, highlighting continued UK action on this issue and joined a high-level panel to discuss best practice.

In November, Commonwealth Law Ministers endorsed Commonwealth Media Principles, reaching consensus for the first time on the important role of free media and freedom of expression in good governance.

Responding to **Russia's** illegal invasion of Ukraine, the UK condemned Russia's attacks on journalists, countered Russian disinformation and held Russia to account at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe, UNESCO and at the UN. Ten journalists were killed in **Ukraine** in 2022. The UK supported journalists to relocate to more secure areas, provided personal protective, first aid and medical equipment for journalists, and delivered training.

In **El Salvador**, the government used legislation, paid trolls and spying software to harass, deter, and in some cases, prosecute critical voices. The British Embassy showed public support for journalists, including those critical of the government. The Vice President participated in an embassy forum with UNESCO and the Association of Journalists of El Salvador – the first time a government representative had done so.

In **Ethiopia**, the suppression of free speech and independent media increased in 2022. Journalists continued to be arrested and detained unlawfully by federal and regional governments, licenses to

[38] G7 Media Ministers Meeting Communiqué – United States Department of State

[39] https://twitter.com/JamesCleverly/status/1587744824911925248?s=20&t=Y9vqZfYrsl88YXWdUEw_uA

[40] Media Freedom Coalition statement on the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists 2022 – Media Freedom Coalition

[41] <https://twitter.com/UNESCO/status/1587580494463516678?cxt=HHwWJlCjYyDnlgsAAAA>

operate were suspended and international journalists deported in violation of Ethiopian law. The Ethiopian government cut off communications in Tigray and parts of Amhara, Afar and Oromia, for periods of time, limiting the flow of information to and from those communities. The UK raised its deep concerns with the Ethiopian Government, and on International Women's Day hosted a reception for women journalists and media workers to support their work.

In **Sudan**, restrictions on media freedom also continued. Radio outlets that were seen to be critical of the military were shut down, heads of state-media institutions replaced, and journalists unlawfully detained. The UK supported independent media outlets by offering capacity-building courses to journalists, designed to help them report on issues related to the economy and the political transition.

In **Egypt**, though new arrests of journalists decreased and many journalists were released from pre-trial detention, others were arrested and remain in prison. In September, prosecutors summoned and interrogated four journalists from independent news website Mada Masr and charged them with "spreading false news". The UK regularly raised concerns about freedom of expression and independent media with the Egyptian authorities. The UK also consistently raised the case of detained blogger Alaa Abd El-Fattah (a dual British-Egyptian national), at the highest levels of the Egyptian government. In November, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak raised the case directly with President Sisi at the COP27 summit in Sharm El-Sheikh.

The Protecting Independent Media for Effective Development programme worked with the Independent Media Commission in **Sierra Leone**, which led to the UK Government hosting a major National Conference on Media Viability and Investment. This convened the private sector, government, regulator, and civil society. The Minister for Communications presented a

'National Action Plan for the Media of Sierra Leone' at UNESCO's World Press Freedom Day on 3 May.

On the same day, the UK Ambassador to **Nepal** invited 11 Nepali women to speak publicly about their experiences as women journalists, poets and publishers. The event raised the profile of female journalism and writing in Nepal, and underlined UK support for independent voices in Nepal.

In 2023, the UK will continue to shine a spotlight on the situation facing journalists and media workers globally, supporting the efforts of the Media Freedom Coalition, UNESCO's Global Media Defence Fund, and effective media development to protect the viability of media worldwide.

Freedom of Expression

Freedom of expression is not only a human right in and of itself but is also an essential element for the enjoyment of a range of other human rights. It applies both online and offline. For democracy to function, people must be allowed to discuss and debate issues freely, to challenge their governments, and to make informed decisions. Freedom of expression continued to be suppressed in many contexts, including through new laws and arrests of people simply for expressing their opinions. Alongside the UK's work on media freedom, the UK has acted around the world to protect freedom of expression across society.

Shortly after launching its invasion of Ukraine, **Russia** introduced so-called "fake news" and "discrediting of the armed forces" laws to stifle domestic dissent. It is vital that ordinary citizens can access reliable and objective information and have a choice in the media they consume. The UK tackled the dissemination of Russian disinformation through an unprecedented package of sanctions announced in March, targeting Russian propagandists and state media.

The UK joined a Ukrainian-led resolution on disinformation, a first for the Human Rights Council. The resolution highlights how disinformation can affect human rights and presents guidance on tackling this problem from a rights-based perspective.

In **Tunisia**, a decree law aimed at 'tackling fake news and misinformation' was adopted in September. The vague terminology has been left open to interpretation and prosecutions under decree law included judges who were critical of the government, opposition politicians, a journalist and a civil society activist. Tunisian civil society and the National Union of Tunisian Journalists argue that the law threatens freedom of expression and freedom of the media. Tunisia fell 21 places in the annual press freedom index by Reporters Without Borders.

In **Saudi Arabia**, there remained a culture of self-censorship, with freedom of expression and media freedom restricted. There has been a notable increase in the frequency and severity of punishment for online activity. Lord (Tariq) Ahmad raised media freedom with the Saudi Human Rights Commission in February. The UK raised individual cases relating to freedom of expression, including Salma Al-Shehab and Nourah Al-Qahtani, with the Saudi authorities at official and ministerial levels.

In **Uganda**, arbitrary detentions continued to be used against government critics and members of the opposition, including those making negative comments online. The parliament of Uganda passed the Computer Misuse (Amendment) Act 2022 that included provisions that could contribute to further restrictions on media freedom and freedom of expression. The UK raised its concerns around the Act and urged the government of Uganda to ensure that, while striking the balance between protecting the right to privacy (including child protection) and freedom of expression, they uphold the fundamentals of both the constitution of Uganda and Uganda's

obligations under international human rights law.

Freedom of expression remained a concern in **Egypt** in 2022. Authorities continued to block access to hundreds of independent websites. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, Egypt remained among the world's top ten jailers of journalists, with 21 journalists in prison. The UK publicly raised the issues of blocked media websites and the free operation of independent media in its Item 4 statements at the UN Human Rights Council.

In 2023, the UK will continue to track restrictions on freedom of expression across the world, raising our concerns both privately and publicly.

Freedom of Religion or Belief

Promoting the right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) remained a priority for the UK. The Minister for Human Rights, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, continued to lead FoRB work, in coordination with the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for FoRB, Fiona Bruce MP, supported by the Deputy Special Envoy, David Burrowes.

In **China**, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Falun Gong practitioners and others remained at risk of persecution, and systematic restrictions on the practice of Islam in Xinjiang persisted. The UK consistently raised this with the authorities at the highest levels. In

March, the then Foreign Secretary addressed the situation in Xinjiang and Tibet in a speech at the UN Human Rights Council, and in October, UK efforts helped to secure the support of 50 countries for a statement at the UN Third Committee that highlighted the severe violations on FoRB in Xinjiang.

In **Algeria**, some Christian groups and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community reported difficulties in practising their faith, largely because of difficulties in registering as a religious minority group. This led to the closure of some churches and arrests. The UK engaged regularly with religious minorities and raised FoRB at Ministerial level during Lord (Tariq) Ahmad's visit in June, as well as in the margins of a FoRB event hosted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in December. Fiona Bruce MP, the PM's Special Envoy for FoRB, met government officials and faith leaders during a visit in September with a delegation from the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance.

Bahrain continued its long tradition of respecting and enabling FoRB, including through engagement and promotion in FoRB initiatives worldwide. Promoting the centrality of Bahrain's message of religious tolerance, the King Hamad Centre for Peaceful Co-existence works to promote Bahrain's tolerant approach, both regionally and further afield. During his visit to Bahrain in February, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad met with the Board of Trustees of King Hamad Centre for Peaceful Co-existence as well as faith leaders. In July, Bahrain's Foreign Minister, Dr. Abdullatif Al Zayani, attended the FoRB International Ministerial Conference in London. Bahrain also hosted an interreligious dialogue in November, which included attendees such as Pope Francis and Grand Imam Ahmed el-Tayeb, who used the opportunity to call for a Sunni-Shia summit to improve dialogue within Islam.

In **Saudi Arabia**, the open practice of non-Muslim faiths remained prohibited. However, positively, the Saudi authorities continued to



The then Foreign Secretary Liz Truss speaking at the UN Human Rights Council in March 2022.



Lord (Tariq) Ahmad meeting with the Board of Trustees of King Hamad Centre for Peaceful Coexistence and faith leaders during his visit to Bahrain in February.

employ more inclusive language towards other faiths. Further welcome developments include the Muslim World League hosting an inter-faith conference in Riyadh in May, and in December declaring that Muslims are not prohibited from exchanging Christmas greetings with Christians.

Since 2014, **Russia** has sustained a campaign of persecution against Crimean Tatars, Jehovah's Witnesses, and clergy belonging to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and Protestant churches in areas of Ukraine temporarily controlled by Russia. Jehovah's Witnesses are banned in Russia, which the European Court of Human Rights has ruled unlawful and in violation of the European Convention of Human Rights. With international partners, the UK helped to secure a UN Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur on human rights in Russia.

In **Eritrea**, the government continued to persecute non-Eritrean Orthodox religious denominations such as the Pentecostal Church and Shia Islam, imprisoning believers and closing down places of worship. In October, a bishop and two priests were detained by the government before being released at the end of December. The UK Chargé d'Affaires raised this arbitrary persecution with the Minister of Information.

In **Sri Lanka**, President Wickremesinghe set an improved tone on FoRB by celebrating the country's diversity in his inaugural speech and later indicated that the controversial "One Country, One Law" commission would be discontinued. However, practices undermining these reconciliatory gestures persisted. State-led attempts to conserve Buddhist heritage were widely perceived to be intended to change religious and ethnic demographics in the North-East. The UK raised these concerns whilst urging the government to foster FoRB in UK-led Human Rights Council resolution 51/1. This renewed the mandate of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

(OHCHR) to report on Sri Lanka and to protect and preserve evidence of past human rights abuses to use in future accountability processes.

In **Pakistan**, religious minorities including Shia Muslims, Christians and Hindus suffered discrimination and violence. Targeting of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community escalated. The UK raised concerns at the highest level in Pakistan and convened inter-faith dialogues with community representatives. In October, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad visited Pakistan and discussed the need to protect freedom of religion or belief with the Government of Pakistan. He also hosted a human rights roundtable with faith leaders and human rights activists to hear their first-hand perspectives.

UK funding supported programmes addressing discrimination and intolerance against marginalised communities. The Inclusion, Accountability and Prevention of Modern Slavery Programme worked with government and local communities to protect and promote the rights of excluded groups, including religious minorities. In December, the UK sanctioned Mian Abdul Haq, a cleric responsible for the forced conversions of girls and women.

In **Afghanistan**, many religious minorities continued to face persecution, threats and forced displacement, including the predominantly Shia Hazara and Sikh communities. Islamic State Khorasan Province carried out attacks against minority religious communities resulting in hundreds of people killed and injured. In October, the UK co-sponsored a Human Rights Council resolution that extended the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, to report on the human rights situation for another year, including the situation for minority groups.

In **Nigeria**, terrorist groups like Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa sought to undermine the right to FoRB by attacking those who do not subscribe to their extremist views.

The UK took a coordinated approach to supporting Nigeria and its neighbours to address the causes and effects of the conflict. This involved political and defence engagement; humanitarian, development and counter-terrorism support; and stabilisation and mediation assistance. Separately, armed violence and criminality in the northwest and Middle Belt have impacted on both Christian and Muslim communities. The UK's peacebuilding projects are sensitive to the religious identities of participants, and have included training peace ambassadors, including women peacebuilders, and faith leaders to promote tolerance and understanding between communities.

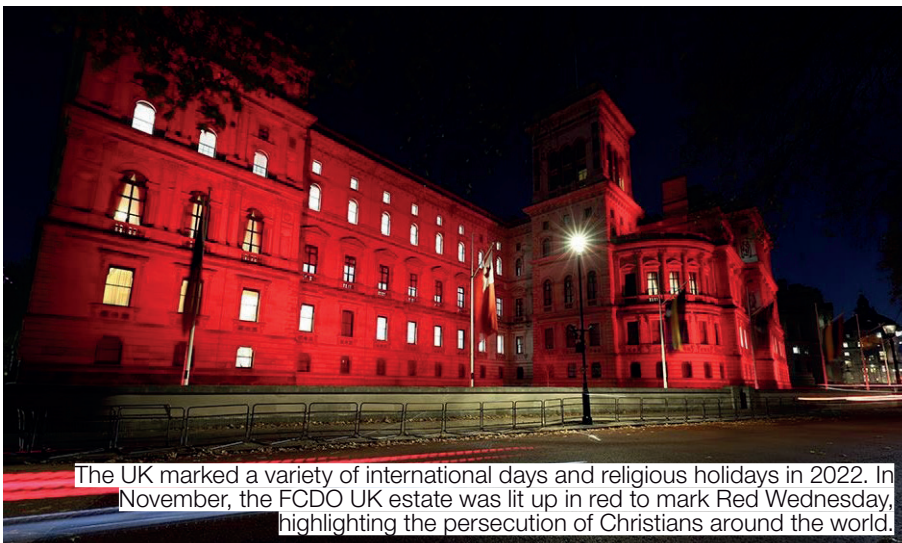
In **India**, the offices of the UK High Commission and Deputy High Commissions regularly engaged with religious representatives and faith communities, and the UK demonstrated its support for diverse faith communities by hosting events. In April, the High Commission hosted an Iftar, attended by religious and civil society contacts, to celebrate the important contribution these community leaders have made to Indian society. The UK High Commissioner regularly visited places of worship across India, including the ISCKON temple in Delhi and the Jama Masjid.

In September, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad spoke at the UN and urged the international community to call out Iran for systematically targeting members of minority communities, including those of the Baha'i faith; to press **Afghanistan** to protect minorities targeted for their beliefs, including Sikhs, Christians and the Hazaras, to challenge the discriminatory provisions in **Myanmar's** citizenship laws, and to hold China to account for its egregious human rights violations in Xinjiang, particularly against the Uyghur Muslims.

In October, the Special Envoy for FoRB spoke at a regional FoRB conference in **Slovakia** (Bratislava) and in December, supported the launch of a new Central European



The Prime Minister's Special Envoy for FoRB, Fiona Bruce MP, with her Deputy, David Burrowes and US Deputy Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, Mariah Mercer. The group had a constructive meeting with officials at Algeria's Ministry of Interior during the visit by the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance to Algeria in September 2022.



The UK marked a variety of international days and religious holidays in 2022. In November, the FCDO UK estate was lit up in red to mark Red Wednesday, highlighting the persecution of Christians around the world.

FoRB roundtable in The Czech Republic (Prague).

The Special Envoy for FoRB was the Chair of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance for 2022. Her focus was on strengthening the Alliance's membership, member engagement, and effectiveness. As a result, the Alliance grew to 45 members, friends and observers. At the end of 2022, the Envoy was re-elected as Chair of the Alliance for 2023.

Alliance statements were issued on **Nigeria, Ukraine and Nicaragua**, on issues affecting Jehovah's Witnesses, the Ahmadiyya Muslim community and the Baha'i community. Another statement expressed concern at the use of the death penalty for blasphemy and apostasy, and was timed to coincide with the UN General Assembly resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty.

In September, the Special Envoy for FoRB led an Alliance delegation to **Algeria**, building useful relationships with the government to discuss situations faced by minority faith and belief communities.

In July, the UK published an independent assessment of its progress in implementing recommendations from the Bishop of Truro's review to address the persecution of Christians. The review concluded that the majority of the recommendations were either at an advanced stage of delivery or in the process of being delivered. The then Foreign Secretary, Liz Truss, set out in a written ministerial statement that she was encouraged by what had been achieved in recent years, in the face of many global challenges. She noted that the UK had led international efforts to increase collaboration to support those who were persecuted for what they believe, and that the UK would look for opportunities to make FoRB central to our wider human rights work.^[42]

UK missions drew on the John Bunyan Fund to support FoRB projects run by local partners. The FCDO continued to fund programmes through the Institute of Development Studies and the University of Oxford.

In 2023, the UK will continue to ensure that the changes made in response to the Truro Review and the outcomes from the International Ministerial Conference are embedded in the FCDO's work. The PM's Special Envoy for FoRB will remain as Chair of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance until the end of 2023.

Lord (Tariq) Ahmad announced £500,000 new UK funding to support defenders of FoRB, including those persecuted because of their activism, as well as funding and expertise for countries prepared to make legislative changes to protect FoRB.

[42] Written statements – Written questions, answers and statements – UK Parliament

FORB Conference

The UK demonstrated its commitment to freedom of religion or belief by holding an International Ministerial Conference on from 5 to 6 July at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre in London. The conference, hosted by Lord (Tariq) Ahmad and the PM's Special Envoy for FoRB, Fiona Bruce MP, brought together a diverse group of over 800 faith and belief leaders, human rights actors and government delegates for rich discussions to address challenges to the right to FoRB.

Ahead of the conference, the Special Envoy and the Prime Minister's Deputy Special Envoy for FoRB, David Burrowes met community and faith groups across the country to raise awareness of FoRB issues around the world.

The conference explored the many facets of FoRB through seventeen themed panel sessions, which covered topics such as early warning and atrocity prevention, legislative protections, inter-convictional dialogue, conflict and insecurity, tackling discrimination, the digital world, gender, engaging parliamentarians, education, the media and innovation. The conference gave a platform to those persecuted for their religion or belief, with speakers from a range of backgrounds from all round the world. Forty-seven governments, international organisations and other entities made pledges to act in support of FoRB. Participating countries joined the UK in signing up to one or more of a set of statements.^[43]

The conference was an important milestone which galvanised international efforts to do more to protect and promote the right to FoRB. Through the convening power of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance, the UK is now helping turn words into action by building coalitions of government and civil society actors focused on key themes from the conference, including on legal reform, inspiring the next generation, cultural and religious heritage, prisoners of conscience, and education.



Opening plenary session on "FoRB: a right for everyone, everywhere" at the International Ministerial Conference on FoRB in July.



Fiona Bruce, the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for FoRB and Lord (Tariq) Ahmad at the closing session of the International Ministerial Conference on FoRB, in July.

[43] International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief 2022: conference statements – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

CHAPTER 4: Safeguarding Human Rights

Post-Holocaust Issues

The UK is committed to international cooperation to promote education, remembrance and research about the Holocaust. As one of the founding signatories of the Stockholm Declaration in 2000, the UK pledged that the terrible events of the Holocaust would remain forever seared in our collective memory.

The Rt Hon Lord Pickles, UK Special Envoy for post-Holocaust issues, continued to ensure that the UK played a prominent role in international discussions on all Holocaust-related matters. Lord Pickles led the UK delegation at two plenary meetings of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), under the Swedish chair.

On 20 January, the UK was proud to co-sponsor an historic UN resolution on the importance of combatting Holocaust denial and distortion. Throughout the year, the UK continually challenged Russia's attempts to justify its territorial aggression against Ukraine on the purported basis of eliminating neo-Nazism, and condemned Russia's deliberate destruction of Ukrainian Holocaust records and sites in the strongest terms.

In January, the FCDO co-hosted an online event with the Israeli Embassy to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day. The event included speeches from the Foreign Secretary, the Minister for Human Rights and the UK Special Envoy for post-Holocaust issues, as well as Holocaust survivor, Lily Ebert.

On 27 January, the FCDO announced that the UK Government will make all of its records related to the Holocaust available to the public for the first time for research and study purposes. This includes the collection of 787 books in the St. Lambrecht collection, once looted by the Nazis. The UK also continued to fund the Wiener Holocaust Library to maintain its digital copy of the International Tracing Service, one of the largest archives on the victims of the Holocaust.

In April, Lord Pickles participated in the Special Envoys' Forum on Antisemitism, coordinated by the World Jewish Congress, to discuss joint initiatives to tackle antisemitism and to share best practice on Holocaust remembrance and education. In November, Lord Pickles chaired a panel on immovable property and looted art at the

International Terezin Declaration Conference, in the Czech Republic.

In March 2024, the UK will assume the IHRA Presidency for one year and will use this to continue to drive international efforts to promote Holocaust education, and to counter Holocaust denial and distortion.

Responsibility to Protect and Mass Atrocity Prevention

Human rights violations and abuses can constitute or amount to an atrocity crime if certain thresholds or conditions are met. The UK supports the UN principle of the Responsibility to Protect, which focuses on the responsibility of states to protect populations from mass atrocities. The UK's policy is to maximise our ability to take effective action to prevent and respond to atrocities.

In September, the UK established the Mass Atrocity Prevention Hub within the FCDO. The Hub aims to provide a dedicated focus on atrocity prevention in both conflict and non-conflict contexts. The Hub strengthened understanding and knowledge of atrocity prevention across government through training and promoting collaboration and best practice. The Hub also developed a comprehensive approach to atrocity prevention, in addition to collaborating with international partners on this issue.

The UK welcomed the International Development Committee's report on the UK's approach to atrocity prevention and committed to taking forward recommendations on bolstering capacity. In line with the Committee's recommendations, the UK, via the Hub, strengthened its central early warning processes and integrated atrocity risk analysis into its foresight and global horizon scanning capabilities. It also offered



The UK Special Envoy for post-Holocaust issues, Lord Pickles, with Nick Archer, former British Ambassador to the Czech Republic, at the International Terezin Declaration Conference in Prague in November 2022.

online atrocity prevention training delivered by the US State Department.

Throughout 2022, the UK trialled new approaches to enhanced monitoring, using Open-Source Intelligence projects to publicly expose activities of hostile states, armed groups and the networks that support them to carry out violations and abuses. These projects helped to verify incidents of grave human rights violations and abuses and enabled UK diplomats to confidently speak out. The evidence gathered may have the potential to be used in future legal proceedings. For example, in **Myanmar**, the UK supported monitoring through the Myanmar Witness Programme, which bolsters the evidence-gathering work of the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar.

The UK took robust action in response to atrocity risks around the world. In **Ethiopia**, the UK strongly backed efforts to ensure accountability for violations and abuses by supporting the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia, co-sponsoring a resolution to extend the latter's mandate.

The FCDO provided funding through a Jo Cox Memorial Grant for research into atrocity prevention in eastern **DRC**. This showed how identity-based violence and atrocity risk might be better integrated into local early warning and response mechanisms.

As a member of the International Atrocity Prevention Working Group, the UK worked closely with international partners and contributed to and led international statements highlighting concerning situations. In October, the UK issued a joint statement expressing concern at the resumption of hostilities in **Ethiopia**, calling for an African Union-led peace process.

The UK continued to engage with the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect, supporting accountability efforts via Human Rights Council-mandated Investigative Mechanisms.

In October, the UK, as part of the Group of Friends, delivered a statement at the UN Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security, highlighting the pivotal importance of women's inclusion in successful atrocity prevention.

Throughout 2023, the UK will continue to be an active member of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect and the International Atrocity Prevention Working Group. The UK will also work bilaterally with countries of concern and others to support states, civil society and the international community in their atrocity prevention efforts.

Peacekeeping

The UK is a leading contributor to the delivery and reform of UN peacekeeping. It does this through deployments, extra-budgetary funding and training partnerships. For example, through the British Peace Support Team (Africa) the UK delivered training to over 5,000 personnel deploying into UN and African Union missions in the past year. This includes comprehensive training on human security.

The UK provided training on sexual and gender-based violence to police personnel in **Ghana** and **Sierra Leone**, focusing on how to ensure investigations are centred around the rights and dignity of victims.

Over the last year, the UK also ensured peacekeeping missions were mandated and resourced to promote respect for human rights and to pursue accountability for human rights violations and abuses. The UK played a leading role in securing the first cross-cutting peacekeeping resolution in six years, at the UN's Budget and Administrative Committee. This included robust language on the importance of tackling sexual exploitation and abuse by UN peacekeepers on mission. The UK highlighted the importance of upholding human rights and protection of civilians after missions draw down. For example, in

MONUSCO, in the **DRC**, the UK is working with the UN and its Member States to agree clear benchmarks that signal a defined end state, not end date, to support long-term peace.

In 2023, the UK will continue to deliver sexual and gender-based violence training and will also deliver courses to support planning and engagement for civilians and vulnerable minority groups. To date, the UK has contributed \$8.7 million to the Elsie Initiative Fund to promote uniformed women's participation in peacekeeping. The UK will continue to stress the importance of promoting the full, equal and meaningful participation role of women in peacekeeping, protecting civilians and preventing sexual violence in conflict as integral parts of peacekeeping operations.

Security and Justice

It is essential that the security and justice sectors of countries around the world uphold and protect the human rights of all, particularly individuals belonging to vulnerable and marginalised groups.

There were some positive global developments on security and justice issues in 2022. **Bahrain** continued to expand the use of alternative sentencing legislation, which was applied to 1470 cases in 2022. Judges can use it at the point of sentencing and all prisoners can apply for non-custodial sentences under the legislation, irrespective of time served.

However, backwards steps on justice and security were observed in other countries. In **Myanmar**, the military continued to assassinate and arbitrarily detain those protesting against the coup, and there were widespread and credible reports of sexual violence and torture. In **Haiti**, where the rule of law has deteriorated, armed gangs committed widespread human rights abuses with impunity.

Meanwhile, in **Guatemala**, the co-option of the justice system continued, as did the politically

motivated detention of prosecutors fighting corruption.^[44] In her visit to the country in November, the UK's Global Ambassador for Human Rights, Rita French, raised concerns around the misuse of criminal procedures directly with the Guatemalan foreign minister.

Death Penalty

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

The UK welcomed notable developments in the **Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Papua New Guinea and Zambia**, where the death penalty was abolished in 2022.

Elsewhere, the death penalty continued to be used, and in some states increased. **China** did not publish statistics on executions, but independent estimates indicate China remained the world's leading executioner. **Iran** also remained one of the worst executors globally with over 500 persons executed, including at least two juvenile offenders, an increase of 83% compared to 2021. Trials in Iran were frequently arbitrary, summary and fell far short of internationally recognised fair trial and due process standards. **Saudi Arabia** carried out 196 executions, around triple the number of executions in 2021.

In **Afghanistan**, the Taliban reiterated that full implementation of Sharia law was compulsory, including public executions. In **Egypt**, the rate of executions declined but the numbers of new death penalty sentences remained amongst the highest in the world with 538 in 2022 according to Amnesty^[45]. In **Myanmar**, the military junta executed four pro-democracy activists, the first use of the death penalty in Myanmar for over 30 years. The military junta has threatened further executions since.



The UK's Global Ambassador for Human Rights, Rita French, meeting with the Vice President of Sierra Leone, Mohamed Juldeh Jalloh, in April 2022. They discussed the progress of human rights in Sierra Leone, including the successful abolition of the death penalty.

Belarus remained the only country in Europe to retain and administer the death penalty, with unsubstantiated reports of one execution and two people remaining on death row in 2022. The scope of the death penalty was extended to include attempted acts of terrorism and members of the security forces or government officials found guilty of treason.

In the **US**, 24 States retained the death penalty and 18 executions were carried out by six States: Texas, Oklahoma, Alabama, Mississippi, Arizona and Missouri. **Japan** carried out one execution.

The UK continued work to bring an end to the use of the death penalty through legal diplomacy and targeted bilateral interventions by both FCDO ministers and officials. The UK was also vocal at the multilateral level, strongly supporting the UN General Assembly 9th resolution for a moratorium on the use of the death penalty.

The UK used its funding to sponsor projects on death penalty abolition. This funded partners such as Reprieve and the Death Penalty Project to facilitate training and legal interventions in countries including **Bangladesh, Ghana, Guyana,**

Kenya, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago and Zimbabwe.

In 2023, the UK will continue to work closely with partners to bring an end to the use of the death penalty globally, including though continued programming on abolition.

Torture Prevention

The UK Government strongly condemns the use of torture in all circumstances. Torture is an abhorrent violation of human rights and human dignity, and the UK is clear that it does not participate in, solicit, encourage or condone the use of torture for any purpose. UK ministers and officials regularly raise concerns with other states and encourage them to fully comply with international obligations to prevent torture.

In 2022, there were some positive steps in preventing the use of torture. For instance, despite credible allegations of torture and mistreatment, including of senior political figures, **Pakistan** took the welcome step of passing the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention and Punishment) Act, which aims to

[44] <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/11/guatemala-un-expert-condemns-targeting-prosecutor-and-judge>

[45] Death sentences and executions 2022 – Amnesty International, May 2023

protect people in custody from torture perpetrated by public officials.

However, many countries around the world continued to subject individuals to torture or other inhumane or degrading treatment. Where allegations of torture were reported to the authorities, many states did not fulfil their duty to investigate and hold those responsible to account.

There was minimal progress on torture in **Uzbekistan**, while concerns about prevention and oversight remained considerable. Of 126 official complaints from citizens of torture by law enforcement, only four cases resulted in criminal charges.

In **Iraq**, there were reports of the widespread use of torture, including to extract forced confessions. There were also credible reports of torture in other countries including **Afghanistan, China** and **Myanmar**.

The UK continued to advocate against the use of torture. UK funding to the Association for the Prevention of Torture supported programmes in over 15 countries across Africa, Latin America and Asia to reduce the risk of torture and ill-treatment in the criminal justice systems. Programmes also strengthened the transparency and independent oversight of countries' national National Preventive Mechanisms, established under the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture (OPCAT).

The FCDO also provided consular assistance to British nationals overseas who alleged torture and mistreatment. The UK takes all allegations of torture or mistreatment of British nationals very seriously. Between January and December, British nationals reported 133 new allegations of torture or mistreatment overseas to consular staff. The FCDO held regular reviews of all such cases, to develop strategies to engage the local authorities and identify regional trends, which the FCDO could address. In 2022, the FCDO reviewed a total of 140 open cases. The FCDO also continued to

train staff on how to deal with complex consular cases, including the appropriate action to take when receiving an allegation of torture or mistreatment.

The UK will continue to assist countries in torture prevention through international engagement and funding to partners, aimed at strengthening local and national mechanisms and capacity building.

Arbitrary Detention

Arbitrarily detaining individuals is unacceptable, unjust, and contrary to states' obligations under international law. The UK condemns the use of arbitrary detention and calls for perpetrators to be held to account.

Last year again saw concerning developments on arbitrary detention. In **Ethiopia**, where reports of arbitrary arrests continued throughout the year, 40 journalists were arrested or continued to be detained unlawfully by federal and regional governments. In the **Central African Republic**, arbitrary and unlawful arrest and detention, particularly due to exceeding the legal time limits or due to lack of a detention order, continued to be a serious concern. In **Venezuela**, critics of the regime continued to be subject to arbitrary detention, including seven trade unionists who remained in detention in December.

In response, the UK continued to work publicly and privately to condemn the use of arbitrary detention and to raise concerns with host governments. The UK supported those who have been arbitrarily detained without access to a fair trial, including by monitoring cases, observing trials and requesting access to detention facilities where prisoners were held. The UK also remained a vocal supporter of the Canadian initiative against the use of arbitrary detention in state-to-state relations, alongside 68 other states and the EU.

Looking ahead to 2023, the UK will remain committed to working with

likeminded partners and through multilateral fora to end arbitrary detention, to advocate for those who have been arbitrarily detained to be released and to demand accountability.

Overseas Security and Justice Assistance

The FCDO continued to work with organisations across the UK to implement the latest Guidance on Overseas Security and Justice Assistance (OSJA). This 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 those risks. This guidance ensures that UK overseas security and justice assistance work meets our human rights obligations and our values.

Below is an estimate of the number of OSJA cases from across Government during the financial year 2022 to 2023:

Region	Assessments
Europe	265
Central Asia	24
Americas	94
Middle East & North Africa	139
Sub Saharan Africa	98
South Asia	44
Asia Pacific	114

Export Controls

The UK Government assesses the risk of human rights violations and abuses for export licence applications on a case-by-case basis and against the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria announced on 8 December 2021, and the strengthened Military End-Use Controls that came into force on 19 May 2022.^[46]

[46] NTE 2022/17: military end-use controls update – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

UK Approach to Granting Export Licences

The UK Government will not grant an export licence where it determines that, among other things, there is a clear risk that the items to be exported:

- » Might be used to commit or facilitate internal repression.
- » Might be used to commit or facilitate a serious violation of International Humanitarian Law.
- » Would overall undermine peace and security, including internal peace and security.

Taking this into consideration, the Government will take account of the risk that the items might be used to commit or facilitate gender-based violence or serious acts of violence against women or children.

The UK Government publishes statistics on all licence decisions, including refusals, on a quarterly basis.^[47]

Private Sector – Business and Human Rights

At the G7 leaders meeting in June, the UK reaffirmed its commitment to implementing international standards relating to human rights across global supply chains, to tackling child labour, and to ensuring decent work. This includes the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights as the leading international framework guiding both states and business in upholding human rights for all, particularly with access to remedies for victims of business-related human rights abuses.

The G7 Sustainable Supply Chain Initiative, established under the UK's presidency, evolved during 2022 to be managed as a global initiative by the Organisation for Economic



Andrew Patrick, the UK's Migration and Modern Slavery Envoy, meeting with the Belgian Economic Mission to the UK in May 2022. They discussed implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

Co-operation and Development. The Sustainable Supply Chain Initiative includes a commitment by 22 leading G7 food and agriculture companies to take action to improve the environmental and social impact of their supply chains and business operations.

The UK introduced a package of measures to update the export control regime, which included steps to enhance military end-use control and to add China to the list of those destinations subject to military end-use controls. These measures came into force on 19 May 2022 and have strengthened the UK's ability to prevent exports that might be used to facilitate human rights violations, including to Xinjiang.

Priorities for 2023 include continuing to work across HMG to champion the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, in bilateral and multilateral engagement. The UK will also continue to raise the awareness and capacity of investors in global capital markets to disrupt flows of capital that fund business human rights abuses.

Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights

The Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights provide tangible guidance to companies on responsible business practices when operating in fragile and high-risk environments. The Voluntary Principles are a key tool in implementing the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Further detail of the UK's work on this can be found in the UK's 2022 Voluntary Principles Annual Update Report.^[48]

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 high risk and conflict areas. Looking forward, UK funding will seek to strengthen industry regulations and legal reform on private security in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo** and **Nigeria**, roll out a joint action toolkit to identify and help mitigate community-corporate conflicts in

[47] <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/strategic-export-controls-licensing-data>

[48] 2022 UK annual update report on the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights for businesses operating in complex or fragile environments – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Colombia and create in-country working groups to tackle human rights challenges of today.

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 International Code of Conduct. The Code sets out principles and standards for security providers. 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 helped to build the capacity of private security providers and their clients on contracting responsible guarding services.

The UK continues to look for opportunities to strengthen participation in mechanisms to regulate private security companies to distinguish responsible actors from malign actors who would seek to undermine the proper functioning of the sector, such as the Wagner Group.

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 UK continued to engage with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and

supported its initiatives to embed standards for due diligence in mineral supply chains globally. During 2022, the focus shifted from conflict minerals to a wider agenda covering minerals critical for energy transition such as cobalt and lithium.

The UK continued to be an active member of the European Partnership for Responsible Minerals and to chair its Downstream Working Group, focused on providing due diligence support to Small and Medium-sized Enterprises and the downstream companies in the sector.

Going forward, the UK will continue to promote the responsible development of supply chains and the circular economy, and the improvement of existing environmental, social, and governance standards.

The Kimberley Process

The Kimberley Process is an international initiative which aims to stop the trade in “conflict diamonds”. It was created to ensure that diamond purchases are not financing violence by rebel movements and their allies seeking to undermine legitimate governments, and creating the conditions that fuel human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law. UK participation in the Process, along with the Government Diamond Office’s implementation and enforcement of the Kimberley Process’ Certificate Scheme, enable the UK to play its part in preventing rough diamonds fuelling conflict.

During 2022, the UK and partners used their participation in the Kimberley Process to support **Ukraine**, to publicly condemn **Russia’s** invasion of Ukraine, and to call for the initiative to discuss the implications of the conflict given Russia’s position as one of the world’s largest exporters of rough diamonds.

In May, the UK joined a Kimberley Process visit to **Zimbabwe** to review their compliance with the

requirements, including how they control the production, import and export of rough diamonds.

In 2023, the UK will work with Kimberley Process participants, industry and civil society on reforming the Kimberley Process, including updating the definition of a conflict diamond so the Process is better able to address the different types of conflict in the diamond sector.

Modern Slavery

The Covid-19 pandemic and the consequences of protracted conflict and humanitarian crises have increased the risk of modern slavery worldwide. The Global Estimates published by the International Labour Organisation in 2022 indicate that 49.6 million people are in modern slavery on any given day. This is an increase of nearly 10 million in the last five years.

In 2022, the UK Government remained committed to eradicating all forms of modern slavery, forced labour and human trafficking in line with achieving UN Sustainable Development Goal 8.7 by 2030.^[49]

The invasion of **Ukraine** caused an increased risk of human trafficking across the region. The resulting humanitarian crisis left many Ukrainian refugees, particularly women and children, vulnerable to exploitation. The UK worked to monitor and minimise the threat of trafficking of Ukrainian refugees in the UK and across the region, partnering with neighbouring governments, NGOs, INTERPOL and EUROPOL.

In October, the UK, alongside other OSCE participating states, funded the OSCE Office of the Special Representative on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings to deliver the project “Preventing and responding to trafficking in human beings amid the humanitarian crisis related to the war in Ukraine”. Since the project started, the office has worked with 13 OSCE participating states affected by the flow of Ukrainian refugees.

[49] Goal 8 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs (un.org)

Elsewhere, the UK continued to address modern slavery in the mining sector in Africa, and continued to combat the worst forms of child labour in South Asia. The UK worked towards eliminating forced labour in global supply chains, with a focus on South East Asia, and pushed forward action to reduce the number of women and girls in modern slavery. In September, the UK also secured the renewal of the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on Modern Slavery for three more years.

The UK supported the Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour and worked with partners to deliver on commitments from the resulting Call to Action. This included eliminating child labour from global supply chains and ensuring that survivors' voices are heard. For example, the UK commissioned research which found that meaningful engagement with survivors of modern slavery improves the effectiveness of policy and programming. The UK is working with survivor-led organisations to implement the recommendations and is committed to effective and ethical engagement.

The UK Migration and Modern Slavery Envoy continued to strengthen bilateral relations with international partners to achieve our aim of ending modern slavery. The Envoy:

- » Visited the **Holy See** and **Italy** to discuss the anti-trafficking risk following the Ukraine invasion and the importance of a global response.
- » Met with Sir Valiant Richey, the OSCE Special Representative on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings, during his country visit to the UK.
- » Visited Doha ahead of the World Cup in **Qatar**, to follow up on the joint International Labour Organisation and Qatari Ministry of Labour visit to the UK in March. The Envoy encouraged further collaboration on combatting human trafficking and explored

how the UK can provide technical support on labour reforms. Lord (Tariq) Ahmad also raised workers' rights with his Qatari counterpart when he visited during the World Cup in December. Qatar continues to make progress on workers' rights and in 2022, Qatar assumed the role of vice-president of the International Labour Conference (ILC) during its 110th session. Qatar will hold the presidency of the ILC for 2023 and has pledged to continue its labour reforms.

Women and girls account for approximately 54% of modern slavery victims. In the **Philippines**, the UK Government supported and empowered trafficked and returning migrant women and children who are victims of online sexual abuse and exploitation, and their families, through a project that provides psychosocial support, counselling and livelihood opportunities.

In **Malaysia**, both government and industry have shown commitment to tackling forced labour, and key legislative reforms have been instituted. The UK supported the Malaysian government on improving enforcement and compliance, which remains a challenge, as a key component of its National Action Plan. This included a skills-sharing programme between the Malaysian Department of Labour and the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority which started in November.

In **India and Bangladesh**, UK support through the Work in Freedom programme reached 45,000 women migrant workers. Interventions included safe migration training, orientation sessions and access to information through NGOs, trade unions and Governments. In India, the UK continued to support projects to promote workers' rights and tackle child labour and forced labour. For example, over 350,000 vulnerable children (67% girls) at risk of child labour and trafficking were identified and linked with social protection schemes and programmes funded by the UK in 2022.

The Modern Slavery Fund (MSF), managed by the Home Office, continued to implement programmes internationally. In **Albania** and **Vietnam**, the MSF promoted alternative livelihoods to prevent modern slavery and to identify and protect victims of trafficking. In **Nigeria**, the MSF programme ended, having achieved results including an increase in investigation skills and the economic reintegration of 444 men and women. In **Romania**, a new MSF programme improved police call handlers' ability to respond to potential victims of trafficking.

The Modern Slavery Innovation Fund (MSIF), also managed by the Home Office, delivered projects across **Bangladesh, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mauritius, South Africa and Sudan**. These programmes supported legislative change, strengthening victim welfare, improving transparency in supply chains, and supporting over 2,196 migrant workers across Asia.

The UK will continue to push for change on a global scale, working to promote business and human rights and eradicate all forms of modern slavery. The UK's key priorities will continue to include eliminating forced labour in supply chains, leveraging the potential of private finance and capital markets to help address the risks of modern slavery, and stopping the exploitation of women and girls.

The UK will continue to support the Right Honourable Theresa May MP in her work to establish a Global Commission on Modern Slavery and to increase political leadership towards achieving UN Sustainable Development Goal 8.7.

Migration and Human Rights

The UN estimated there were 281 million international migrants globally in 2022.^[50] The Russian invasion of Ukraine contributed to this number and sparked the largest movement of refugees in Europe since WWII. Many

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

of these individuals are at risk of human rights abuses.

The UK continued to make clear its expectation that all states should discharge their international obligations towards migrants with full respect for human rights. The UK strongly condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which has led to breaches of international humanitarian law and human rights abuses and violations, along with significant movement of people. Around 5.9 million people in Ukraine were displaced, with an additional 7.89 million refugees recorded across Europe.^[51]

The UK created two specific visa schemes which offered support to displaced individuals and allowed uncapped numbers of Ukrainians to find safety in the UK. As of 5 December, the UK granted 204,900 visas under the Ukraine Family Scheme and Homes for Ukraine sponsorship scheme. The UK also committed £220 million of humanitarian assistance to Ukraine and the region.

Irregular migration continued to expose migrants to risks of exploitation and human rights abuses by organised crime groups. The UN estimated that 5,797 migrants lost their lives or went missing along migration routes worldwide,^[52] with at least 12 migrant deaths in the English Channel, including the tragic events in December when four people died attempting to cross the Channel. In 2022, joint activity with France saw nearly 33,000 of these dangerous, illegal and unnecessary crossings prevented. The UK continued to work with international partners on a “whole of route” approach to tackle the challenges of irregular migration. In December, the Prime Minister

committed to tackling irregular migration as a top priority, setting out a clear agenda to achieve this.^[53]

The UK has a proud history of providing protection for those who need it through its safe and legal routes, which have provided refuge for people from all over the world. However, nobody should put their

lives at risk by taking dangerous and illegal journeys. The UK’s migration partnership approach will see those arriving dangerously, illegally and unnecessarily into the UK returned to their home country (if safe) or relocated to have their claims for asylum considered in a safe third country where they will have the opportunity to rebuild their lives.

UK Programming on Migration and Human Rights

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,^[54] where UK funding from 2016 to 2023 supported 3.5 million Syrian refugees in Turkey. This helped vulnerable host communities to access education, health, jobs, and opportunities, with a focus on women and girls.

The UK also provided the International Organization for Migration with a substantial financial contribution to provide humanitarian assistance to forced migrants, refugees and other vulnerable groups.

In line with the UN Global Compact for Migration, the FCDO supported efforts to ensure more global migration was safe, orderly and regular. Through the Better Regional Migration Management programme, the UK helped to maximise the socio-economic benefits of safe and regular migration in East Africa. The programme supported activities to strengthen the use of data in labour market information systems and policy, to improve labour migration governance and skills recognition, and to protect labour migrants from exploitation and abuse.

Recognising that climate change will increasingly play a significant factor in driving global migration, the UK maintained its commitment to spend £11.6 billion in international climate finance between April 2021 and April 2026 to help vulnerable countries build resilience to climate change.^[55]

[51] <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>

[52] Data | Missing Migrants Project (iom.int)

[53] <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-on-illegal-migration-13-december-2022>

[54] <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://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

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

Economic and Social Rights

The UK remains committed to ending the preventable deaths of mothers, babies and children by 2030. In 2022, the UK identified eleven countries with high rates of preventable deaths.^[56] It then conducted analyses in those countries to identify how the UK, together with partners, can focus its collective policy, influencing and diplomatic efforts to achieve positive change, including through targeted technical assistance.

In 2023, the UK will continue to work with key partners, including civil society organisations and the private sector, to galvanise action and push for a multi-sectoral approach to ending preventable deaths, underpinned by a focus on equity, quality and integration.

The UK continued to support global cooperation, accountability and partnership to strengthen systems that deliver equitable, sustainable and climate resilient water, sanitation and hygiene services. With others, the UK's support to Sanitation and Water for All led to progress on integrating water and adaptation at COP 27 and at the High-Level Meeting of Ministers of Economy, Climate, Health and Water in May 2022.

Continued collaboration with Unilever, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and ten partners led to 260 million people receiving hygiene and behaviour change messaging by September. In addition, 12,509 handwashing stations in schools, communities and health care facilities ensured people had the means to practise hygiene and prevent disease.

In 2023, the FCDO will launch a new programme at the UN Water Conference. This will focus on supporting governments in up to six developing countries to deliver sustainable, resilient and inclusive water, sanitation and hygiene systems.

Sexual and Reproductive Rights

Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) is fundamental to unlock the potential, agency and freedom of women and girls, as outlined in the International Development Strategy.

The UK defended and promoted universal and comprehensive SRHR for all through policy and programmes, including through access to safe abortion, contraception and maternal health medicines, through ending female genital mutilation and through supporting HIV/AIDS care, particularly when other states or donors were unwilling or unable to do so.

The UK continued to champion SRHR across human rights, health and humanitarian negotiations and processes at the UN, including at the Commission on the Status of Women, World Health Assembly, the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly. The UK co-led a landmark joint statement on SRHR and bodily autonomy,^[57] along with partners **Liberia, Mexico, the USA, Albania** and **Nepal**, which was signed by 71 countries and delivered for the first time at the UNGA 3rd Committee for Human Rights in New York.

The UK continues to work with like-minded countries to defend against increasing attacks on access to comprehensive SRHR, particularly in multilateral spaces. In November 2022, 40 countries signed-up to the UK's political declaration on conflict-related sexual violence which outlines commitments to promote and defend comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights for all.

In 2023, the UK will continue to take a leading role to progress sexual and reproductive health and rights. This includes supporting the Rwandan-hosted Women Deliver Conference, the largest gathering of women's rights organisations globally. The UK will also continue to collaborate with youth and civil society organisations who are working to secure sexual and reproductive health and rights at the local and national level.

Women and girls are more vulnerable socially and economically to malnutrition. Fewer than one in three children eat a diet that meets minimum diversity requirements.^[58] The UK's global leadership on addressing malnutrition targeted women, girls and young children in their first 1,000 days, to improve their development and life chances.

The UK continued to work with partners, including UNICEF, to design innovative finance mechanisms on nutrition and to reform the prevention and treatment of wasting. Additionally, UK support to global accountability mechanisms, such as the Access to Nutrition Initiative, changed food industry practices that negatively impact women's and children's health and nutrition.

In 2023, the UK will continue to co-chair the multi-stakeholder Action Review Panel on Child Wasting (ARP), advocating for more sustainable financing for wasting through the Child Nutrition Fund, and using the collective ARP voice to raise Child Wasting at multilateral forums. The FCDO's Nutrition Action for Systemic Change programme will continue to support capacity building and global accountability on nutrition.

Social protection is critical in reducing poverty, vulnerability and inequality and in helping families to cope with shocks, including conflict, climate change and food insecurity. In 2022, the UK supported social protection programming and provided technical assistance to countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East and North Africa regions.

[56] Bangladesh, DRC, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan

[57] www.gov.uk/government/speeches/we-must-respect-the-bodily-autonomy-of-women-and-girls-throughout-their-lives-cross-regional-joint-statement-at-the-un-third-committee

The UK also delivered analysis on opportunities for crisis response through social protection systems in **Ukraine** and refugee hosting countries in the region. In addition, the UK deployed an expert through its Social Protection Technical Assistance, Advice and Resources assistance facility, to support social protection and humanitarian cash coordination in Ukraine.

The FCDO will continue to champion social protection through policy expertise, international engagement and diplomacy, bilateral and multilateral investments and central programmes. By working with governments and development partners, the UK will promote strengthened social protection systems, including building inclusive and resilient systems, that can respond to climate-related and other crises.

Land rights

Secure land tenure rights support the realisation of various human rights, and underpin sustainable land use and the protection of forests and nature.

The UK continued to promote good land governance, including through its leadership of the COP26 Forest Tenure Pledge. This initiative aims to advance Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' (IPLCs) forest tenure rights and promote greater recognition for their role in protecting nature. The UK convened a global donor coordination group, the Forest Tenure Funders Group, which meets quarterly and brings together 23 public and private donors for the pledge to support more coherent and evidence-based support to IPLCs.

The UK also stepped up its support to projects working with IPLCs including support to the **Tenure Facility**, which supports IPLCs to document and defend their tenure rights.

The UK will continue to lead and support global work with IPLCs in 2023 and beyond so they can benefit from more secure tenure rights. This will include expanding the UK's work to promote forest governance and strengthen IPLC tenure rights and continued coordination and policy dialogue with tropical forest country governments.

CHAPTER 5: Human Rights and the Multilateral System

Protecting a stable and open international order that safeguards human rights and open societies and is based on respect for international law is a cornerstone of UK foreign policy. As the Foreign Secretary noted, the international rules-based system “seeks to protect every country and create the setting for everyone to prosper.”^[58]

This chapter sets out how the UK uses its standing, including in the UN, the Commonwealth, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, G20 and G7, to promote the protection of human rights, the rule of law and international norms.

The UK works through these institutions to advance its thematic human rights priorities, and to ensure respect for human rights and democratic values are embedded in multilateral responses to emerging challenges, such as climate change and the environment; cyber, digital and tech governance, and private security standards.

The UK pushes back against those who seek to weaken agreed human rights norms and protections in multilateral fora, and is strengthening existing broad-based alliances, building flexible coalitions with middle ground countries and reaching out to new partners in support of these aims.

The UK also uses the international architecture to maintain scrutiny on repressive states and to hold individuals and member states to account for human rights violations and abuses of international humanitarian law, including through international justice mechanisms such as the International Criminal Court.

In 2023, the UK will continue to bolster and shape the international human rights system and use it to hold those who violate or abuse human rights to account.

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 exchanges on human rights between states. The UK is currently a member of the principle intergovernmental forum on human rights, 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 UN Security Council (UNSC) and the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

In 2022, the UK led on a number of HRC resolutions, including on **Syria, Sudan, South Sudan and Sri Lanka**. We supported over 40 resolutions, including actively voting for 18 resolutions, including on **Ukraine, Russia, Afghanistan, Iran** and the renewal of the mandate of the Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. This contributed to the HRC’s work

on wider accountability, with a focus on Ukraine and Russia resulting in the creation of the Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine and the Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Russia.

One of the mechanisms of the HRC is the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), a process of peer-review of the human rights records of, and by, all UN member states. The UK strongly supports the UPR and has participated at every country’s review since the process began in 2008. The third cycle of the UPR ended in February, with every UN member state again having taken part.

The UK’s latest UPR took place in November, where 115 countries delivered statements and made 302 recommendations. The main issues covered were maintaining human rights protection, immigration and asylum, combatting discrimination and hate crime, the rights of women and girls, rights of people with disabilities, and ratification of UN human rights treaties.

In 2023, the UK will again participate actively in the UPR process and



The Foreign Secretary, James Cleverly, addressing the UNSC in September 2022. He delivered a statement condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine and expressed solidarity with the Ukrainian people.

[58] British foreign policy and diplomacy: Foreign Secretary’s speech, 12 December 2022 – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

continue to make use of the last year of its current UN Human Rights Council term to highlight ongoing and emerging country priority issues, including **Ukraine, Iran** and **Afghanistan**. It will also use the occasion of the 75th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to highlight UK work to promote and protect human rights globally.

Commonwealth

In 2022, the UK worked with member states from across the Commonwealth to support the values that are enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter. The Commonwealth is an important forum through which the UK can deliver its priorities on promoting democracy and protecting human rights.



Members of the UK delegation during the UK's UPR at the HRC in Geneva, in November. Mike Freer MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Ministry of Justice, led the delegation.

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2022

The centrepiece of the Commonwealth calendar in 2022 was the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) that took place in Rwanda in June, which delivered important human rights commitments.

Both the Commonwealth Leaders' Communiqué and Statement emphasised Commonwealth leaders' commitment to governance, human rights and the rule of law.^[59] The communiqué recognised the vital role of a vibrant civil society, including human rights defenders, emphasised the need to protect all individuals from all forms of violence and noted the adoption of a Commonwealth Declaration on Gender Equality.^[60]

The UK announced £2.7 million of funding to continue to support grassroots organisations, such as the Commonwealth Equality Network, to defend human rights and equality for LGBT+ people. This included delivering on leaders' commitment to eliminate discriminatory laws and policies that fail to protect all individuals from violence and discrimination. It also included funding to support the important work of Pride House Birmingham, raising visibility and awareness of LGBT+ people at the Commonwealth Games. In total, four (**Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Singapore and St Kitts and Nevis**) Commonwealth member states took steps to decriminalise consensual same-sex relationships in 2022.

The UK handed over the Commonwealth Chair-in-Office to **Rwanda** following our extended tenure as chair from 2018 to 2022. More information can be found in the UK's Chair-in-Office report addendum.^[61]

Commonwealth Media Freedom Principles Endorsed

In November, Commonwealth Law Ministers endorsed the revised Commonwealth Principles on Freedom of Expression and the Role of the Media in Good Governance (the "Principles"). For the first time, the Principles brought together best practice on the important role of media and freedom of expression in governance. The Principles highlighted the role of an independent judiciary in upholding the right to freedom of expression and the need for states to put in place measures to enable the safety of journalists. The endorsement of the Principles was the result of almost two years' work, in which the UK played a leading role. Commonwealth Leaders will be invited to formally adopt the Principles at CHOGM in 2024.

[59] CHOGM 2022 Communiqué.pdf (production-new-commonwealth-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com) and Microsoft Word – CHOGM – Draft Proposed Elements of a Leaders' Statement (production-new-commonwealth-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com)

[60] D19065_COM_Gender Declaration 2022.pdf (production-new-commonwealth-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com)

[61] UK Commonwealth Chair-In-Office report addendum 2020 to 2022: continued delivery of Commonwealth Summit commitments – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Supporting Democracy and Human Rights across the Commonwealth

The UK continued its partnership with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK Branch to support Commonwealth parliaments in holding their governments to account. Activities in 2022 focused on the scrutiny of government expenditure, promoting the voice of women in politics, climate security and tackling modern slavery, with a particular focus on parliaments in **Kiribati, Vanuatu, Bangladesh, Maldives, Pakistan, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and South Africa**.

The UK also provided funding to the Equality and Human Rights Commission to manage the transition of chair of the Commonwealth Forum National Human Rights Institutions from the UK to the Rwandan National Commission for Human Rights.

The UK continued to provide funding for two resident human rights advisers at the Commonwealth Small States Office in Geneva. UK funding enabled the advisers to provide direct support to eight Commonwealth member states (**Guyana, Lesotho, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, The Gambia, Gabon, Belize and Vanuatu**).

UK funding has helped to establish a cohort of officials who can lead their respective countries' efforts, increasing the ability of Commonwealth countries to interact with the work of the UN Human Rights Council. It has also provided technical assistance to Commonwealth member states to help the sustainable implementation of recommendations from the Universal Periodic Review process, which will lead to real world improvements in human rights.

There will be a number of Commonwealth ministerial meetings throughout 2023, to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Commonwealth Charter. These events, covering issues pertaining to

gender equality, finance, health, trade and the environment, will be further opportunities for the UK to work with other Commonwealth countries. The UK will support Commonwealth partners, such as the Commonwealth Secretariat and Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK, to champion the values, including on democracy and human rights, that are enshrined in the Charter and to start to lay the groundwork for CHOGM 2024 in Samoa.

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 across Europe. In the wake of the Second

World War, the UK was one of the founding members of the organisation. Today, the CoE includes 46 member States, enabling the UK to work with European partners, as well as Observer States such as Canada, Japan and the United States, to address shared challenges. In 2022, this included responding to Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine and helping to shape international norms and standards on emerging human rights issues such as artificial intelligence and the relationship between human rights and the environment.

The CoE is growing. Kosovo submitted its application for membership of the CoE on 12 May 2022.^[62] The UK supports Kosovo's membership of the CoE, as a signal of its commitment to democracy, the rule of law and the protection of the rights of all its citizens.

The CoE's Response to Russia's Illegal Invasion of Ukraine

The UK – both HMG and the UK delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly – played a crucial role in the CoE's swift action to expel the **Russian Federation** from the organisation in March, in response to its unprovoked invasion of **Ukraine**. The UK played a key role in shaping the future strategic direction of the CoE following Russia's expulsion, and in working through the legal and financial consequences on the organisation.

Russia ceased to be a Party to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) on 16 September but remains liable for any ECHR violations which occurred prior to this date. The European Court of Human Rights remains competent to deal with the around 17,000 applications against Russia concerning actions or omissions occurring up until 16 September 2022. This is an important mechanism for Russian civil society to highlight violations and demonstrates that Russia continues to be held account internationally.

The CoE held its annual ministerial meeting in Turin in May. The then Foreign Secretary, Liz Truss, emphasised that, following Russia's expulsion, the CoE had an important role in strengthening and securing democracy as the best way of promoting prosperity and security throughout Europe.

Throughout the year, the UK continued to support **Ukraine** through the CoE. The CoE adopted a €50 million Action Plan to support Ukraine's resilience and recovery, and considered how best the Council could support Ukraine in ensuring Russia was held accountable.

The CoE also established a formal group through which to engage with representatives from **Belarusian** democratic opposition and civil society.

[62] Kosovo applied for membership on 12 May 2022, although this has yet to progress as of April 2023

Alongside national courts, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ensures that States are held to account for their obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). The UK is and will remain party to the ECHR and has long been at the forefront of efforts to improve the effectiveness of the ECtHR. The UK is active in the Committee of Ministers quarterly human rights meeting to supervise implementation of ECtHR judgments.

In July, following a referral from the CoE, the ECtHR found that **Turkey** had failed to comply with its 2019 judgment for the immediate release of human rights defender, Osman Kavala, after 5 years' imprisonment. The UK will continue to work closely with Turkey as a key partner to find a resolution.

The CoE also adopted further Decisions in the *McKerr* group of cases, which concern the adequacy of investigations into deaths in Northern Ireland during the 1980s. The UK set out our commitment to working with stakeholders, including at the CoE, to address concerns around the UK's implementation of these judgments through the NI Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill.

At the end of 2022, there were 99 pending applications before the ECtHR against the UK. This represents the lowest rate of applications to the ECtHR per capita of all States parties to the ECHR. The number of cases communicated by the ECtHR to the Government annually remained very low, with only two findings of violations made against the UK. In urgent cases where the ECtHR considered there to be a risk of serious and irreversible harm, the ECtHR may grant interim measures. Out of more than 1000 interim measures granted in 2022 against CoE member States, only five were granted against the UK Delegation.

The UK's Parliamentary Delegation to the CoE plays an important and active role in promoting and protecting UK policy and interests at the CoE. In 2022, the UK Delegation led a number of debates, including on the human rights obligations of **Turkey** and on the participation of children in democratic society. The leader of the UK Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly to the Council of Europe, John Howell MP for Henley, co-led a fact-finding mission to Turkey to visit Osman Kavala, who was sentenced to life in prison in 2022.

On wider CoE work, the UK ratified the Istanbul Convention in July, a gold-standard treaty for the protection of women and girls. The UK also contributed financially to the Venice Commission, the CoE's advisory body on constitutional matters, as well as GRECO, the group of states established to monitor states' compliance with CoE anti-corruption standards, and the CoE Human Rights Trust Fund. In 2022, the Trust Fund supported work on reducing the backlog of outstanding unexecuted judgments of the European Court of Human Rights.

In 2023, the UK will continue to play a key role in shaping the future strategic direction on the CoE, including through the Fourth Council of Europe Summit, with a particular focus on supporting Ukraine, strengthening CoE's response on **Russian** accountability and upholding democratic principles throughout Europe.

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) provides a forum for dialogue between 57 participating states, including on human rights, the rule of law and democratic governance. The UK worked with like-minded partners to address ongoing human rights challenges in the OSCE.

The OSCE's Response to Russia's Illegal Invasion of Ukraine

The UK supported three invocations of the OSCE's Moscow Mechanism, twice focusing on human rights and humanitarian impacts of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on the Ukrainian people, and once focusing on Russia's human rights situation and the link between internal repression and external aggression (in Ukraine). Through this mechanism the OSCE was the first multilateral organisation to deliver reporting on Russia invading Ukraine, providing evidence to feed into accountability processes. The delegations of the Russian Federation and Belarus rejected the findings of the reports.

Work to keep **Belarus** high on the agenda continued. The UK regularly raised the findings of the 2020 Moscow Mechanism report on Belarus, and Belarus as a co-aggressor to the war in Ukraine, at the Permanent Council.

Throughout the year, the UK delivered thematic statements at the OSCE Permanent Council on issues such as freedom of religion or belief, freedom of expression and media freedom.

The UK gave extra budgetary funding to the Human Dimension Conference – the largest human rights conference globally. This provided extensive opportunity to hear directly from those impacted by, and working against, the backsliding of democracy and human rights across the OSCE region. The UK supported side events on Russia's invasion of Ukraine and accountability, Belarus and accountability, sexual violence in conflict (in Ukraine) and the safety of journalists.

The UK is one of eight participating states who make up the Democracy Defenders Initiative (DDI). 2022's winners were Russian campaign group Memorial (who then won the Nobel Peace Prize) and Ukraine's Center for Civil Liberties. The UK, with other DDI core group members, organised a DDI event at the Human Dimension Conference.

Relationship with the European Union

The UK continues to work with the EU on shared human rights objectives and engages regularly with the EU on human rights situations of concern around the world.

In 2022, the UK closely coordinated with the EU, and other partners including the **US, Canada and Australia**, on a number of sanctions packages. This included three packages of sanctions on Iranian officials at the heart of the regime's repression, following the death of Mahsa Amini.

In November 2022, the UK Mission to the EU hosted an event to mark the UN International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists, a key area of interest for the EU as they work on files such as the Media Freedom Act and anti-SLAPPS

(Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation), a type of abusive litigation used to silence journalists and suppress freedom of expression.

In 2023, the UK will continue to seek opportunities for coordination with international partners, including the EU, on geographic and thematic human rights priorities. International cooperation is at the heart of UK sanctions policy and the UK will continue to act with our allies to deploy targeted sanctions to deter future malign activity, to disrupt current malign activity, and to demonstrate our readiness to take action to defend international norms.

Network of European Human Rights Ambassadors

The UK is one of 12 European nations to have a human rights ambassador. In 2022, the group (consisting of the UK, Finland, Netherlands, Sweden, France, Spain, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Germany, Slovakia, Iceland and Estonia) issued joint statements on a variety of human rights issues, including on concerning developments in **Sri Lanka, Belarus, Guatemala, Iran, Egypt and Russia**.

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 to account.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) plays an important role in ending impunity for those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity. It is important that the Court has sufficient resources to fulfil its function, which is why the UK supported an increase of over 12% to the Court's annual budget at the Assembly of States Parties.

The trials of Ali Muhammad Ali Abd-Al-Rahman, who faces 31 charges of war crimes committed in the Central African Republic (CAR) and Al Hassan from Mali, whose trial is expected to conclude in 2023, continued. The trial of Mahamat Said, for war crimes and crimes against humanity allegedly committed in Bangui, CAR, also commenced.

Implementation of the recommendations of the Independent Expert Review of the Court continued, including the introduction of a tenure policy for senior grades, and a revised due diligence policy for senior appointments to the Court. Long open Preliminary Examinations were closed in 2022 and the working culture and governance of the Court continued to be addressed by the Prosecutor and the Registrar.

The UK supported international efforts to gather, analyse and preserve evidence of atrocities committed, to ensure that genuine accountability remains possible. This included supporting the UN International Impartial and Independent Mechanism, the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar, and the Myanmar Witness Programme, which is gathering, verifying, and reporting information on human rights violations in Myanmar. The UK also supported the UN Investigative Team for the Accountability of Daesh.



On 8 November, the UK Mission to the EU in partnership with the European Endowment for Democracy, held an event to mark the UN International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists. The panel brought together leading investigative journalists: Yanina Korniienko from Ukraine, Stevan Dojčinović from Serbia, and Ahmed Gamal Ziada from Egypt. The keynote speaker was Caoilfhionn Gallagher KC, human rights lawyer. The panel was moderated by Julie Majerczak of Reporters Without Borders.

Accountability for Actions in Ukraine

Russia's Illegal Invasion of Ukraine: UK Action to Hold Perpetrators of Atrocities to Account

The UK's response to Russia's unprovoked, premeditated and barbaric attack against a sovereign democratic state was swift and sustained. It included introducing what has become the largest and most severe set of sanction packages ever imposed on Russia, and on entities and individuals supporting Russia's illegal actions.

As the international community drew together in support of Ukraine, the first reports began to emerge of shocking atrocities having taken place. Throughout 2022, the UK and its partners remained committed to ensuring that allegations of war crimes are investigated within effective, swift and fair judicial systems. The UK's approach to accountability had three main workstreams:

1. ensuring that multilateral mechanisms build pressure on Russia;
2. helping to build the capacity of the office of the Ukrainian Prosecutor General to conduct domestic investigations and prosecutions; and
3. engaging and supporting the work of the ICC as the primary international institution with the mandate to investigate and prosecute war crimes and other international crimes of the most serious concern.

These are explained below.

Domestically, the UK War Crimes Network, which brings together the FCDO, Crown Prosecution Service, Police, Home Office and civil society, met regularly. The Network considered how the UK could best assist these international efforts to collate evidence of atrocities. The Network also discussed the operational aspects of investigating cases against individuals who may be in, or seeking to, enter the UK.

1. Multilateral Mechanisms

In 2022, the UK was at the forefront of efforts to support multilateral mechanisms able to investigate atrocities being committed in Ukraine, and to hold Russia to account for its actions in Ukraine, and within Russia.

- a. UN: In March, the UK worked with allies at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) to establish a new independent Commission of Inquiry (CoI) to investigate

allegations of atrocities. The CoI reported in September that war crimes had been committed in Ukraine, and will report to the HRC again in 2023.

In April, the UK helped to lead efforts at UNGA to suspend Russia from the HRC, as a result of Russia's gross and systematic human rights abuses and violations. This was only the second time an HRC member had been suspended.^[63]

In May, the UK strongly supported an HRC Special Session on Ukraine which focused on abuses and violations in the recently liberated areas of Ukraine, and Mariupol. The resulting resolution further tasked the CoI with an investigation into events in the Kyiv, Chernihiv, Kharkiv and Sumy regions, and ensured a continued focus on Mariupol through an update and debate with the then UN

High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, during the 50th HRC session in June.

The UK cosponsored an HRC resolution in October which created a UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Russia, the first time the Council had put Russia's human rights situation on its agenda.

At UNGA Third Committee (October-November), as a member of the core group, the UK supported a resolution tabled by Ukraine on human rights in illegally annexed Crimea. The UK also voted against Russia's 'Glorification of Nazism' resolution, which perpetuates the false narrative it used as a pretext for its invasion of Ukraine.

- b. OSCE: The UK welcomed publication of the OSCE Moscow Mechanism reports in April and July,^[64] which found clear evidence of violations of international law by Russian Forces in Ukraine. A third report found that Putin's repression of civil society and ordinary citizens had been a key enabler of Russia's aggression in Ukraine.^[65]
- c. Council of Europe: The UK worked with partners in the Council of Europe to support measures against Russia, ultimately, including Russia's expulsion from the organisation. In August, the UK filed an intervention in the case brought by Ukraine against Russia in the International Court of Justice. The ECtHR has granted the UK leave to intervene along with 25 other States.

[63] The first was Libya in 2011 in response to Gaddafi's repression of protests.

[64] <https://www.osce.org/odihr/515868>

<https://www.osce.org/odihr/522616>

[65] <https://www.osce.org/odihr/526720>

2. Supporting Ukraine to investigate and prosecute war crimes

In 2022, the UK worked with partners to ensure that Ukraine has the expertise, resources and capacity to investigate allegations of war crimes, and where appropriate, to prosecute those responsible.

In March, the then UK Attorney General appointed Sir Howard Morrison KC to help advise the Ukrainian Prosecutor General. Sir Howard, who has over 35 years judicial experience, including at the UN International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, conducted numerous visits to Ukraine and provided advice and training to Ukrainian judges.

In May, the UK, US and EU announced the creation of the Atrocity Crimes Advisory Group (ACA), with the mission of supporting the War Crimes Unit of the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine. Through £2.5 million of UK funding, the ACA provided mentoring, advice and operational support, drawing from the expertise of senior war crimes prosecutors, investigators, military analysts, forensic specialists, and other experts.

ACA Mobile Justice Teams, composed of both international and Ukrainian experts, were deployed to sites of alleged war crimes. The teams helped Ukraine to document evidence of atrocities, which will enable it to investigate and ultimately, to prosecute international crimes.

UK funding also supported the deployment of a Mobile Justice Team to the liberated town of Kherson, and allowed UK experts in conflict related sexual violence to help prosecutors and the police handle such cases. UK funding additionally supported survivors of attacks, trained Ukrainian judges in war crimes prosecution and management, and trained senior police and forensic officers in crime scene management, case building and evidentiary requirements for war crimes.

3. The International Criminal Court

The International Criminal Court (ICC) is a court of last resort, complementary to national legal systems, undertaking investigations and prosecutions when national authorities are unable or unwilling to do so.

In March, given the volume of allegations and with the war ongoing, the UK led efforts to refer the situation in Ukraine to the ICC. With the support of 42 other countries, UK action helped to expedite the court's investigation.

The UK, already one of the ICC's largest financial contributors, committed to ensuring that the court has the capability and resources to conduct its work in Ukraine, while also maintaining active investigations into international crimes in other conflicts. In March, the UK and the Netherlands co-hosted a meeting of international partners in The Hague to encourage and coordinate offers of assistance.

In addition to the UK's funding support of £10.5 million to the ICC 2022 annual budget, the UK made a further £1 million voluntary contribution in 2022, increasing the ICC's collection of evidence capacity, and providing enhanced

psychosocial support to witnesses and survivors.

The UK provided personnel to help the ICC to uncover evidence of alleged war crimes. This included a police liaison officer in The Hague, to assist with the swift sharing of information between the UK and the ICC and two experienced forensic officers. The UK also provided additional training to ICC investigators in open-source intelligence and digital forensics.

Whether in The Hague, or in Ukraine's courts, the UK will remain committed to ensuring that there is no impunity for those who commit atrocity crimes during the conflict.



In a call with G7 leaders in December 2022, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak called for combined efforts to strengthen support for the people of Ukraine.

CHAPTER 6: Human Rights Priority Countries

This chapter includes a section on each of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's (FCDO) Human Rights Priority Countries (HRPCs). These are countries which either have particular human rights or democracy challenges – or are on a negative or positive trajectory. They are not intended to represent an exhaustive list of all of the countries where the UK works to support human rights. Nor are they a homogenous group. Rather, they are the countries where the FCDO judges it can make a real difference.

Making progress – particularly in countries where a lack of respect for human rights is entrenched – is often difficult. It requires determined sustained engagement, often in collaboration and partnership with others. But by focusing its efforts on particular countries, the FCDO is able to exert influence over the long term to achieve greater impact, encouraging governments to meet their international human rights obligations.

The HRPC list is not, however, static. This reflects the fact that changes in the human rights situation in a country may mean a revised approach to engagement and focus is required, and the FCDO adjusts the list accordingly. Recognising that, this year Ethiopia and Haiti have been added to the list while Bahrain has been removed.

Afghanistan

The human rights situation in Afghanistan deteriorated as the Taliban sought to consolidate control. Women and girls in particular faced significant curtailments to their civil,

political, economic, social and cultural rights, and in some cases, they were totally segregated from society.

In September, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan stated that “in no other country have women and girls so rapidly disappeared from all spheres of public life, nor are they as disadvantaged in every aspect of their lives”.^[66]

Political appointments remained exclusively male and predominantly Pashtun. On 23 March, the Ministry of Education announced that girls' secondary schools would remain closed, although implementation was patchy. On 20 December, the Ministry of Higher Education announced that women would not be allowed to attend university until further notice. On 24 December, the Taliban banned Afghan women from working for NGOs, significantly impacting aid delivery.

The Taliban also imposed increasingly oppressive social practices and restrictions on women's freedom of movement. On 27 March, men and women were prevented from attending public spaces like parks on the same day, and on 10 November, women were completely banned from public parks across Afghanistan. On 7 May, the Taliban announced that women should cover their faces and bodies in public and should stay indoors unless necessary. Implementation of these directives was inconsistent and sometimes harsh.

In December, the UN reported that gender segregation of health workers in medical facilities was

institutionalised and that female patients without a guardian were being turned away. The UN also reported an increase in informal policing of women by their families, communities and employers.^[67]

Women defence lawyers were prevented from renewing their licences, limiting women's awareness of their rights and access to justice, including in relation to gender-based violence. Reports of honour killings and suicides continued. Children's rights organisations reported a sharp increase in child, early and forced marriage due to the worsening economic and humanitarian crisis and a lack of educational and professional opportunities for girls.^[68]

The UK regularly supported women's rights at the UN, including as co-chair of the Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan in New York. The UK provided platforms for Afghan women to speak out, advocated for their full inclusion in society, and promoted their rights to essential services. In March, the FCDO co-hosted a humanitarian pledging conference, which raised \$2.44 billion. The UK made a commitment that at least 50% of those we reached with our aid would be women and girls. The UK also continued to support the delivery of education, including through NGOs and UN agencies.

Religious and ethnic minorities continued to face persecution, attacks and forced displacement. The UN recorded 160 attacks claimed by the Islamic State Khorasan Province from 1 January to 13 November.^[69] Shia Hazara, Sikh and Sufi communities, schools and places of worship were targeted.

[66] <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/09/afghanistan-un-expert-warns-human-rights-crisis-presages-authoritarianism>

[67] [221207_sg_report_on_afghanistan_s.2022.916.pdf](https://www.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/221207_sg_report_on_afghanistan_s.2022.916.pdf) (unmissions.org)

[68] <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc516-situation-human-rights-afghanistan-report-special-rapporteur>

[69] [220615_sg_report_on_afghanistan_s.2022.485.pdf](https://www.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/220615_sg_report_on_afghanistan_s.2022.485.pdf) (unmissions.org)

[220914_sg_report_on_afghanistan_s.2022.485.pdf](https://www.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/220914_sg_report_on_afghanistan_s.2022.485.pdf) (unmissions.org)

[221207_sg_report_on_afghanistan_s.2022.916.pdf](https://www.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/221207_sg_report_on_afghanistan_s.2022.916.pdf) (unmissions.org)

In September, the UN Special Rapporteur stated that an increase in inflammatory speech was being reported, both online and in some mosques during Friday prayers, including calling for Hazaras to be killed.^[70] LGBT+ people also continued to face widespread human rights violations and abuses.

Independent media and civic space further diminished. The Taliban reinforced its 2021 directives prohibiting broadcasts and publications that criticised Taliban rule or were deemed incompatible with their interpretation of Islamic and Afghan values. In March, the Taliban banned broadcasters from airing international programmes, including the BBC World Service. On 19 May, the Taliban announced that female television presenters should cover their faces on air.

Journalists, civil society activists and human rights defenders continued to be harassed, killed and arrested; many maintained a low profile or discontinued their activities for fear of retribution. In September, the Taliban re-established the Media Violations Commission to handle media complaints. Commission members were primarily drawn from the Taliban, and did not comprise any women or journalists, bringing its neutrality into doubt.

The UK continued to work with the Media Freedom Coalition to support independent media in Afghanistan and supported the 18 November decision to remove Afghanistan from the Coalition.

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) received credible reports of extrajudicial killings, torture and ill-treatment of former government officials and members of the former Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, in violation of the general amnesty announced by the Taliban in August 2021.^[71] Individuals accused

of affiliation with the National Resistance Front and the Islamic State Khorasan Province were also arbitrarily killed and tortured.

In May, the Taliban dissolved the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission.^[72] In November, the Taliban reiterated that full implementation of Sharia law was compulsory, including public executions, amputations and floggings for crimes including adultery and theft. Reports of corporal and capital punishments subsequently increased.

UK ministers and officials continued to meet Afghan women, journalists and representatives from minority groups to hear their concerns. The UK worked with the international community, including the G7, G20 and through the UN, to press the Taliban to reverse their decisions. This included supporting an urgent debate at the June Human Rights Council (HRC) on the human rights of women and girls in Afghanistan. On 7 October, the UK co-sponsored a Human Rights Council resolution which extended the mandate of UN Special Rapporteur, Richard Bennett, to monitor and report on the human rights situation for another year. FCDO officials regularly raised human rights issues with the Taliban, including the protection of minorities, women's rights, girls' education and freedom of expression, and encouraged regional and Muslim-majority countries to do the same.

On 6 January, the Government launched the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme. The FCDO set up an online platform for eligible GardaWorld contractors, British Council contractors and Chevening alumni, to express interest in resettlement under the scheme's Pathway 3. By the end of 2022, the FCDO had allocated over half of the 1500 places available in Pathway 3's first year.

In 2023, the UK will continue to work with international partners to press the Taliban on human rights. The UK will ensure credible monitoring and accountability mechanisms are in place. The UK will support Afghan civil society and work to ensure its programming reaches the most vulnerable, including women, girls and minority groups. The FCDO will continue processing and allocating remaining places under year one of Pathway 3 and looks forward to welcoming the first Pathway 3 arrivals to the UK as soon as is practicable. After the first year of Pathway 3, the Government will work with international partners and non-government organisations to welcome other groups of Afghans who are at risk.

Bangladesh

In 2022, the human rights situation in Bangladesh remained a serious concern across issues including harassment and detention of human rights defenders and political opposition, restrictions on media freedom through the Digital Security Act, and violence against women and girls. While Bangladesh continued to host almost one million Rohingya refugees, there were restrictions on Rohingya livelihoods, movement, and education. However, there were some positive developments in 2022 – there were fewer reports of attacks on people as a result of their religion or belief, and there was a reduction in reports of extra-judicial killings and abductions.

Human rights defenders, civil society and political opposition were increasingly targeted and harassed in 2022. There was a surge in protests and also in violence against political opposition, as well as arbitrary arrests and restrictions on freedom of peaceful assembly. In 2022, 70 deaths and 6,914 injured persons were recorded in connection with

[70] <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc516-situation-human-rights-afghanistan-report-special-rapporteur>

[71] https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/221207_sg_report_on_afghanistan_s.2022.916.pdf

[72] https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/221207_sg_report_on_afghanistan_s.2022.916.pdf

political events.^[73] Bangladesh Nationalist Party opposition leader Begum Khaleda Zia remained under a suspended sentence and foreign travel restrictions.

Ahead of political flashpoints, the UK encouraged dialogue between political actors and raised concerns with ministers and law enforcement. In December, the UK issued a statement with international partners urging respect for human rights and fair elections. Throughout 2022, UK programme funding supported grassroots interventions, which combined national-level advocacy and lobbying on legislative reform.

Human rights groups reported 31 extra-judicial killings and 21 abductions by the end of 2022 – a reduction from 2021, in part as a result of US sanctions in December 2021 against Bangladesh's Rapid Action Battalion (RAB). UK lobbying and programmes also applied scrutiny to extra-judicial killings. The UK also informed the Bangladesh government that HMG's sanctions policy would be guided by the situation on the ground.^[74]

In June, a prominent human rights organisation, Odhikar, was denied renewal of its NGO registration by Bangladesh's NGO Affairs Bureau. The UK expressed its concerns about attacks against Odhikar and other human rights organisations, collaborating with international partners to monitor cases and provide support.

Restrictions on media and attacks on civil society organisations continued throughout 2022. Bangladesh dropped ten points from the previous year to rank 162 out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index. Human rights groups noted 210 reports of journalists experiencing harassment

by December, including investigative journalist Rozina Islam.

There were some restrictions in digital freedoms, with the Digital Security Act used to bring hundreds of further cases against critics and political opposition. The government's draft Data Protection Act was released in July, increasing concerns about privacy and obstacles to interconnectivity. Together with civil society, the UK called repeatedly for amendment of the Digital Security Act, and for adequate consultation regarding the Data Protection Act.

The marginalisation of ethnic minorities continued to have a negative impact, including in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and plain lands. The UK worked with international partners and the government of Bangladesh to encourage full implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord.

There were fewer instances of attacks on religious minorities, with Hindu Durga Puja celebrations in October largely peaceful. Whilst the UK recognises that the government of Bangladesh responded swiftly to instances of violence, reports of harassment continued, particularly towards secular groups and Hindu minorities, often incited online. UK funding through civil society organisations supported freedom of religion or belief and community mediation processes, including support to gender equality in community engagement.

Violence against women and girls remained a major concern. According to a leading human rights organisation,^[75] there were reports of rape of at least 936 women and girls, and 206 women murdered in domestic violence. Human rights and civil society organisations demanded

the formulation of rape and sexual harassment laws in line with human rights standards.^[76] However, more positively, the government of Bangladesh approved a draft amendment to the Evidence Act, which prevented the defence from using the character of any woman against them, if they ever pursued criminal charges for sexual violence in court.

The UK supported Bangladesh's continued hosting of approximately one million Rohingya refugees displaced from Myanmar in camps in Cox's Bazar, and continued to provide vital humanitarian assistance to the Rohingya and host communities, bringing the UK's total support since 2017 to £345 million.

The UK continued to emphasise that Rohingya returns to Myanmar should happen in a safe, voluntary and dignified way. In September, amid tensions at the Bangladesh-Myanmar border, a Rohingya teenager and four Bangladeshis were killed by mortar shells from Myanmar.

The security situation of the camps was an increasing concern, including heightened violence and gunfire between criminal armed groups, and more killings of Rohingya leaders. Widespread sexual assault of women and girls continued. There was alleged abuse and extortion of Rohingya by police in the camps.^[77] In 2022, over 3,500 Rohingya attempted sea crossings in 39 boats in the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal, departing from both Myanmar and Bangladesh.^[78] Many Rohingya died during these voyages.

The government of Bangladesh allowed education using the Myanmar Curriculum and established a skills development framework, improving access to education, skills training and income generation in the

[73] Source: Ain o Salish Kendra (Bangladeshi NGO reporting)

[74] The UK does not comment on future designations as to do so could reduce their impact.

[75] Source: Ain o Salish Kendra (Bangladeshi NGO reporting)

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

[77] Bangladesh: Rampant Police Abuse of Rohingya Refugees | Human Rights Watch (hrw.org)

[78] According to the latest data from UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency. UNHCR – UNHCR seeks comprehensive regional response to address rise in deadly South-East Asia sea journeys

camps. However, there remained no substantive livelihood opportunities for the Rohingya in Cox's Bazar.

Parliamentary elections are due to be held in Bangladesh in late 2023 or early 2024. To support free and fair elections, the UK will strengthen advocacy on human rights and democratic freedoms, leveraging diplomatic engagement and targeted development programming alongside our international partners.

Belarus

The human rights situation related to the conflict in Ukraine is covered in the thematic chapters of this report. This section covers the domestic human rights situation in Belarus.

The human rights situation in Belarus deteriorated further throughout 2022 as the Belarusian authorities continued to systematically target political opponents and their supporters, independent media, and civil society in connection with the protests following the 2020 presidential elections. By the end of the year, 1,446 political prisoners were reported in Belarus. Human rights defenders are aware of at least 1,242 persons convicted on politically motivated criminal charges in 2022.

The Belarusian regime has almost entirely eradicated independent media within Belarus. Journalists continued to be targeted, and either imprisoned or forced to flee abroad. In 2022, there were 43 incidents of journalists being detained, 55 raids and 20 administrative arrests. At the end of the year, 33 journalists remained in prison. The authorities started 11 new criminal cases against journalists and media workers, and passed 17 sentences for charges including state treason, with individuals receiving prison terms of up to 14 years.

Civil society faced unprecedented repression, with freedom of association almost non-existent in Belarus. The regime forced or pressured hundreds of civil society organisations to close; more than 1,000 have been lost since 2020.



The Foreign Secretary, James Cleverly, then Minister for Europe, meeting leading Belarusian opposition figure, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, in March 2022. They discussed the UK's solidarity with the Belarusian people and their fight for freedom and democracy.

The authorities further restricted freedom of expression and speech online through anti-extremism legislation. They declared nine media outlets and over 1,500 online resources (mostly telegram channels) extremist, with over 5,000 "extremist crimes" declared in total. The Belarusian regime blocked access fully or partially to over 3,000 online resources on censorship grounds. It also created a list of over 2,000 "extremist" individuals or organisations and more than 200 "terrorists". Almost all of those listed are political opponents of the regime, civil society members or organisations, or independent media.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko signed into force several new laws, which have further raised the costs of dissent and opposition. He introduced restrictions against "persons involved in extremist activities", including prohibiting people from teaching or publishing activities. Setting its sights on the opposition in exile, the regime has authorised "special proceedings *in absentia*" in criminal cases, which will allow the prosecution of prominent opposition leaders who are based outside Belarus, such as Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and Pavel Latushka. A new law enables the regime to strip Belarusian citizenship from individuals who live abroad and are convicted of a criminal offence.

These laws provide the Belarusian regime with further methods for repression and targeting of its opponents, without independent judicial oversight.

The Belarusian regime introduced severe restrictions on the education sector in 2022. Almost all private schools have closed, with parents compelled to enrol their children at state schools. Teachers and school directors suspected of a lack of loyalty to the regime have been dismissed.

Belarus is the only country in Europe to retain and administer the death penalty. In 2022, there were unsubstantiated reports of one execution. It is believed that two people remained on death row. The scope of the death penalty was extended in 2022 for attempted acts of terrorism and members of the security forces or government officials found guilty of treason.

In July, the International Civil Aviation Organisation published their final report into the 2021 diversion of Ryanair flight FR4978, attributing state responsibility for the forced diversion to the Belarusian regime. The UK welcomed this report and delivered a statement to the UN Security Council, highlighting that the Belarusian state endangered the safety and security of a commercial passenger aircraft and the lives of all

those on board, in a flagrant violation of international law.

The Belarusian authorities have arrested many of the few remaining independent trade unionists in Belarus, with some sent to maximum security penal colonies.

To show our solidarity with civil society and the democratic opposition to the Belarusian regime, British Embassy Minsk staff regularly attended the trials of political prisoners, worked with likeminded countries to raise specific cases, and continued to request access to the detention facilities in which such prisoners are held. In February, European human rights ambassadors, including the UK's Global Ambassador for Human Rights, Rita French, met with exiled opposition leader, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, to discuss the deteriorating human rights situation in Belarus. The Foreign Secretary, James Cleverly, then Minister for Europe, also met with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya in March.

The UK also supported the International Accountability Platform on Belarus. This programme has taken a survivor-centred approach to gathering evidence of human rights violations since 2020. In response to continuing human rights violations in Belarus, the UK continued to maintain its sanctions regime. The UK has sanctioned over 100 individuals and entities, including President Lukashenko, for serious violations of human rights in Belarus.

At the Organisation for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the UK frequently addressed the human rights situation in Belarus, delivering statements calling on Belarus to engage and respond to questions and recommendations raised by the Moscow and Vienna Mechanisms. At two major OSCE conferences, the UK hosted events focusing on accountability for human rights violations and supporting human rights defenders in Belarus.

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 will continue to call on the Belarusian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all those held on political grounds.

Central African Republic

There was a further deterioration of the human rights situation in the Central African Republic (CAR) in 2022. In response to the attempt to overthrow the government in 2020, President Touadera and the CAR authorities requested support from Russian and Rwandan bilateral forces and the Russian private military company, Wagner, to operate alongside the CAR Armed Forces (FACA) in order to repel the armed groups. Reports vary on how many Russian personnel, primarily provided by Wagner, are present in CAR. The Russian ambassador to CAR claimed that 1135 fighters were present while the Government of CAR put the number at around 5000.

An increase in operations in 2022 by FACA and Wagner against one of the main armed groups in CAR, Coalition for the Patriots of Change (CPC), resulted in an increase in allegations of human rights violations and abuses and international humanitarian law violations by all actors to the conflict, largely against the Fulani and Muslim communities. In a December statement at the UN Security Council, the UK highlighted the destabilising role played by the armed groups, national security forces and Wagner, calling on the Government of CAR to conduct full and timely investigations into all allegations of human rights violations and abuses.

The UK worked closely with international partners in support of our collective effort to end violence and to build stability in the country. The UN, through its peacekeeping mission in the CAR (MINUSCA), remained central to this effort. The UK contributed approximately £40 million to MINUSCA in 2022.

On 29 June, a letter from the UN Panel of Experts on CAR expressed alarm at the pattern of human rights violations and abuses affecting minority communities and the risk of igniting new cycles of violence along communal, religious and ethnic lines. It also documented the increasing threat to civilians posed by improvised explosive devices and anti-personnel mines, and grave violations against children, including recruitment and use in armed conflict, killing, and incidents of sexual violence.^[79]

In the first half of 2022, MINUSCA documented 451 incidents of human rights violations and abuses, and serious violations of international humanitarian law, including conflict-related sexual violence. Many of these incidents were of an extremely serious nature, affecting a total of 1462 victims. Armed groups that are signatories to the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic were responsible for almost half of these incidents. Armed group Unité pour la paix en Centrafrique was alone responsible for a third of cases of armed group violence. FACA troops and their allies, jointly or alone, were responsible for the remaining two thirds of the documented human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law. Separate testimonies received by the UN Independent Expert on CAR refer to abuses committed by Russian allies against the civilian population, including sexual violence, acts of intimidation, destruction of homes, threats, extortion, acts of torture or cruel, humiliating, inhuman and degrading treatment.^[80]

[79] https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_2022_527.pdf

[80] <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G22/466/33/PDF/G2246633.pdf?OpenElement>

In August, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that one in two people did not have enough to eat in CAR. This is a direct result of the conflict, which had intensified since the beginning of the year. The number of internally displaced people remained among the highest since 2014, reaching 610,000 people. People lived in fear of attacks by armed groups, which limited both their mobility and access to fields and forests for farming, gathering and hunting. This dangerous environment also limited the access of humanitarian organisations to people in need of assistance.^[81]

From October to December 2022, the Human Rights Division of MINUSCA documented 483 human rights violations and abuses, affecting 1,300 civilians. This is a 9% increase in victims compared to the previous reporting period with state actors being reported as responsible for committing the most human rights violations (58%) affecting the most victims (70%). The most recurrent violations were related to arbitrary detention and inhuman conditions of detention, physical and mental integrity, and property rights.

In November, the UK voted in support of UN Security Council resolution 2659 (2022), renewing MINUSCA's mandate for a further 12 months.^[82] The Council identified the Mission's priority tasks as protection of civilians; support to the peace process, including implementation of the ceasefire and the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation; facilitation of the immediate delivery of humanitarian assistance, and protection of United Nations personnel, installations, equipment and goods. Following the renewal, the UK Deputy Permanent

Representative to the UN, James Kariuki, addressed the UNSC.^[83] He noted that the government of CAR remains primarily responsible for the protection of all civilians from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

The same UN report flagged that the main human rights violations and abuses were violations of the right to life, particularly summary or extrajudicial executions. It also drew attention to incidents of physical and mental harm with cases of cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment, as well as gunshot and stab wounds against the backdrop of military operations and attacks by armed groups. Finally, arbitrary and unlawful arrest and detention, particularly due to exceeding the legal time limits or due to lack of a detention order, continued to be a concern.

The UK will continue to support efforts to promote peace and stability in CAR by encouraging the government of CAR to make progress on the implementation of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation. The UK continues to support the Republican Dialogue for Reconciliation as a way to reduce violence and to alleviate the deepening humanitarian crisis across the country.

China

There continued to be widespread restrictions and violations on human rights and fundamental freedoms across China in 2022. This included severe constraints on media freedom, freedom of religion or belief, and the rule of law, continued repression of culture and language in Tibet, and systematic human rights violations in Xinjiang. Dynamic Zero

Covid controls provided the authorities with extra tools for expanded suppression of dissent. Restrictions on LGBT+ and gender rights persisted, as did restrictions impeding civil society from operating freely. In Hong Kong, rights and freedoms continued to be undermined.

Systematic repression of Uyghur culture, society and religion in Xinjiang continued, including ongoing mass detention. Further credible evidence emerged of the use of forced labour, predominantly targeting those from Xinjiang's Uyghur population, affecting a growing range of global industries.^[84] In August, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights published a report on the human rights situation in Xinjiang,^[85] which noted that restrictions of human rights "may constitute international crimes, in particular crimes against humanity". Evidence continued to demonstrate that Uyghur Muslims were increasingly moved from political "re-education camps" to mass detention in formal prisons, with continued high levels of detention and prosecution.^[86] Uyghurs outside of China continued to report harassment and intimidation.

Reports continued to document the suppression of Tibetan language and culture, including through the mass collection of DNA and other biometric data in Tibetan regions.^[87] There were further reports of politically motivated detentions and arrests of Tibetans as well as mistreatment in detention. Access to Tibet for foreign nationals – including accredited diplomats and journalists – remained highly restricted.

There remained tight restrictions on freedom of religion or belief, including

[81] <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/car/card/RSI0ADd7Tz/>

[82] <https://press.un.org/en/2022/sc15104.doc.htm>

[83] <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/ensuring-long-term-stability-in-the-central-african-republic--2>

[84] <https://www.shu.ac.uk/helena-kennedy-centre-international-justice/research-and-projects/all-projects/driving-force>; <https://www.shu.ac.uk/helena-kennedy-centre-international-justice/research-and-projects/all-projects/built-on-repression>

[85] <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/2022-08-31/22-08-31-final-assesment.pdf>

[86] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/09/14/china-xinjiang-official-figures-reveal-higher-prisoner-count>

[87] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/09/05/china-new-evidence-mass-dna-collection-tibet>; <https://citizenlab.ca/2022/12/mass-iris-scan-collection-in-qinghai/>

through policies designed to “sinicise” religions. Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Falun Gong practitioners and others remained at risk of persecution on the grounds of their religion or belief. Places of worship were particularly targeted for temporary closure on the grounds of pandemic controls. In March, new measures were introduced that further restricted the sharing of religious materials online.

China’s authorities suppressed peaceful protests against Covid restrictions. Individual protestors were subsequently targeted, detained and arrested. There was mass censorship of protest-related content online, including police targeting of individuals sharing information on social media.

Widespread censorship continued to be deployed to restrict freedom of expression and access to information. Foreign journalists and their Chinese-national staff reported harassment both online and offline, especially when reporting on “sensitive” issues such as protests or human rights. China continued to have the world’s highest number of detained journalists, including citizen journalists such as Zhang Zhan. Foreign journalists also continued to encounter opaque restrictions on applying for and renewing visas, reducing their ability to report from within China.

Respect for rule of law remained a significant concern. China continued its widespread use of ‘Residential Surveillance in a Designated Location’, a form of solitary confinement outside of the formal judicial system that denies individuals access to lawyers, leaving detainees exposed to severe human rights violations. Labour rights activist Wang Jianbing and independent journalist Huang Xueqin, both charged for “inciting subversion of state power”, were still awaiting trial after their detention in September 2021, during which time Huang had no direct contact with her family or

initial selection of lawyer. Human rights lawyer Ding Jiayi and legal scholar Xu Zhiyong were tried for “subversion” in June in secret by a court in Linyi, Shandong province.^[88] Reports of torture and deaths in detention continued to emerge, as did further evidence regarding the expanding use of house arrests and psychiatric hospitals to detain human rights defenders.

Pressure on LGBT+ and women’s rights organisations continued, including through the suppression of LGBT+ content online, the police targeting of civil society organisations and the harassment of leaders in the LGBT+ and women’s rights communities, which led to many organisations to cease activity.

Rights and freedoms continued to be eroded on multiple fronts in Hong Kong, under the pervasive National Security Law. High profile pro-democracy figures, including Jimmy Lai and former pan-democratic politicians, remained in prison awaiting trial. Prominent human rights lawyers were pressured into leaving Hong Kong. Attempts were made to restrict political debate overseas and independent media outlets were closed. In May, under new electoral rules, the Chief Executive was selected as the sole candidate, reflecting the continued decline in political plurality in Hong Kong. With diminishing respect for the values of political freedom, including freedom of expression in Hong Kong, serving members of the UK Supreme Court decided they could no longer sit in the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal.

Throughout 2022, the UK took robust action in response to the human rights situation in China, including consistently raising our concerns at the highest levels with the Chinese government in Beijing. Diplomats conducted independent visits to Xinjiang and continued to attend trials in Hong Kong. No UK ministers or officials attended the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics in view of the human rights situation.

The FCDO continued to support NGOs in exposing and reacting to human rights violations in Xinjiang, Tibet and elsewhere in China. This included funding research to highlight and build the evidence base of China’s continued systematic violations in Xinjiang; resisting the export of China’s model of repression; supporting the rights of Tibetans; and exposing China’s growing influence overseas, including attacks on media freedom and global disinformation campaigns.

The UK continued to raise concerns about human rights in China in multilateral fora, including the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) and the UN General Assembly Third Committee. In June and October, global UK diplomatic efforts helped to secure the support of 47 and 50 countries respectively for joint statements at the UN, expressing concern about the human rights situations in Xinjiang and Tibet, as well as the erosion of rights and freedoms in Hong Kong. These joint statements helped to raise the reputational and diplomatic cost to China for its human rights violations.

At the end of August, then UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet’s report on the human rights situation in Xinjiang said that China was committing human rights violations,^[89] including possible crimes against humanity, in the region. In response to the report, in September, the UK was part of a group of countries that requested a debate on the human rights situation in Xinjiang. This was the first time the HRC had considered any text on China. While the vote on the debate did not pass, the UK continues to work with our partners to hold the Chinese authorities to account, and to shine a spotlight on China’s human rights violations.

In 2023, the UK will continue to play a leading role in both pressing China to improve its human rights record, and in working through multilateral organisations to co-ordinate an

[88] Their verdicts were announced in April 2023. XU Zhiyong and DING Jiayi were handed 14 and 12 year sentences respectively by a court in Linyi, Shandong Province, <https://twitter.com/ukinchina/status/1645686684174917632>

[89] <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/2022-08-31/22-08-31-final-assesment.pdf>

international response to human rights violations. The UK will push for greater transparency about the human rights situation in Xinjiang, intending to fund research and conduct further diplomatic visits. The UK intends to fund projects that expose human rights violations and increase understanding and awareness of contemporary human rights in China, and fund NGOs in China working to improve the lives of citizens.

Colombia

Despite overall security progress since the signing of Colombia's historic 2016 Peace Agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), illegal armed groups continued to fight for control of coca cultivation, drug trafficking, illegal mining and other illicit activities throughout 2022. Although significant steps have been taken in the construction of truth and transitional justice, violence, insecurity and environmental degradation continued to entail serious human rights concerns for the people and communities affected, often in the poorest and most remote areas of the country. This is despite the new government's renewed focus on human rights and peace.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) verified 112 killings of human rights defenders in 2022,^[90] while Colombia's human rights ombudsman reported that 215 human rights activists and social leaders were killed – the highest annual number recorded since the Peace Agreement was signed.

According to Global Witness, Colombia is the second most dangerous country in the world for environmental defenders,^[91] with those from indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities at particular

risk in 2022, facing threats, forced evictions, surveillance and criminalisation.

The security situation of former FARC combatants, and signatories to the Peace Agreement, also continues to be of concern. The UN Verification Mission has verified 355 killings since the 2016 Peace Agreement, with 50 people murdered in 2022 alone.^[92]

Criminal groups continued to profit from migrant flows along Colombia's borders with Venezuela and Panama, with human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation and labour exploitation the most common human rights abuses suffered by migrants in transit. In 2022, according to Doctors Without Borders, at least 14% of all migrants crossing through the Darien Gap experienced some form of sexual violence or exploitation.^[93]

Throughout the year, the UK continued to support the Education Cannot Wait programme in Colombia to help Venezuelan refugees and migrant students transition back to formal education and strengthen their foundational skills. In February, Minister for Development, Andrew Mitchell, announced a UK pledge of £90 million for education in emergencies, including £80 million for Education Cannot Wait.

According to the Foundation for Free Press in Colombia, Colombia continues to be one of the western hemisphere's most dangerous countries for journalists. In 2022, 54 journalists and four media workers were killed while carrying out their work, and threats against journalists rose sharply compared to 2021. In November, through the Magna Carta fund, the UK began supporting a programme to help improve press freedom throughout the country, particularly in conflict-affected areas.

More positively, in August, newly elected President Gustavo Petro,

began implementing a *Total Peace* policy aimed at reducing violence and guaranteeing the social, economic and environmental rights of all of Colombia's citizens. Supporting the Colombian government in its commitment to secure a broad and lasting peace, including as penholder in the UN Security Council, remained an important priority of the UK throughout the year.

A key part of this support is provided through the UK's Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF), which continued to support the implementation of the Peace Agreement and support improvements to stability and security in Colombia throughout 2022. CSSF programmes helped the OHCHR to support the Colombian state in protecting human rights defenders, providing them with technical advice, and investigating killings.

Through the UN's Multi-Partner Trust Fund, the UK and other donors worked in partnership with the Colombian government and civil society to improve self-protection and human rights defence programmes in the areas most affected by the conflict.

Recognising the interlinkages between peace and environmental sustainability, UK International Climate Finance programmes in 2022 continued to work with a conflict sensitive approach to tackling deforestation and biodiversity loss – often linked to illicit activities – and to support sustainable and peaceful livelihoods in conflict-affected areas. The UK-Colombia Partnership for Sustainable Growth was updated in November to recognise these interlinkages, and the UK's objective to support peaceful livelihoods.

In June, the Truth Commission – a non-judicial mechanism set up pursuant to the 2016 peace deal – published its final report, based on interviews with thousands of

[90] <https://www.ohchr.org/es/statements/2023/01/un-high-commissioner-human-rights-volker-turk-concludes-official-visit-colombia>

[91] <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/blog/colombia-escazuagreement-ratification/>

[92] <https://colombia.unmissions.org/el-secretario-general-saluda-la-determinaci%C3%B3n-de-colombia-de-avanzar-hacia-la-consolidaci%C3%B3n-de-la>

[93] <https://www.msf.org.co/actualidad/denunciamos-deterioro-las-condiciones-acogida-los-migrantes-panama-y-la-falta-atencion>



The Minister for the Americas and Caribbean, David Rutley MP, meeting survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, September 2022.

people^[94]. The report is a significant milestone in Colombia's reconciliation process, and the first of its kind to recognise sexual violence and reproductive violence, as well as political violence against women during the conflict. Through its CSSF support, the UK helped the Truth Commission's work to gather testimonies from Colombians both in Colombia and abroad, including in the UK.

In a further important step, Colombia's Special Jurisdiction for Peace, announced in July the opening of a macro case on sexual violence and other crimes related to gender, sexual orientation and identity. The UK supported the office of the judges who lead on the case, as well as victim and survivor organisations advocating for the recognition of sexual violence as a weapon during the armed conflict.

Under the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI), the UK continued to help Colombia address the impact of conflict-related sexual violence. At the PSVI conference in November, the UK welcomed a large delegation from Colombia that embodied its multi-level commitment to the prevention and prosecution of this heinous crime. Colombia is now an active member of the International Alliance on PSVI.

The Minister for the Americas and Caribbean, David Rutley MP, visited Colombia in November 2022, where he met victims and survivors and discussed UK support to survivors of sexual violence, including psychosocial and legal support, and access to justice. As well as support to female victims, UK programming included support to male and LGBT+ survivors to overcome the specific barriers they face in their pursuit of justice and accountability.

In 2023, a year in which the country will hold local and regional elections in October, the UK will continue to work closely with the Colombian government and civil society to promote human rights, peace and security across the country.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

There were no signs of any improvement in the dire human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in 2022. The country's borders remained closed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the DPRK authorities continued to refuse to co-operate with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) or with the newly appointed UN Special Rapporteur on the

situation of human rights in North Korea, Elizabeth Salmón.

The DPRK was listed in last place out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index and top of Open Doors' annual ranking of the 50 countries in which Christians experience extreme persecution. In principle, freedoms of speech, religion or belief, the press, association, and peaceful assembly were guaranteed by the DPRK's constitution, but in reality, it was almost impossible for believers to gather or meet to worship, with the DPRK's "anti-reactionary thought" law bringing enormous personal risk to those who did dare to do so.

The DPRK government remained the subject of country specific human rights resolutions at the UN. It continued to deny allegations of human rights violations, and failed to address reports by the UN Secretary General and the UN Special Rapporteur during 2022 on the human rights situation in the country. The regime continued to refuse to recognise or 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".^[95] NGO reports added to the growing body of information and deep concern about human rights violations in the DPRK, including Korea Future's "North Korean Prison Database" launched in March.

The UK continued to raise and challenge the DPRK's human rights record in multilateral fora, calling on the DPRK to ensure its people's fundamental human rights, rather than diverting its resources to its illegal weapons programme. The UK pressed for a UN Security Council annual debate on human rights in the DPRK, on the basis that human rights there and international peace and security were inextricably linked. The UK co-sponsored resolutions on the human rights situation in the DPRK, adopted by the UN General

[94] Hay futuro si hay verdad | Informe Final Comisión de la Verdad (comisiondelaverdad.co)r

[95] <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/co-idprk/reportofthe-commissionof-inquiry-dprk>

Assembly and the UN Human Rights Council. 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 them unrestricted access to the country.

The DPRK's border closures and tight restrictions on internal movement introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic continued to severely affect the distribution of aid and support, with UN agencies and international NGOs unable to access the country to conduct an assessment of need. The UK reminded the DPRK that its restrictive COVID-19 measures should be proportionate and not used as a tool to further constrain the freedom of its citizens, or to restrict the ability of the international community to engage with authorities in Pyongyang.

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

In 2023, the UK will continue to raise the human rights situation in the DPRK, and use multilateral fora to urge the regime to co-operate fully with relevant UN human rights mandate holders and allow them unhindered access to the country. The UK will continue to support the new UN Special Rapporteur, Elizabeth Salmón, to shine a spotlight on the deeply concerning human rights situation in the DPRK, in order to effect improvements and permanent change for the people of North Korea.

The UK will also keep under review the use of UK autonomous global human rights sanctions. 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 2022, particularly in the eastern provinces affected by conflict. The UN Joint Human Rights Office documented 5,969 human rights violations and abuses, a 15% decrease from 2021. Human rights violations and abuses continued to be concentrated to conflict-affected provinces in 2022 (85%), with a significant increase in the number of extrajudicial executions.

While the number of documented human rights violations and abuses declined, the overall security situation in DRC deteriorated in 2022. The re-emergence of armed group M23, resulted in increased violence and a large spike in humanitarian need. This jeopardised efforts to pursue peace and prosperity, and exacerbated the already severe humanitarian situation. DRC is home to one of the largest humanitarian crises in the world, with 26.4 million – a quarter of the population – in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. In 2022, the number of internally displaced people increased significantly to 5.9 million, with 600,000 from the on-going M23 conflict alone.

UK partners, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and SAFER, responded to humanitarian needs caused by M23 advances, where they had access. In October, the UK announced a further £2 million for ICRC, to support their vital work providing lifesaving assistance and promoting respect for international humanitarian law among the authorities and armed groups. Additional funding of £2.5 million to SAFER for rapid cash assistance was agreed, a proportion of which was

used for the M23 crisis. The UK's current £40 million humanitarian programme provided life-saving emergency relief, protection and access to health care, water and shelter to over a million people most affected by conflict, displacement and acute food insecurity.

The UK supported efforts to build stability in DRC, through diplomatic efforts and funding. In financial year 2021 to 2022, the UK contributed approximately £45 million and three staff officers to the UN Peacekeeping Mission (MONUSCO), including a senior gender and child protection officer. 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.

Over half of Congolese women have experienced physical violence in their lifetime, and those living in eastern DRC were vulnerable to alarming rates of conflict related sexual violence (CRSV). The UK is committed to preventing and responding to CRSV. In early 2022, the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) funded projects implemented by TRIAL, Panzi Foundation and World Vision, helped strengthen accountability for CRSV, and reduced stigma through community dialogues. Funding to the Global Survivors Fund supported their work to enhance access to redress for survivors, supporting over 1000 survivors in DRC. The UK, as a dedicated board member, proudly announced a further £5.15 million to the Global Survivors Fund. This funding is part of the UK's new 'ACT for Survivors Initiative'.

In October, HRH The Duchess of Edinburgh and the Minister for Human Rights, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, conducted a joint visit to the DRC, meeting with key government and civil society stakeholders, as well as survivors, to raise awareness and seek close collaboration on PSVI. In a welcome move, ahead of the PSVI International Conference in November, the DRC endorsed the Political Declaration on CRSV, outlining key national



HRH The Duchess of Edinburgh, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad and Dr Mukwege during a visit to the DRC, meeting with key civil society stakeholders, as well as survivors, to raise awareness and seek close collaboration on PSVI, October 2022.

commitments, including action under the Platform for Action Promoting the Rights and Wellbeing of Children Born of CRSV, which was launched at the conference. The UK is working closely with the DRC government to deliver on these commitments.

The artisanal mining sector remained particularly vulnerable to modern slavery and human rights abuses, with regular reports of child labour and exploitative practices. The British Embassy in Kinshasa is an active member of the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights Initiative, a multi-stakeholder initiative focused on improving respect for human rights in the extractives sector. The DRC government applied to become a member of the initiative and committed to develop a plan of action to ensure adherence to the Voluntary Principles and obtain full membership status.

The UK-funded Partnership Against Child Exploitation programme included operations in DRC. The programme tackled supply and demand issues which result in child labour, with a holistic intervention in improving law enforcement, increasing children's agency, improving livelihoods for conflict-affected families, and supporting

businesses to improve supply chain due diligence and to fulfil their duty of care.

The UK will continue to monitor, lobby and engage on human rights, working with local and international partners. Presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for December 2023 will inevitably dominate the DRC political landscape this year. In a welcome move, the president and the National Independent Electoral Commission have said they are committed to holding free, fair, inclusive and transparent elections. However, during this period there is a greater chance of tension, including inter-ethnic rivalry that could lead to human rights violations and abuses. During the election period, the UK will also monitor linked human rights issues, such as media freedom and freedom of expression.

Egypt

In Egypt, 2022 saw ongoing challenges for civil society; restrictions on freedom of expression, including media and digital freedom; no improvement in prison conditions, and a rise in the number of death penalty sentences issued, although

2022 saw an overall decrease in the number of executions. However, there was some progress with a number of political prisoners released during the year following the reinstatement of the Presidential Pardon Committee in April, and the announcement of a new national dialogue for political reform.

The operating environment for civil society organisations continued to be difficult, even when Egypt hosted COP 27. Many local opposition voices had to register with international organisations in order to attend. There were also curbs to freedom of peaceful assembly outside the COP 27 venue, and hundreds of people were arrested before the conference, in connection to calls for protests during the summit. The UK's COP presidency team worked closely with Egyptian counterparts to ensure an inclusive event. The UK reinforced this with a statement at the UN Human Rights Council in September, which called on Egypt to ensure media, civil society and NGOs could operate freely during the conference.^[96]

The announcement of the national dialogue in April marked a potential change by the Egyptian government, promising an opening up of political space. Although an executive committee was formed, the dialogue failed to happen in 2022. However, the reinstated Presidential Pardon Committee did have a tangible impact, and over 1,000 individuals were reported to have been released by December, including the prominent politician Ziad El-Elaimy.^[97] Detained since 2019, El-Elaimy was sentenced to five years in prison last year on charges of spreading false news, and his pardon was a major concession by the regime.

However, new – although notably less high profile – arrests overshadowed those released. Figures received from the Egyptian Centre for Rights and Freedoms reported over 2,700 politically motivated arrests over the same period.^[98] Many were held in

[96] <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/human-rights-council-51-uk-statement-on-china-russia-iran-ethiopia-and-egypt>

[97] https://www-ec--rf-net.translate.google/?_x_tr_sl=ar&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en&_x_tr_pto=sc

[98] https://www-ec--rf-net.translate.google/?_x_tr_sl=ar&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en&_x_tr_pto=sc

pre-trial detention as the Egyptian authorities continued to use anti-terrorism legislation to keep human rights defenders (HRDs) detained for the two-year limit, at which point they applied new charges. Often detainees were held in poor conditions. Egypt Watch recorded there had been at least 48 deaths in detention in 2022.^[99] For those who were freed, many were subject to asset freezes and travel bans, including Karim Ennarah of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights. The UK continued to lobby on this, and other cases, in a bid to lift the restrictions and end the practice, including at the UN Human Rights Council in March.^[100]

One of the HRDs moved from pre-trial detention (in December 2021) was Alaa Abd El-Fattah, a dual British-Egyptian. He is serving a five-year prison sentence on charges of “spreading false news”. The UK has been refused consular access to El-Fattah, and throughout much of 2022, he was on hunger strike to protest against his conditions in prison. The UK lobbied extensively for his release, including through successive interventions by the Prime Minister and his predecessors, the Foreign Secretary and other ministers. European human rights ambassadors, including the UK’s Global Ambassador for Human Rights, Rita French, issued a joint statement calling for El-Fattah’s release.

Freedom of expression, including media and press freedoms, continued to be limited in Egypt, which ranked 168 out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index (down two places from 2021).^[101] According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, Egypt is holding 21 journalists in prison.^[102] Though new arrests of journalists fell – and many were released from pre-trial detention – others were arrested and remain in prison.

These include journalist Safaa Al-Korbagy and TV presenter Hala Fahmy, arrested in April for their criticism of the state media authority. In September, prosecutors interrogated four journalists from independent news website Mada Masr, and charged them with “spreading false news” over a news article. In addition, the authorities continued to block access to hundreds of independent news and human rights websites without judicial orders. The UK specifically highlighted this at the HRC in March.

Egypt continued to be one of the leading countries to use – and carry out – the death penalty.^[103] In March, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights called on Egypt to establish a moratorium on the use of the death penalty. Although difficult to verify, the Egyptian authorities did appear to pause executions during Ramadan, and fewer sentences were carried out in 2022 than in previous years.

In line with President Sisi’s commitments, there continued to be more space for freedom of religion or belief. Over 2,500 church licences were approved in 2022 – an increase on 2021. In April, the Anglican Church launched the Centre for Christian-Muslim Understanding and Partnership in Cairo to promote interfaith dialogue both in Egypt and abroad. However, the use of religious laws, including “contempt of religion” and “blasphemy”, is a persistent practice; in January, Marco Girgis was sentenced to five years for contempt of Islam. The UK continued to engage positively with all religious leaders and communities in Egypt, including during the Minister for Human Rights, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon’s visit to Egypt during Ramadan, where he met the Grand Imam and the Archbishop of the Anglican Church in Egypt.

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a serious issue in Egypt. Reports of violence against women doubled in recent years,^[104] and at least four women were murdered by men in 2022 for refusing their advances. The murders sparked a public outcry, particularly on social media. There is broad consensus at the governmental level that GBV must be addressed; action in 2022 included strengthened penalties issued by the Egyptian government for anyone convicted of GBV. With complicated processes and social taboos, incidents are often under-reported, attitudes slow to change, and a culture of impunity remains. As part of 16 Days of Activism, the UK launched the “For Her, With Her” fund, to improve efforts to tackle GBV, supporting grassroots organisations and putting women’s voices at the centre of what the UK does in Egypt.

There was some progress on gender equality, including allowing women to become judges at male dominated top judicial bodies (such as the Public Prosecution Office) for the first time. However, concerns remained on wider societal progress, including the continued delay to a new personal status law governing issues of marriage, divorce and child guardianship. A controversial draft bill aimed at changing personal status laws, penned by judges without civil society input, was withdrawn in 2021, and there was no progress in 2022 on legislation to improve equality.

Campaigners reported that the LGBT+ community continued to be at risk of arrest on charges of debauchery, immorality or blasphemy. In private, LGBT+ Egyptians support each other, offering safe spaces to be themselves, but traditional voices are slow to change. For example, societal norms still view homosexuality as morally deviant, and trans men and trans

[99] <https://egyptwatch.net/2022/12/29/48-deaths-in-2022-medical-negligence-still-devours-political-detainees-in-egypt/>

[100] <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/un-human-rights-council-49-uk-statement-for-the-item-4-general-debate>

[101] <https://rsf.org/en/country/egypt>

[102] <https://cpj.org/mideast/egypt/>

[103] <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/05/death-penalty-2021-facts-and-figures/#:~:text=At%20least%20356%20people%20were,to%20record%20worldwide%20in%202021.>

[104] https://www.ngocswarabstates.org/sites/default/files/media/report_of_caw_observatory_2020.pdf

women still lack recognition in public institutions, thereby depriving them of essential services including access to safe and secure healthcare. The LGBT+ community face discrimination from the government through the infamous ‘vice’ police, who infiltrate dating apps and use meet-ups arranged to entrap, arrest and detain individuals. Checkpoints and random phone searches are also a major concern with people arrested, simply over the presence of certain apps on their phone.

The UK will continue to engage and promote progress on human rights in Egypt. UK priorities for 2023 are to assist vulnerable and marginalised groups, human rights defenders, NGOs, and independent media to operate freely in Egypt.

Eritrea

The human rights situation in Eritrea did not improve in 2022. Reports of human rights and humanitarian law violations by Eritrean troops involved in the conflict in Ethiopia went unacknowledged and unaddressed by the Eritrean government. Eritrea did not accept the outcomes of the reports by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), and the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE) into human rights violations and abuses, and international humanitarian law violations during the conflict in northern Ethiopia. These reports detailed many serious violations and abuses of international human rights, humanitarian, and refugee law by all parties to the conflict in northern Ethiopia, including the Eritrean Defence Force.

However, welcome steps included the significant withdrawals of Eritrean troops from northern Ethiopia following the November 2022 peace agreement between the federal government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front, and the Eritrean government publicly supporting the agreement.

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. 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 interactive dialogues with the UN Special Rapporteur for the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Dr. Mohamed Abdelsalam Babiker. In March and October 2022, the UK commissioned a two-part report through the Religious Freedom Institute (RFI) on religious freedom in Eritrea. After many years of the UK calling for the release from house arrest of Patriarch Abune Antonios, the Head of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, the Patriarch passed away in February 2022, still under incarceration after 16 years. In October, a Catholic bishop and a priest were arrested and detained without charge but were released unharmed in December.

The UK continued to support the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea and remained disappointed with the government of Eritrea’s refusal to permit him access to visit. The special rapporteur visited the UK in December 2022, where he met with FCDO and Home Office officials and diaspora groups. During the 50th Session of the UN Human Rights Council, the special rapporteur concluded that he had not seen any evidence of an improvement in the human rights situation in Eritrea. The system of universal and compulsory national service, spanning both military and civilian roles, remained in need of reform. For many, the service was indefinite, and many Eritreans avoided it by leaving the country, often by perilous means. The mobilisation of civilians to join Eritrean troops fighting in northern Ethiopia continued throughout the year, with frequent roundups of civilians across Eritrea.

Eritrea was ranked at the bottom of the World Press Freedom Index, 179 out of 180 countries, with all internal media operated by the state. An exhibition at the House of Lords highlighted that sixteen journalists arbitrarily detained without a fair trial during the 2000s remained incarcerated. The exhibition marked the disappearances and the ongoing call for their release. Access to the internet remained limited to internet cafes, and there was still 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 complete withdrawal of Eritrean troops from Ethiopia, and 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 Human Rights Council.

Ethiopia

The decision to add Ethiopia to the list of Human Rights Priority Countries was taken in response to independent international investigations into the conflict in northern Ethiopia,^[105] which found that all parties involved in the conflict have been responsible for violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law. Additionally, there are regular allegations of human rights abuses and violations by state and non-state actors throughout the country. The human rights situation in Ethiopia is highly concerning and is deteriorating overall, despite improvements in the north.

The human rights situation in Ethiopia has been dominated by the conflict in

[105] The investigations took place between November 2020 and November 2022

northern Ethiopia. The situation improved following the peace agreement between the government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) on 2 November. However, reports of violations ascribed to Eritrean forces continued. Across Ethiopia, human rights violations and abuses were also recorded, where insecurity and inter-regional and regional-federal contestation led to the deaths and displacement of many civilians. Space for political parties and the media to operate was reduced, including through the arrest of opposition politicians and journalists.

The conflict in the Tigray region was characterised by a widespread disregard for international law and lack of protection for civilians. The International Commission of Human Rights Experts in Ethiopia (ICHREE), in its report of 19 September,^[106] found "...reasonable grounds to believe..." that all parties to the conflict in northern Ethiopia had committed serious violations and abuses of international human rights law and international humanitarian law. Reports by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission's (EHRC) and Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International also catalogued many violations and abuses,^[107] including mass killings of civilians, sexual and gender-based violence and the destruction and looting of vital infrastructure. The Ethiopian government and its allies consistently denied or obstructed humanitarian access into Tigray, which the UN characterised as a "major protection crisis", and referred to a "de facto humanitarian blockade on Tigray."^[108]

The UK government consistently called for all parties to uphold human rights and international humanitarian law and co-sponsored the renewal of ICHREE's mandate at the 51st session of the Human Rights Council. Despite many challenges, including attempts to defund ICHREE, and other states declining to allow access



The Foreign Secretary, James Cleverly, meeting with Abiy Ahmed Ali, the Ethiopian Prime Minister, in December 2022. The Foreign Secretary emphasised the UK's full support for lasting peace in Ethiopia. Since the November 2022 agreement, the UK has called for greater accountability on human rights violations and a credible national transitional justice process.

to refugee centres on their territory, ICHREE published its first report in September, and was mandated to provide a further report in 2023. The Ethiopian government took some steps towards supporting accountability, for example establishing the Inter-Ministerial Task Force to follow up the OHCHR EHRC Joint Investigation. However, concerns were raised, including by ICHREE, about whether it was impartially and adequately investigating crimes across the country. The peace agreement includes a commitment to create a comprehensive national transitional justice policy, aimed at delivering truth, accountability, redress, reconciliation, and healing.

Insecurity and conflict across other regions of Ethiopia, including in: Oromia; Amhara; Afar; Benishangul Gumuz; and the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNPR), led to rising numbers of incidents of inter-communal violence, deaths of civilians and increasing numbers of internally displaced people. Reports from Amhara and Afar, including in the first four months of the year, indicate that armed forces and groups allegedly engaged in widespread destruction and looting of private and public property,

including factories, schools, and health facilities, hindering access to vital services and livelihoods. In Oromia, fighting between the government and the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), and between the OLA and the Amharan militia has led to many civilian deaths, including the massacre of over 200 of Amhara ethnicity in Gimbi town in June.

Hate speech against Tigrayans, including discriminatory language from the government, was promoted throughout the conflict. Journalists, politicians, and pro-federal-government activists called ethnic Tigrayans "traitors", called for neighbours to "weed" them, and called for authorities to detain ethnic Tigrayans in "concentration camps".

In January, Ethiopia announced the release of high-profile detainees as part of a statement on national reconciliation, including prominent Oromo, Tigrayan and Amhara activists. Following a vote in the Ethiopian parliament to end the state of emergency in February, the majority of those arrested under the state of emergency were released. However, reports of arbitrary arrests continued throughout the year across the political spectrum. Opposition

[106] <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/ichre-ethiopa/index>

[107] EHRC Annual Report for 2021-2022 published July 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/04/ethiopia-crimes-against-humanity-in-western-tigray-zone/>

[108] <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/un-aid-chief-ethiopia-famine-tigray-get-those-trucks-moving>

political parties also complained that they were unable to open offices.

Ethiopia slid down the Reporters Without Borders' global rankings for media freedom to 114 from 101,^[109] due to an increased suppression of free speech and independent media. Over the year, 40 journalists were arrested or continued to be detained unlawfully by federal and regional governments.

There was no recognition of LGBT+ rights in Ethiopia in 2022. Both male and female same-sex sexual activity is illegal and punishable with imprisonment.

During a visit to Ethiopia in December, the Foreign Secretary, James Cleverly, told Prime Minister Abiy that Ethiopia could rely on the UK's full support on its path to recovery and reconciliation. The UK will continue to work with the Ethiopian government and civil society in their efforts to ensure survivors of human rights abuses and violations receive comprehensive support, and perpetrators are held to account. The UK will also continue to engage on Ethiopia at the HRC in 2023 in line with current mandated activity.

Haiti

The decision to add Haiti to the list of Human Rights Priority Countries was taken in response to the rapidly accelerated downward trend on human rights there following the assassination of President Moïse in 2021, and the ongoing governance crisis that this precipitated. Without a political settlement leading to an elected and accepted government, the human rights situation is anticipated to worsen.

Haiti's long-standing political, security and humanitarian crisis facilitated increasing levels of impunity and widespread human rights abuses. Haitian civilians suffered at the hands of armed gangs, and the rights of women and children continued to be overlooked as the interim government was unable to effectively combat the

increasing levels of violence and to protect human rights. In May, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, said that she was deeply disturbed by the severe human rights impact from the surge in violence involving heavily armed gangs in Port-au-Prince. She urged the Haitian authorities, with the support of the international community, to restore the rule of law promptly and to protect people from armed violence.

An investigative report by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on human rights abuses committed by gangs stated that from July 8 to December 31, at least 263 people were killed and at least 57 women and girls were raped in just one neighbourhood within Cité Soleil. That particular area had become ground zero for intense fighting between warring gangs and, the report said, residents lived in "an almost permanent climate of terror due to the use of snipers that killed, at random, any person who passed in their field of vision." Among the victims were at least 17 women and several children, the youngest eight years old.

The number of reported homicides nationwide in 2022 increased by 35.2% compared with 2021, with 2,183 victims reported during the year. Kidnappings rose by 104.7%, with 1,359 victims recorded by the police in 2022 compared with 664 in 2021. In an absence of governance, armed gangs intensified their control of territory, occupying over 60% of the capital and key strategic areas, including all major transport routes in and out of Port-au-Prince.

An estimated 4.7 million people, around 40% of Haiti's population, needed humanitarian assistance and experienced acute food insecurity in 2022, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). This included, for the first time, 19,000 at risk of famine-like conditions. Armed gangs exacerbated the humanitarian situation by blockading the main fuel

terminal in Port-au-Prince and preventing the distribution of fuel.

Gang violence had a severe impact on the enjoyment of human rights. Dozens of schools, medical centres, businesses and markets remained closed, and people struggled to find basic products including food, water and medicines. Other methods used by gangs to disrupt access to food and water included damaging public water mains and threatening to kill water truck drivers if they entered certain neighbourhoods. As a result, the first outbreak of cholera in nearly three years caused at least 223 deaths as of 27 November, according to Haiti's health ministry. The UK supported Haiti through our contributions to the UN and other international agencies, including the World Bank, who have the strongest presence on the ground to deliver aid. Through the British Embassy in Port-au-Prince, the UK remained in regular contact and coordination with these agencies.

Women and children continued to be the most affected by the escalating insecurity. Gangs had rapidly increased the use of sexual violence, including rape, as a strategy to instil fear in communities. UN reporting has identified instances of collective rape and other sexual violence against women, girls, LGBT+ persons and, to a lesser extent, men and boys, as a weapon to punish and humiliate local populations. Government prevention and protection responses remained weak.

Turf battles displaced tens of thousands. By November 2022, over 156,000 individuals were recognised as internally displaced (including several thousand from the August 2021 earthquake).

Access to education remained difficult. The reopening of schools following the Covid pandemic was delayed by gang violence and blockades, and the prevalence of internally displaced persons also prevented large numbers of children from returning to the classroom. By

[109] <https://rsf.org/en/country/ethiopia>

December 2022, approximately 66% of schools had reopened in a limited capacity, through UN support.

During Haiti's review at the Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review, the UK expressed its concern at the deteriorating and volatile security situation, and called on Haiti to ensure police officers in prisons and detention facilities were properly trained, and to bring prison conditions in line with the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners. The UK also called on the government to enact and implement laws to prohibit and prevent sexual and gender-based violence and ensure perpetrators are brought to justice. Through the mandate renewal process for the UN Integrated Office in Haiti, the FCDO sought and obtained a strengthened role for the UN in tackling gender based human rights abuses. This saw an increased capacity within the Integrated Office to promote human rights, with a particular focus on women's rights and gender equality.

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

Iran

The human rights situation in Iran continued to deteriorate in 2022. The number of executions surged, and human rights were further eroded in

multiple areas. Civic and media freedoms, freedom of expression on and offline, and freedom of religion or belief were systematically violated. Women and girls faced tightening restrictions and Iran escalated its practice of using detained foreign nationals to pressure other governments. Reports of serious human rights violations surged from September 2022 onwards, as the authorities violently suppressed widespread protests.

In September 2022, the death of Mahsa Amini, a young woman from Iran's Kurdish community following her arrest for allegedly breaching Iran's strict headscarf rules, sparked major protests. Demonstrations continued for the rest of the year; these were suppressed by the regime with extreme brutality, including beating and firing on protesters. This led to over 500 deaths, including approximately 70 children.^[110]

Minority communities were disproportionately impacted. In one incident in Zahedan, a majority Sunni town, authorities fired on a peaceful crowd, killing an estimated 82 people.^[111] Iran also deployed heavy weaponry to crush dissent in several Kurdish-majority towns.^[112] Women and girls attending protests were reportedly targeted by Iranian law enforcement for gender-based violence. The authorities also conducted mass arrests; at least 22,000 people were detained in relations to protests.^[113] Reports of torture and sexual violence to extract false confessions were widespread. In December, Iran executed two individuals arrested in connection to protests following summary trials which reportedly fell far short of internationally recognised standards.

At least 500 people sentenced to death by the Iranian courts were executed in 2022, the highest number in five years.^[114] This includes reports of five juvenile offenders. Iran continues to rank amongst one of the world's most prolific executors. LGBT+ activists Zahra (Sareh) Sedighi and Elham Choobdar were sentenced to death in September. LGBT+ rights remained precarious in Iran.^[115]

Iran continued to breach its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Continuing its longstanding patterns of censorship, Iran repeatedly targeted journalists and systematically constrained media freedoms in 2022, including using frequent internet shutdowns and throttling to limit reporting of protests. The government's "User Protection Bill" concerning internet infrastructure was criticised by UN Special Rapporteurs on human rights for its potential to isolate Iran from the global internet.^[116] At least 88 journalists were arrested or sent back to prison in 2022,^[117] a large number of whom were detained following the start of protests in September.^[118]

Widespread freedom of religion or belief issues persisted in Iran in 2022. Members of religious minorities in Iran remained vulnerable in 2022, and Iran's government failed to introduce protections for a number of its religious minorities. Persecution of the Baha'i community intensified in particular.

Over July and August, Iranian Baha'is reported widespread arrests and seizure of assets. In the village of Roushankouh, Mazandaran province, Baha'i houses were demolished and land confiscated.^[119] Former spiritual

[110] <https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2023/03/human-rights-council-hears-about-reports-massacres-civilians-myanmar-and-possible>

[111] <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/iran-least-82-protesters-and-bystanders-killed-bloody-crackdown-baluchistan>

[112] <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc5267-situation-human-rights-islamic-republic-iran-report-special> pg8

[113] <https://apnews.com/article/iran-protests-arrested-pardons-mahsa-amini-ae3c45c6bcc883900ff1b1e83f85df95>

[114] <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc5267-situation-human-rights-islamic-republic-iran-report-special> pg16

[115] <https://6rang.org/english/3426/>

[116] <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/03/un-human-rights-experts-urge-iran-abandon-restrictive-internet-bill>

[117] <https://web.archive.org/web/20230106130300/https://cpj.org/2022/09/names-of-journalists-arrested-in-irans-anti-state-protests/>

[118] <https://cpj.org/reports/2022/12/number-of-jailed-journalists-spikes-to-new-global-record/>

[119] <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/fcdo-minister-statement-on-treatment-of-bahai-in-iran>

leaders of the Baha'i were sentenced to prison terms, and at least 100 Baha'i students were barred from entering university as of August 2022.^[120] Christians also continued to face systematic discrimination and harassment, particularly converts and those accused of proselytising or organising services in homes. Ethnic minorities also faced persecution: people from the Baluch, Kurdish and Ahawazi Arab and Afghan minorities have been targeted for harassment, arbitrary detention and execution.

Women and girls continued to face restrictions in 2022. In July and August, President Raisi signed decrees on the enforcement of Iran's strict hijab and chastity laws, which resulted in women judged improperly dressed being denied access to government offices, banks and public transport.^[121] Women reported greater enforcement, including the use of facial recognition software to issue automated penalties for those driving without hijab. Regime officials also reported Iranian girls being sent to 'psychological centres' for protesting for their right to choose what to wear.^[122] Child marriage remained prevalent. Girls experienced less legal protection than boys on the age of criminal responsibility – nine lunar years (8.7 years) compared to 15 lunar years (14.6 years) for boys.

In March 2022, after years of unfair and unjust detention, British Nationals Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and Anoosheh Ashoori were allowed to return to the UK. Iran continued to deny consular access to other dual-British nationals in detention. The UK raised dual national detainee cases with Iran. Iran intensified its practice of using detained nationals for political leverage; a number of European dual and mono nationals were arrested over the course of the year.

In 2022, Iran still did not have an independent judiciary; the head of

the judiciary is appointed by the supreme leader. The appointment of judges has been criticised for focusing on candidates' beliefs and political leanings. Systemic violation of fair trial rights in the revolutionary courts is well documented, including denial of a fair and public hearing, the use of torture and mistreatment to obtain confessions, and denial of access to a chosen lawyer. British National Alireza Akbari, who was executed at the start of 2023, raised concerns of torture and mistreatment during his time in detention in 2022.

The UK made clear to Iran that violations of the human rights of members of religious and ethnic minorities were unacceptable. The UK also repeatedly condemned the targeting of journalists within Iran, as well as credible and serious threats to UK-based individuals reporting on the situation in Iran,^[123] and the UK condemned Iran's use of the death penalty bilaterally and in multiple fora, including the G7.

In 2022, the UK worked with international partners to raise the regime's violations of human rights, including at the UN Security Council, the Human Rights Council and UN General Assembly. In March, the UK was part of the core group on the HRC resolution mandating the UN Special Rapporteur on Iran; in October/November, the UK co-sponsored the UNGA Third Committee resolution on Iran; and in November, the UK supported a HRC Special Session on the human rights situation in Iran, with a particular focus on women and girls. The session voted to create a Fact Finding Mission to investigate human rights violations related to the protests, collect evidence and report back to the Council in March 2024. In December, the UK, along with 29 other countries, voted to remove Iran from the Commission on the Status of Women. The UK has introduced

42 new Iran human rights sanctions since the death of Mahsa Amini.

The UK will continue to work with partners to deter and challenge Iran's human rights violations at all opportunities. The UK remains committed to ensuring Iran is held accountable through multilateral fora for its human rights violations, in particular through the investigations of the UN Fact Finding Mission, and through the work of the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights.

Iraq

The human rights situation in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) remained concerning. The protracted government formation process, following elections in October 2021, hindered progress significantly. Civil society space and freedom of expression was constrained. Armed groups continued to operate with impunity, and targeted killings and intimidation of political activists persisted. Women and girls continued to be marginalised by conservative social, religious and tribal norms, with high reported rates of gender-based violence, including honour killings. More positively, for the first time, women exceeded the 25% quota of parliamentary seats (securing 29%) in the 2021 elections.

The space for independent journalism and human rights defenders remained limited. Freedom of expression was inhibited by the use of intimidation and prosecution, including for social media activity. Little progress was made on accountability for those responsible for the deaths, enforced disappearances and arbitrary arrests of protesters in 2019 to 2020, despite the promises made by the former government. In the KRI, journalists were arrested and detained without warrants, including ahead of planned protests in August. The UK pressed for media freedom and freedom of

[120] <https://www.bic.org/focus-areas/situation-iranian-bahais/current-situation>

[121] <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-women-dress-restrictions-raisi/31989759.html>

[122] <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2022/10/12/iranian-students-sent-psychological-centres-reforming/>

[123] <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/news/director-general-ken-mccallum-gives-annual-threat-update>



Former UK Consul General Erbil, David Hunt, met with Yazidi spiritual leaders to discuss their situation.

expression with governments in Iraq and the KRI.

In Iraq, there are reports of widespread use of torture, including to extract forced confessions, and a consistent lack of respect for the conditions of a fair trial and procedural safeguards in the KRI and Federal Iraq. Courts in Federal Iraq continued to apply the death penalty, and reportedly some of these sentences were carried out in 2022. The UK continued to lobby against use of the death penalty, for better conditions in detentions, and for due process and transparency in investigations and trials. No executions have taken place in the KRI since 2016.

Despite open conflict with Daesh ending in 2017, 1.2 million displaced people live in camps or informal settlements. Some of those returning from displacement find themselves ostracised and denied their social, political, and legal rights, risking marginalisation and susceptibility to extremist ideology. The UK provided over £278 million in humanitarian assistance between 2014 and 2022. The UK lobbied the government and worked closely with UN agencies to ensure there were national government-led efforts to reintegrate Iraq's remaining internally displaced persons.

The UK worked with the government and partners to press for full implementation and financial provision of the Yazidi Survivors' Law,

which seeks to provide reparations for female survivors of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) committed by Daesh. This led to an allocation of \$17 million in the emergency budget passed in June. With the support of UK-funded technical assistance, the applications process for reparations was launched in September. There was limited cooperation between federal and Kurdish authorities on the implementation of the law. At least 2000 Yazidi women and girls remained unaccounted for and progress is needed on integrating children born of CRSV.

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. Against that difficult context, in December, the government of Iraq took a positive step in approving a decree to grant

ownership of residential lands and properties to the Yazidi residents of the 11 collective townships in Sinjar, reversing a discriminatory policy put in place 47 years ago. The Yazidis have been under the threat of persecution and expulsion for nearly 47 years. Yazidi tribal and religious leaders have welcomed this step while continuing to call for its full implementation.

Through UK funding to the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq and other UN agencies, the UK continued to support the work of the UN Investigative Team for the Accountability of Daesh (UNITAD). In September, UNITAD's mandate was extended for a further year.

Whilst the increase in the number of women in parliamentary seats is a positive development, only three women were appointed to ministerial positions in the new government, and women remain marginalised in Iraqi society. Similarly, in the KRI there are three female ministers and 30% of parliamentary seats are held by women, including the speaker.

Discriminatory laws continued to expose women to violence, with incidents of gender-based violence increasing since COVID-19. There has been no progress on the passing of an anti-domestic violence law, and the Iraqi Federal Supreme Court upheld the view that a husband's legal right to "punish his wife within certain limits" is constitutional. Honour killings and violence against the LGBT+ community also continued across Federal Iraq and the KRI, often unreported.



FCDO staff met with female-led NGOs in Mosul in November 2022 to discuss challenges facing women every day in Nineveh, and the work of their organisations to address GBV.

UK lobbying on gender equality was complemented by the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund's Women's Voices First project, which provided capacity building, project funding, and advocacy support to 19 grassroots women's rights organisations across Iraq, to develop a localised women, peace and security agenda. The project has reached over 9000 female and over 2000 male direct beneficiaries. An advocacy initiative to overcome the lack of female staff in community policing and domestic violence centres led to the designation of female staff to handle all incoming domestic violence complaints in one governorate.

The UK will continue to lobby against human rights violations and support the government of Iraq, the KRG and civil society organisations to safeguard the human rights of all Iraqis.

Libya

In Libya, 2022 saw continued severe human rights abuses and violations, stemming from years of political division, lack of accountability and the requisite systems for accountability.

The October 2020 ceasefire was largely maintained, but the failure to conduct elections in December 2021 led to periods of increased political tension throughout 2022, including militia clashes that cost civilian lives. The International Criminal Court prosecutor announced that he had applied for further arrest warrants and, in December, he visited Libya to further the ongoing investigation into crimes against humanity and war crimes since 2011. Human rights abuses continued, including systematic arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances and torture. The Human Rights Council mandated Fact Finding Mission reported that they have reasonable grounds to believe crimes against humanity are occurring in official

prisons and in extra-legal detention centres.^[124]

Civic space notably declined, spurred by an increasingly difficult political environment and a growing narrative against international interference. The year saw an increase in arbitrary detentions of civil society actors and in the adoption of laws and regulations that curtailed freedom of expression. The increased targeting and intimidation of international civil society organisations by security agencies threatened their ability to operate – particularly on work regarding democratic and human rights issues. The UK successfully lobbied authorities on individual cases, and led efforts to co-ordinate international advocacy with the UN Support Mission in Libya. Civil space was further impeded on by the adoption of decision no. 811, which allows security and military authorities to intervene in the regulation of audio-visual media. Similarly, the adoption of the cyber crime law curtailed press freedom and legalised mass surveillance of speech online. The UK funded BBC Media Action El Kul to support open information and media freedom, and has worked to identify online hate speech targeted at women.

The UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and Girls visited Libya in December. They reported that a lack of political will and implementation gaps in policies relating to women's rights continued to pose a challenge to advancing the rights of women and girls in Libya.^[125] Women continued to face discrimination on issues pertaining to marriage, inheritance and divorce. The children of Libyan women remain unable to obtain Libyan nationality on an equal basis to the children of Libyan men. In a positive step, a new decree issued in October granted non-citizen children of Libyan women access to education, medical treatment and visa-free entry to Libya.

Violence against women continued, with victims still lacking comprehensive legal protections. In particular, absence of adequate laws relating to rape and domestic violence have forced women and girls into exploitative and coercive relationships with powerful individuals, including those with links to militia. Additionally, the targeting of women in public life continued through online abuse, violence and enforced disappearances. The whereabouts of Seram Sergiwa, a member of parliament, remain unknown. The interim-Libyan government and Libyan NGOs attended the UK-hosted Conference on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict (PSVI), and the Minister for Human Rights, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, lobbied the Libyan Foreign Minister for commitments on addressing PSVI. The UK completed a gender strategy and funded projects to increase access for women in Libya to engage and participate in elections.

The UK continued to support the UN to drive forward a political process that delivers stability and security for Libya, and improves the prospects for transitional justice and accountability. To this end, the UK hosted a conference at Wilton Park in October to coordinate the international community in support of the new UN Special Representative Bathily. The UK also lobbied Libya to extend the Fact Finding Mission and, through the UK Mission in Geneva, gave technical assistance that delivered a mandate extension until March 2023, to allow the Fact Finding Mission to complete their investigations into violations and abuses of human rights.

On security, through the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, the UK funded Mine Action's mine removal work to support Libyans' access to safe homes and land. The UK delivered counter-terrorism training for Libyan law enforcement partners, with an emphasis on human rights compliance in security operations.

[124] <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/libya/index>

[125] <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/12/libya-alarming-levels-violence-against-women-and-girls-must-end-says-un>

The Magna Carta fund enabled a scoping project on migration and people trafficking that supported the development of a larger project taken forward by partners.

Through diplomatic engagement, the UK will continue to push for progress on the political process, towards the ultimate goal of elections, a unified and democratically elected government, and an environment that upholds accountability and ends impunity. The UK will continue to encourage coordination amongst the international community towards a sustainable peace process, and advocate for Libyan civil society, for women and for the vulnerable, calling for the protection of the human rights of all Libyans.

Mali

The human rights situation in Mali continued to deteriorate throughout 2022. The deployment of the Wagner Group led to an increase in the intensity of military operations in central Mali, accompanied by a significant spike in human rights abuses and violations, alongside attempts to limit national and international scrutiny and accountability mechanisms. Media outlets were suspended, while voices from civil society and the political opposition were increasingly silenced. As terrorist violence spread, civilians were killed, humanitarian needs increased, and allegations of conflict-related sexual violence surged.

The Wagner Group deployed to Mali in December 2021. Throughout 2022, their partnership with the Malian Defence and Security Forces (MDSF) was marked by reports of human rights abuses and violations, including executions, mass graves, arbitrary arrests, sexual violence and torture. For a number of UN experts, such reports amounted to possible war crimes and crimes against humanity.^[126] From January to March 2022, the number of human rights

violations committed by the MDSF increased tenfold compared to the previous quarter.^[127] Allegations linked to the Malian authorities' counter-terrorism efforts in central Mali, supported by the Wagner Group, included the massacre of hundreds of civilians in Moura, in March, and the killing of over 50 civilians (as well as acts of torture during detention) in Hombori in April.

Accountability for the actions of the Wagner Group and the MDSF were hampered by the authorities' restrictions on the UN Peacekeeping mission in Mali, MINUSMA. Sections of Malian airspace were closed to MINUSMA air operations, peacekeepers were repeatedly denied access to certain areas to investigate human rights allegations and, at the UN Security Council's adoption of MINUSMA's renewed mandate in June, the Malian authorities publicly stated that they would not guarantee freedom of movement for the mission to carry out its human rights tasks.

UK ministers raised concerns about the Wagner Group's destabilising impact and human rights record, urging unrestricted access for MINUSMA to independently investigate allegations. Despite restrictions, UK peacekeepers deployed to MINUSMA continued to conduct patrols – providing deterrence and gathering life-saving intelligence – and provided protection to civilians in the face of attacks. The UK's contingent worked to enhance UN performance in countering improvised explosive devices, and was praised by senior UN officials for demonstrating best practice in emergency medical care.

Freedom of expression suffered amid a crackdown on criticism and dissent. In March 2022, the Malian authorities suspended France 24 and Radio France Internationale indefinitely. This was followed by the temporary suspension of the first national media outlet in November. Human Rights Watch warned of

harassment and intimidation of media professionals over their real or perceived criticism of the authorities.^[128]

Al-Qaeda and Islamic State aligned groups continued to spread violence and terror across Mali. They attacked civilians, national forces and international peacekeepers, threatened humanitarian workers, drove mass displacement, and blockaded towns, cutting them off from life-saving support and access to livelihoods. Acts of violence against civilians were also committed by signatory armed groups to the peace agreement and community militias.

The UN's quarterly human rights report covering April to June 2022 reported an almost 50% increase in cases of sexual and gender-based violence committed by a range of actors compared to the same period in 2021. In December 2022, the UK sanctioned the Al Qaeda-aligned group, Katiba Macina, for its involvement in sexual and gender-based violence, including rape and forced marriage. UK funding helped provide healthcare and psychosocial care to survivors of gender-based violence in Mali, and the establishment of local community dialogues on the issue. The UK also funded work that supported women's financial independence through the creation of small businesses, and that promoted women's political engagement.

In 2023, the UK will continue to challenge the Malian authorities when actions or decisions undermine human rights or obstruct accountability processes. The protection and promotion of the rights of women and girls will remain a focus for UK engagement in Mali, and the UK will continue to support the people of Mali, including through humanitarian assistance and community level stabilisation efforts. As UN Security Council members decide on the future of MINUSMA following the publication of the UN's

[126] <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/01/mali-un-experts-call-independent-investigation-possible-international-crimes>

[127] https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/220530_NoteTrimestrielle_jan-mars2022_final.pdf

[128] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/11/10/protect-freedom-expression-mali>

review in January 2023, we will continue to make the case for human rights to be at the heart of the UN's effort.

Myanmar (Burma)

The military regime continued to roll back a decade of democratic progress, with a shrinking civic space, ongoing arbitrary detentions, escalating violence and the first use of the death penalty in over three decades.

Violence continued throughout 2022. The military continued to target opposition voices, civil society, journalists and medical professionals. As of 31 December 2022, verified figures showed that the military had killed over 2,600 people protesting military rule since the coup in February 2021.^[129] At the end of 2022, 13,217 people were in arbitrary detention, including State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Myint.^[130]

Security forces continued to commit atrocities throughout the country with impunity, with widespread and credible reports of sexual violence and torture. Myanmar suffered over 16,000 conflict related fatalities in 2022, second only to Ukraine.^[131] Indiscriminate air strikes were increasingly used, with at least 600 air attacks carried out across the country, destroying schools, hospitals and places of worship.^[132] In November, an air strike on a concert in Kachin State killed at least 60 people.^[133] In 2022, there were over 556 incidents of military arson attacks, notably in Chin State and Sagaing and Magway Regions. Over 1.5 million people remained displaced, and over 17.6 million

people will require humanitarian assistance in 2023.

On 21 December 2022, the UN Security Council passed the first ever resolution on the situation in Myanmar, led by the UK, which demanded an end to violence and the release of those arbitrarily detained. The UK also continued to fund the Myanmar Witness programme in 2022, to preserve and verify evidence of violations for future prosecution.

Although the most widespread violations were perpetrated by the military, Ethnic Armed Organisations and opposition groups, known as the People's Defence Forces, continued to contribute to the increased violence, including carrying out extrajudicial killings. In response, the UK worked quickly with the US, EU and Canada to impose significant targeted sanctions on the military regime, with successive action on the anniversary of the coup, Myanmar Armed Forces Day and UN Human Rights Day. The sanctions targeted the military regime's access to arms, revenue and equipment which facilitates its campaign of violence. On 27 March 2022, the UK coordinated a joint statement, supported by 47 countries, which committed to working together to prevent the flow of arms to Myanmar.

At least two journalists were killed by the military in 2022. Almost all independent media outlets remained outlawed, and around 50 journalists remained in detention. In 2022, Myanmar was the world's biggest jailer of journalists relative to its population.^[134] The military restricted and controlled the online space, which hindered the delivery of aid and reporting of atrocities, and perpetuated disinformation.

Buddhist nationalist narratives, perpetuated by state institutions, religious ideologues and the media, increased the risks of identity-based violence against minorities, particularly for Muslims and Christians. The UK called for the release of detained Kachin pastor, Reverend Hkalom Samson. Over 163 religious sites have been destroyed since the coup. Rohingya people continue to suffer systemic discrimination and are denied citizenship, freedom of movement and access to education or healthcare, leaving them vulnerable to human trafficking.

In 2022 there was a 360% increase in Rohingya from Myanmar and Bangladesh attempting risky journeys to third countries, with over 348 individuals dying at sea in 2022.^[135] UK assistance reached approximately 200,000 Rohingya with essential food and water, sanitation and hygiene. In August 2022, the UK announced its intention to intervene in the International Court of Justice case on Myanmar's actions towards the Rohingya in 2016 to 2017.

Reports of conflict-related sexual violence continued, including in centres of detention and against LGBT+ communities. Over 3,455 women have been arrested since the coup, with reports of torture and sexual violence while detained.^[136]

Intimate partner violence, modern slavery and human trafficking, sexual exploitation and forced marriage remained major threats. Rates of human trafficking are estimated to have risen since the coup. The UK continues to support livelihoods and food security programming which aims to reduce the risks of trafficking and supports survivors. UK contributions to the Access to Health

[129] Assistance Association for Political Prisoners » Blog Archive » Graphs of arrest and death data as of December 31, 2022 collected and compiled by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) since the February 1, 2021 military coup (aappb.org)

[130] Assistance Association for Political Prisoners » Blog Archive » Graphs of arrest and death data as of December 31, 2022 collected and compiled by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) since the February 1, 2021 military coup (aappb.org)

[131] ACLED Conflict Severity Index (acleddata.com)

[132] Myanmar: Air strikes have become a deadly new tactic in the civil war – BBC News

[133] Myanmar airstrike kills 60 people at concert, says Kachin separatist group | Myanmar | The Guardian

[134] Three journalists sentenced, another arrested in Myanmar's endless terror | RSF

[135] Document – Protection at Sea in South East Asia – 2022 in Review (unhcr.org)

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

Fund meant that awareness raising around preventing gender-based violence reached more than 35,000 people in 2022.

Children continued to be attacked and harmed as a result of conflict. As of 31 December 2022, over 520,000 children were displaced, and over 376 children were in detention, where they were at increased risk of abuse and mistreatment.^[137] Over five million children were out of school (half of the school-age population). Of the 17.6 million people predicted to be in need of assistance in 2023, five million are children. The UK supported 235,000 children to access education (including over 120,000 girls) in 2022.

In 2023, the UK will continue to support the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' call to end the crisis and to implement the Five Point Consensus without delay. The UK will continue to use all multilateral fora, including the UN Security Council, to call for an end to violence, to promote and protect the rights of all the people of Myanmar, and to press for inclusive dialogue between all stakeholders in Myanmar.

Nicaragua

The human rights situation in Nicaragua continued to deteriorate in 2022. Through its control of the military, a compliant judiciary, and control of all 153 municipalities, the Ortega regime consolidated its hold on Nicaragua with further limitations of civil liberties. The climate of repression, shrinking space for freedom of expression, restrictions on the right to peaceful assembly, and reports of further harassment and arbitrary detentions, represented

a degradation of human rights and democracy.

Since 2019, the Ortega regime has detained more than 200 political prisoners, including politicians, media workers, human rights defenders, faith leaders and lay people linked to the Catholic Church. Throughout 2022, the UK called repeatedly on the Nicaraguan government to take all steps necessary to address the deteriorating human rights and democracy situation in the country. The UK continued to work with international partners, both to hold those who undermine human rights to account, and to encourage the Nicaraguan government to end its repression against its citizens, release all opposition leaders and political prisoners. The UK also pressed for the full restoration of their civil and political rights granted under the Nicaraguan constitution.

Nicaragua's ranking in the Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index dropped from 121 out of 180 in 2021, to 160 in 2022,^[138] driven by the regime's unabated attacks on journalists and independent media. Freedom House rated Nicaragua as "not free" in its Freedom in the World 2022 index.^[139] Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index ranked Nicaragua 167 out of 178, compared to 164 out of 180 in 2021.^[140]

In March, the UK delivered a statement on Nicaragua at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC),^[141] calling for the release of political prisoners and condemning the Nicaraguan government's attempts to suppress political opposition and silence critics. The UK co-sponsored the HRC's resolution establishing a Group of Experts on Human Rights

mandated to investigate alleged human rights violations in Nicaragua.^[142] On 16 June, Rita French, the UK's Global Ambassador for Human Rights, delivered the UK's statement during the Interactive Dialogue on the High Commissioner's report on Nicaragua at the HRC.^[143] During a visit to Costa Rica in November 2022, Rita French met with Nicaraguan Human Rights NGOs exiled in Costa Rica, where they discussed the challenges faced in Nicaragua and what more the international community could be doing to support those in Nicaragua and in exile.

The UK's sanctions measures against Nicaraguan officials are part of a wider set of UK actions aimed at promoting democracy and respect for human rights in Nicaragua. On 9 December, the UK imposed sanctions (asset freezes and travel bans) under the UK's Global Human Rights Sanctions against two Nicaraguan officials, Sadrach Zeledon and Hernandez Chirino (Deputy Mayor of Matagalpa) for their involvement in promoting and supporting serious violations of human rights.^[144] These designations complement 14 existing 2020 and 2021 designations of regime politicians.

Free and fair elections with the participation of a credible opposition are part of the foundations of a stable democracy. Municipal elections in November, which were neither free nor fair, followed sham presidential elections in November 2021. The Inter-American Commission of Human Rights on 4 November underlined the "lack of the minimum conditions to be able to have free and fair elections due to the lack of an independent electoral

[137] Assistance Association for Political Prisoners » Blog Archive » Graphs of arrest and death data as of December 31, 2022 collected and compiled by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) since the February 1, 2021 military coup (aappb.org)

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

[139] <https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores>

[140] <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022>

[141] <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/un-human-rights-council-49-uk-statement-during-the-interactive-dialogue-on-the-high-commissioners-report-on-nicaragua>

[142] <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/LTD/G22/292/81/PDF/G2229281.pdf?OpenElement>

[143] <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/un-human-rights-council-50-uk-statement-during-the-interactive-dialogue-on-nicaragua>

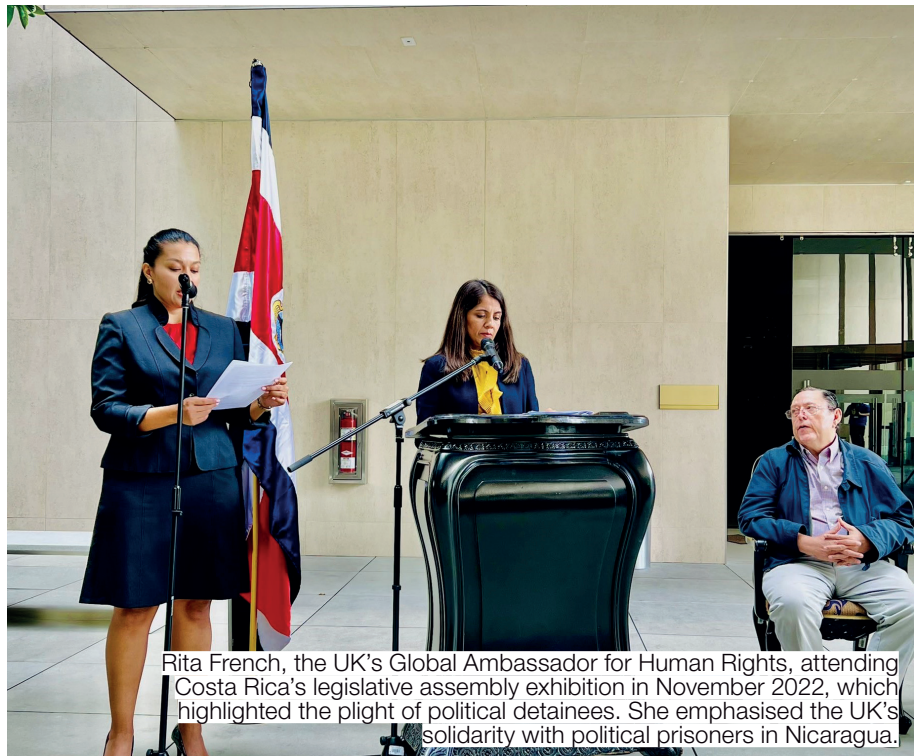
[144] <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-sanctions-target-30-corrupt-political-figures-human-rights-violators-and-perpetrators-of-conflict-related-sexual-violence-around-the-world>

system, as well as the continued violation of human rights against those identified as ‘opposition’ politicians”^[145] On 8 November, Minister for the Americas and Caribbean, David Rutley MP, publicly commented, highlighting the “deepening authoritarianism and lack of political freedom” in Nicaragua.^[146] On 15 December, Rita French delivered an intervention at the HRC in Geneva denouncing the suppression of political freedoms in Nicaragua.^[147]

On 10 August, the Prime Minister’s Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief, Fiona Bruce MP, tweeted about reports of harassment of members of the Catholic Church in Nicaragua and discussed the situation with members of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance (IRFBA).^[148] On 12 August, the UK’s permanent observer at the Organisation of American States referred to the issue in a statement at a special meeting on the situation in Nicaragua. In October, the UK co-signed a statement on Nicaragua by the IRFBA that highlighted concerns at the continued disregard of Nicaragua for its international human rights obligations.^[149]

During his visit to the Holy See on 26 August, the Minister for Human Rights, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, discussed the detention of Nicaraguan Bishop Rolando Álvarez. Bishop Álvarez, detained on 19 August, remained under house arrest for the remainder of 2022, after he continued to speak out about the need for religious and democratic freedom in Nicaragua.

The Ortega regime is increasingly authoritarian, and the UK will continue to call out those responsible for human rights abuses. In 2023, the UK, together with international partners, will continue to consider and implement a range of measures intended to increase the pressure on



Rita French, the UK’s Global Ambassador for Human Rights, attending Costa Rica’s legislative assembly exhibition in November 2022, which highlighted the plight of political detainees. She emphasised the UK’s solidarity with political prisoners in Nicaragua.

the Ortega regime to end its repression of the civilian population in Nicaragua and to encourage respect and support for democracy and the rule of law.

Occupied Palestinian Territories

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

Violations by the Gol of human rights and international humanitarian law in the context of Israel’s occupation intensified. There were also increased human rights abuses by the Palestinian Authority (PA), and by Hamas, the de facto administration in Gaza.

Tensions in Gaza continued to rise, including a three-day violent conflict between Israel and Palestinian Islamic Jihad from 5 to 7 August. According to the Israeli Security Agency, 1245 rockets and other projectiles were launched into Israel in 2022 from Gaza. The UK condemned these indiscriminate terrorist attacks.

Figures from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) show that 49 Palestinians, including 17 children, were killed and a further 360 injured, and 2000 housing units in Gaza were destroyed during the August conflict, exacerbating the long-standing humanitarian crisis further.

The UK provided £3.7m in humanitarian assistance through the UN Relief and Works Agency’s OPTs appeal to fund emergency food assistance in Gaza and to meet the worsening humanitarian need.

In Gaza, Hamas exercised repressive control over civil society and political opposition, restricted women’s rights

[145] https://www.oas.org/en/IACHR/jsForm/?File=/en/iachr/media_center/PReleases/2022/248.asp

[146] <https://twitter.com/davidrutley/status/1590372515188441088>

[147] <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k16/k16mobdju8>

[148] https://twitter.com/UK_FoRBEEnvoy/status/1557308925413818368?cxt=HHwWglCwje-N1pwrAAAA

[149] <https://www.state.gov/irfba-chair-and-vice-chairs-statement-on-nicaragua/>

and arbitrarily summoned and arrested journalists and activists. On 11 December, Hamas police raided a UN Office of the High Commission for Human Rights (OHCHR) event commemorating Human Rights Day. In November, Hamas executed five Palestinians, the first use of the death penalty since 2017. Hamas sentenced a further 27 Palestinians to death in 2022. While the UK maintained a non-contact policy with Hamas, it publicly condemned Hamas' human rights abuses, including use of the death penalty.

In the West Bank, the PA continued to breach fundamental freedoms. Palestinian legislative elections have not been held since 2006. "Lawyers for Justice" recorded 1147 detentions related to political affiliations or freedom of expression in the West Bank. The UK continued to lobby the PA to establish a national preventative mechanism against torture.

Attacks on individuals and events with perceived links to the LGBT+ community rose in the West Bank. In June, members of a Fatah-affiliated movement attacked a concert organised by an LGBT+ Palestinian artist. In July, a theatre festival involving British, Swedish and Irish nationals was attacked when a street parade was misunderstood as a "pride" event.

The UK made clear its expectations via a joint demarche that PA security forces adequately protect the LGBT+ community.

Despite verbal commitments from the PA, there was limited progress on women's rights. The Family Protection Bill, which would increase the protection of women's rights in law, was not ratified. In 2022, the Georgetown Women, Peace and Security Index ranked the OPTs worst in the world for women's legal protections. The UK's Conflict, Security and Stability Fund continued to support activities enhancing the rights of women and girls and protecting them from gender-based violence.

According to OCHA, 155 Palestinians, including 36 children, were killed by Israeli forces in the Occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, in 2022 – the highest number of fatalities since OCHA records began in 2005. Prominent journalist Shireen Abu Aqleh was killed on 11 May while wearing body armour that clearly showed her as press. Also killed in terror attacks in Israel and the West Bank in 2022 were 31 Israelis, including 25 civilians and 6 members of Israeli security forces.^[150] The Israeli Security Agency recorded 2,152 violent attacks by Palestinians in the West Bank during 2022. The UK called for investigations into the use of force by Israeli security forces which resulted in Palestinian casualties.

OCHA reported 849 incidents where acts of violence and vandalism by Israeli settlers in the Occupied Palestinian Territories resulted in Palestinian casualties and/or property damage – the highest number since OCHA records began in 2006. Two Palestinians were killed in settler-related violent incidents, including Ali Hasan Harb, whose suspected killer was released without charge in September 2022. Ministers and senior officials continued to call for accountability for settler violence in the UK's bilateral engagement with Israel, and at the UN Security Council.

Israel continued its policy of illegal settlement expansion, a breach of international humanitarian law. During 2022, Israel began construction on 2,119 settlement units, and advanced plans for 4,427 units in the West Bank, including in and around Jerusalem. The UK firmly opposes settlement expansion, which undermines the viability of a two-state solution.

Israel demolished Palestinian homes and buildings at an accelerating rate. According to OCHA, Israel demolished or seized 953 structures, including 140 donor-funded structures, displacing over 1,000 Palestinians. In May, the Israeli High Court authorised Israel to proceed

with the demolition of eight villages in Masafer Yatta, rendering 1,300 Palestinians at risk of forcible transfer. A donor-funded school was demolished in November. The UK publicly urged Israeli authorities not to proceed with evictions and demolitions, which are illegal in all but the most exceptional circumstances. The UK funds legal aid for Palestinians contesting eviction and demolition cases.

Israel continued to hold Palestinian minors under the age of 18 in detention, with 157 detained at the end of 2022. Israeli authorities continued the practice of administrative detention, with 835 prisoners held in December 2022 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 Geneva Convention.

During 2022, pressure continued on human rights defenders in the OPTs. In August, Israeli authorities raided six Palestinian civil society organisations which it designated as terrorist organisations, restricting their ability to protect human rights in the OPTs. The UK does not support Israel's decision to designate these organisations. In December, Israel breached the Geneva Convention by revoking the residency of Palestinian human rights lawyer Salah Hammouri. Israel continued to refuse new visas or visa renewals for UN OHCHR, as it has since 2020. In 2022, Israel also began to refuse visas or to renew visas for UN OCHA staff.

In 2023, the UK will continue to oppose violations and abuses of international human rights law and international humanitarian law by the Gol, the PA and Hamas. The UK will support the work of civil society actors. The UK will also continue to urge Palestinian elections to restore democratic legitimacy to the Palestinian leadership, whilst also providing programmatic support to improve the accountability of the PA. The UK will also seek to facilitate

[150] Including 2 Ukrainian Nationals residing in Israel

direct talks in support of progressing the two-state solution.

Pakistan

In 2022, the human rights situation in Pakistan continued to deteriorate in some areas. Catastrophic flooding affected 33 million people, and vulnerable sections of society – including women, children and minority groups – felt the impact most acutely. Violence and discrimination against minority communities persisted. Media freedom continued to shrink.

Pakistan took some positive steps including passing legislation to tackle custodial torture and promote women's rights.

The mistreatment and exclusion of religious minorities – including Shia Muslims, Christians and Hindus – continued in 2022. Blasphemy laws continued to be used to undermine human rights. Those accused of blasphemy were often victims of mob violence.

A Christian pastor was murdered in Peshawar in January. A Shia mosque in Peshawar was bombed in March, killing at least 62 people and injuring at least 200. An 18-year-old Hindu girl was murdered in Sindh, having resisted her attacker's attempts to forcibly convert her to Islam and marry her.

Violence and discrimination against the Ahmadiyya Muslim community escalated, including the religiously motivated murder of a community member in Rabwah in August and the arrest of an Ahmadi Muslim leader in December. Ahmadi mosques and graves were desecrated, without condemnation from the state. In October 2022, the Punjab government made it mandatory to include the oath of Khatm-e-Nabuwat (finality of the Prophethood) in the marriage certificate form.

The Archbishop of Canterbury visited Pakistan in February. During meetings with President Alvi, the then

Prime Minister Khan and the Chief of Army Staff, he discussed interfaith harmony and the need to protect freedom of religion or belief for all.

From 2021 to 2022, Pakistan fell from 145th to 157th of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders' Press Freedom Index, reflecting continued attacks against journalists, arbitrary arrests of media personnel and media blackouts. In February, the National Assembly passed the Prevention of Electronic Crimes (Amendment) Ordinance, increasing sentences for those who criticise the government, military or judiciary. This retrograde step was subsequently overruled by the Islamabad High Court, noting its misuse against journalists. In November, the Sindh government formed a commission for the protection of journalists, in line with its Journalist Protection Bill.

Violence against women and girls remained widespread. Reports of forced conversion and forced marriage continued, with women from minority communities particularly vulnerable. In December, the UK announced global human rights sanctions against Mian Abdul Haq, a Muslim cleric of the Bharchundi Sharif shrine in Ghotki, Sindh, who is responsible for the forced conversions and marriages of girls and women from religious minority communities.

There were some positive developments on gender equality. In January, Justice Ayesha Malik became Pakistan's first female Supreme Court judge. The National Assembly passed the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace (Amendment) Act, aiming to protect women against violence and discrimination. Pakistan also launched a Gender National Policy Framework, focusing on inclusive education and employment.

Same-sex relationships remained illegal. Violence against transgender people rose, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Encouragingly, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government established a fund to support the

welfare of transgender people, and the Sindh Assembly unanimously passed a law establishing an historic 0.5% quota for transgender civil servants in the Sindh government.

There were no judicial executions in 2022, and in July, the Senate passed legislation removing the death penalty for railway sabotage. However, the death penalty remains for a wide range of other offences.

There were credible allegations of torture and mistreatment, including of senior political figures. Nonetheless, in November, Pakistan passed the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention and Punishment) Act, which aims to protect people in custody from torture perpetrated by public officials. Reports of enforced disappearances continued. In October, the National Assembly passed the Criminal Laws (Amendment) Bill, which seeks to criminalise enforced disappearances.^[151]

The UK continued to raise concerns about the human rights situation with the government of Pakistan. During his visit in October, Minister for Human Rights, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, pressed Pakistan's foreign minister and minister for human rights on the need to protect minority communities, women's rights and freedom of religion or belief. In June, in the run up to the UK's International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief, the British High Commission in Islamabad hosted an event to celebrate religious diversity in Pakistan.

Alongside this advocacy, UK Government funding supported projects to promote the rights of marginalised groups, including the Inclusion, Accountability and Prevention of Modern Slavery Programme, which brought together influential community and faith leaders and representatives from minority groups to resolve local issues and change social behaviours. The programme works with government to improve protection

[151] At May 2023, the Bill is still waiting to be passed into law.

and justice services for victims of gender-based violence. At the community level, it has reached over 24 million people with information and awareness about rights and government services. The UK government-supported Hate Speech and Disinformation Programme is supporting the government of Pakistan to ensure protection of women and religious minorities against hate speech.

The UK will continue its work to protect and promote the rights of marginalised groups in Pakistan, focusing on safeguarding freedom of religion or belief, media freedom and the rights of women and girls.

Russia

The human rights situation related to the war in Ukraine is covered in the thematic chapters of this report. This section covers the domestic human rights situation in Russia and in Georgia's breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

2022 was a bleak year for human rights in Russia. Russia's increasing repression at home both enabled, and was driven by, their aggression abroad. The Kremlin's clampdown on human rights and fundamental freedoms inside Russia severely constrained the opportunities of the Russian people to express dissent or opposition to the war. Since February, the Russian government has enacted over 20 new oppressive laws, imprisoned numerous political prisoners, detained over 20,000 anti-war protestors and shuttered many civil society organisations.

Russia expanded the so-called "foreign agent" and anti- "LGBT propaganda" laws, broadened the definition of treason and introduced new laws on so-called "fake news" and on discrediting the armed forces. These measures aim to create a climate of fear and restrict the freedoms of all Russians. They effectively terminated freedom of expression, freedom of association,

freedom of the media, and the protection of minority rights in Russia.

Organisations and individuals can now be deemed a "foreign agent" if they are considered "under foreign influence" – any interaction with foreign entities can potentially be considered suspect. In 2022, 176 organisations and individuals were deemed "foreign agents". This clampdown hit civil society organisations particularly hard, since much of their funding was previously from international partners. Many ceased to operate or were forced into exile abroad.

The Russian authorities restricted freedom of expression and ensured by various means that official narratives dominated their own information space. In the early days of the war with Ukraine, new laws cracked down on domestic dissent. As a result, independent media were stifled as reporting the truth resulted in heavy fines, closure of publications and prison sentences. According to civil society organisations, over 400 criminal prosecutions and 5,000 administrative cases have been launched in connection with anti-war speech and reporting. An astonishing 210,450 websites have been blocked and more than 26 publications fined.

Updates to Russia's anti- "LGBT propaganda" laws broadened and strengthened the ban on any discussion and sharing of information about LGBT+ persons and their human rights. Social media companies are now required to report on and remove so-called propaganda; libraries and streaming sites are obliged to remove content involving LGBT+ representation. As a member of the Equal Rights Coalition, the UK worked with international partners to make clear to Russia that we all stand with LGBT+ Russians following these amendments.

For a number of years, the regime has targeted oppositionists through politically motivated criminal charges. Russian opposition politician Alexei

Navalny remained incarcerated on these grounds, and was facing further repressive measures. 2022 saw a dramatic increase in political prisoners, with the Memorial human rights group estimating the number at over 500 people.^[152] Individuals faced criminal punishment for actively opposing the war, including Vladimir Kara-Murza, an opposition politician, journalist and civil society activist, who faces up to 34 years' imprisonment for speaking out against the invasion.

Russian interference in Georgia's breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia led to a continued deterioration of the human rights situation, with illegitimate detentions and reports of torture and ethnic discrimination. Continued restrictions on freedom of movement following the closure of unofficial crossing points into South Ossetia prevented residents from accessing education and healthcare, in some cases leading to deaths. This was exacerbated by tensions caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

In March 2022, following the invasion, the UK and the other Council of Europe member states unanimously decided to expel Russia from the Council for breaching its fundamental principles. Despite its expulsion, Russia is still liable for European Convention on Human Rights violations occurring before 16 September 2022 and the Court continued to process and prioritise the many pending Russian cases. Russia continued to be bound by obligations under Council of Europe conventions that are open to non-members, although may have been taking steps to denounce these. Additionally, the Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly focused on wider work around Russian accountability including on the crime of aggression, register of damages and compensation mechanisms.

The UK also used other multilateral instruments to hold the Russian authorities to account. With

[152] Memorial was co-awarded a Nobel Peace Prize in 2022 for its 'outstanding effort to document war crimes, human right abuses and the abuse of power'.

international partners, it invoked the OSCE's Moscow Mechanism, which evidenced Russia's efforts to wage a campaign of repression against its own people. It also helped to secure a UN Special Rapporteur charged with undertaking future country visits, acting on individual cases of reported violations and concerns, raising public awareness and providing advice for technical co-operation.

The UK held a number of human rights violators to account through its sanctions regimes in 2022; in December, ahead of Human Rights Day, the UK designated four individuals responsible for human rights violations in Crimea.

In 2023, the UK will continue to shine the spotlight on human rights violations in Russia. FCDO officials will also continue to engage with human rights defenders and civil society, such as the recently appointed UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Russia.

Saudi Arabia

2022 saw some positive progress on human rights in Saudi Arabia, but also regression and stalled reform in other areas. Social and economic changes implemented under Vision 2030 brought a wave of positive developments, particularly for women. Conversely, departure from the moratorium on the death sentence for drug-related offences contributed to an increase in the overall number of executions. Restrictions on freedom of expression and political activity increased, with online and social media activity markedly curtailed.

Opportunities for women in Saudi Arabia continued to diversify and improve. Representation of women in the Saudi workforce increased and positions of senior responsibility in the Kingdom gradually opened up. Women made up 37% of the

workforce – more than double the percentage in 2016, exceeding the Vision 2030 target of 30% almost a decade early.^[153] Since 2016, 45% of new businesses were created by women and over half of university graduates in the Kingdom were women.

Much of the guardianship system was dismantled, though it was not abolished in its entirety. In October, Saudi Arabia made the historic decision to allow women to attend the Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages without a “mahram” (male guardian).^[154] A new Personal Status Law was passed in March, improving the rights of women on a range of issues, including marriage, divorce, and child custody. UK-trained female security officers were deployed in a range of frontline roles, including to provide security during Hajj.

Despite these reforms, patriarchal authority remained engrained in Saudi society and popular social attitudes were yet to reflect the extent of the reforms. Prominent women's rights defenders also remained banned from travel and under suspended sentences of imprisonment.

In contrast to the positive social reforms seen in the Kingdom over the past decade, the annual rate of executions almost doubled since 2015 – from an average of 70 executions per year from 2011 to 2015, to an average of 130 executions in each of the seven years since. The Saudi Human Rights Commission stated that there were 196 executions in Saudi Arabia in 2022. 57 of these cases were for drug-related offences. These were the first drug-related executions since 2020, thereby ending the unofficial moratorium on use of the death penalty for serious drug-related offences. The Minister for Human Rights, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, raised this as an area of

concern, as well as individual cases, with the Saudi ambassador on 24 November, with the Saudi vice-foreign minister on 13 December, and with the president of the Saudi Human Rights Commission on 21 December.

There remained a culture of self-censorship and fear in Saudi Arabia, where freedom of expression and media freedom were restricted. The World Press Freedom Index rated the Kingdom 166 out of 180 countries.^[155] The majority of the large number of political opponents who were arrested in 2017 remained in detention. Allegations from detainees of torture, forced confessions, and lack of family contact continued. There was a notable increase in the frequency and severity of punishments for activity conducted online. The Anti-Cyber Crime Law was used to charge individuals who expressed dissent online; charged offences included the “production, preparation, transmission or storage of material that harms public order, religious values, public morals and privacy via an information network”.^[156] Lord (Tariq) Ahmad raised the UK's concern about restrictions on freedom of expression, including individual cases, with the Saudi authorities throughout the year.

In 2021, Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman announced an ambitious package of legal reforms aimed at improving accountability, transparency and consistency in the Saudi judicial system.^[157] The package included a Personal Status Law, a Civil Transactions Law, and a Law of Evidence, all of which came into force. A new Penal Code for Discretionary Sanctions remained under review. The Penal Code is expected to provide more certainty in the judicial process by reducing the role of judges' discretion. There remained issues around transparency, consistency and accountability in the justice system.

[153] <https://www.thenationalnews.com/gulf-news/2023/01/12/saudi-women-now-make-up-more-than-a-third-of-kingdoms-workforce/>

[154] <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/saudi-arabia-hajj-umrah-women-no-male-guardian-required>

[155] <https://rsf.org/en/country/saudi-arabia>

[156] <https://laws.boe.gov.sa/BoeLaws/Laws/LawDetails/25df73d6-0f49-4dc5-b010-a9a700f2ec1d/2>

[157] <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-judiciary-idUSKBN2A82E6>

Access to trials for international observers, including by staff from the British Embassy in Riyadh, remained restricted. Saudi Arabia has expressed a desire to reform their legal frameworks and justice system. The Saudi justice minister visited the UK in January and met the UK Secretary of State for Justice to discuss human rights and judicial reform.^[158]

Further reforms to the ‘Kafala’ work sponsorship system came into effect. In August, reforms were extended to over three million domestic workers. Concerns remained around the now illegal but continued confiscation of workers’ passports. Employees still required their employers’ permission to leave the country. Progress was made in implementing the Saudi National Action Plan to combat human trafficking in the Kingdom,^[159] including through agreements with the International Organisation for Migration and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. Lord (Tariq) Ahmad discussed labour reforms with the President of the Saudi Human Rights Commission on 21 December.

The open practice of non-Muslim faiths remained prohibited in Saudi Arabia. However, positively, the Saudi authorities have continued to employ more inclusive language towards other faiths. The Secretary General of the Muslim World League, Dr Mohammed Al-Issa, holds ministerial rank and hosted an inter-faith conference in Riyadh in May.^[160] This event included Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Christians and Buddhists. In December, Dr Al-Issa declared that there is no Islamic text that prohibits Muslims from exchanging Christmas greetings with Christians.

The UK will continue to engage closely, collaboratively and creatively with Saudi counterparts on human rights, and will raise individual cases where it is appropriate to do so. The UK will support Saudi Arabia to help realise the ambitions of Vision 2030

and ensure that doing so benefits Saudis and non-Saudis in the Kingdom.

Somalia

After almost two years of protracted elections, the UK welcomed the peaceful transition of power to the new administration in 2022. Whilst it was disappointing that the 30% quota for female MPs was not met, the election of the parliament’s first female deputy speaker was a positive development, and the UK has continued to highlight the importance of increased representation for women in leadership roles.

In 2022, the UK continued to call in international fora for greater human rights protections in Somalia. For example, on 7 October 2022, resolution 51/38 was passed at the UN Human Rights Council, which was co-sponsored by the UK alongside Somalia. This renewed the mandate of the Independent Expert on Human Rights in Somalia, who provides critical monitoring and reporting on the human rights situation in the country.

Data from the UN’s Global Protection Cluster indicated a 200% rise in gender-based violence (GBV) cases in Somalia in 2022, including rape, forced marriage and female genital mutilation. There is a lack of infrastructure for the collection of evidence in sexual offences cases, and as a result it is often difficult for victims to seek justice. In addition, women and girls comprise 80% of those displaced by drought, increasing their vulnerability.

Tackling sexual violence and promoting justice and support for survivors remained a priority for the UK in Somalia in 2022. In November, the UK helped to set up a project to enable the UN Population Fund to respond to incidents of GBV amongst newly displaced populations. The

project aims to reach 34,000 women and girls with GBV intervention services, including clinical management of rape, psychosocial support, and emergency reproductive services.

In December, the renewed tabling in the Somali parliament of legislation to criminalise sexual offences was impeded by public backlash against the first deputy speaker’s speech on the bill. The UK coordinated the international community’s joint response through the Human Rights Working Group in Somalia, which the UK and the US co-chair. The working group brings together international partners to coordinate action on specific human rights developments in Somalia.

The UK has continued to help girls in Somalia to access education and obtain the knowledge and tools they need to succeed. This has included support to the Adolescent Girls’ Education Somalia programme, which has so far enrolled over 60,000 girls in school. The UK also funded the Global Partnership for Education, which has strengthened the Somali education system, and Education Cannot Wait, a programme which prioritised the educational needs of the most marginalised, crisis-affected children.

Somalia ranked 140 out of 180 countries on the Reporters without Borders press freedom index,^[161] and there are numerous cases of journalists being arrested and detained throughout Somalia. Unfortunately, the space for media freedom is decreasing, with counter-al-Shabaab operations being used to justify a clampdown on press freedoms under the guise of preventing al-Shabaab propaganda.

On 8 October, the Ministry of Information issued a directive prohibiting the “dissemination of extremist ideology messages”. A prominent Somali journalist who

[158] <https://twitter.com/DominicRaab/status/1486023521579020288>

[159] <https://www.ncct.gov.sa/en/national-action-plan>

[160] <https://religionnews.com/2022/05/12/world-faith-leaders-convene-in-saudi-arabia-for-first-time-in-ground-breaking-conference-to-build-bridges-with-muslim-leaders/>

[161] Reporters Without Borders 2022 Index, Index | RSF

criticised the directive was later arrested. As co-chair of the Human Rights Working Group, the UK continued to coordinate lobbying and messaging with international partners on individual cases of journalists' arrests as well as media freedom more broadly. The UK has provided media training to journalists, and worked with security actors to improve respect for media freedom. We urge the new administration to amend the 2020 Media Law to enable the media to report independently without risk of retribution.

Counter-al-Shabaab operations are a major focus for the present Somali administration, and progress has been made. The UK urges Somalia to ensure that protection of human rights is central to these efforts.

The UK's security and justice assistance to Somalia is designed to strengthen the appropriate, legitimate use of government authority. Programmatic interventions support training of the Somali Army, African Union peacekeepers and the judicial system, on the prevention of human rights violations and abuses and supporting civilians affected by conflict.

In 2022, the UK continued to champion freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) work to ensure the rights of minority religions are respected. The UK closely monitored instances of Christian converts in Somaliland being detained for their beliefs. In 2022, three Christian converts were arrested in 2022 and given sentences of three to five years. The Prime Minister's Special Envoy for FoRB raised the issue of religious freedom and due process in these cases, in a letter to the Somaliland Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 22 October.

The UK will continue to use its position as a leading partner of Somalia and penholder in the UN Security Council to work towards a safer and more secure country for all.



Development Minister, Andrew Mitchell, at Kabasa Primary Internally Displaced Persons School, a public school managed by the community. Under the UK's Adolescent Girls Education Somalia programme (funded under the Girls' Education Challenge), the school received support through a range of interventions. This included Accelerated Basic Education to help children and youth – especially adolescent girls and young women – to gain fundamental literacy, numeracy, and life skills to “catch up” and re-enter the formal school system or transition to vocational or livelihoods training.

South Sudan

In 2022, sub-national violence between armed groups led to hundreds of innocent South Sudanese civilians killed, tens of thousands displaced, appalling acts of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and the destruction of homes and livelihoods. The humanitarian crisis worsened, with 74% of the population, around 9.4 million people, in some form of humanitarian need by the end of 2022. Media freedom and civic space were limited, with journalists, critics and human rights activists threatened, harassed, illegally arrested and arbitrarily detained by South Sudanese authorities. Limited progress on implementation of the 2018 peace agreement meant key institutions to prevent and provide accountability for human rights abuses and violations were not established.

There was an escalation in sub-national conflict across South Sudan, including outbreaks of serious violence in Unity, Upper Nile, Central Equatoria, Warrap, Abyei Administrative Area and Jonglei States. Conflict between armed groups in Unity State in the first half of 2022 led to 173 civilians killed and 131 cases of rape and gang rape, including of children.^[162] The government of South Sudan (GoSS) formed a special investigative committee but did not deploy it. In response, the UK sanctioned two county commissioners who were responsible for mobilising forces and armed militias to rape, abduct and kill civilians. The Troika (UK, US, Norway) published joint statements and lobbied senior government figures to de-escalate violence and provide justice for survivors.

The UK funded three positions in South Sudan's Ceasefire &

[162] <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/attacks-against-civilians-southern-unity-state-south-sudan-february-%E2%80%93-may-2022>

Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring and Verification Mechanism and the Revitalised Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission. The UK also funded the Peacebuilding Opportunities Fund, which continued community-led peace dialogues in Greater Pibor Administrative Area and Jonglei, engaging youth and women and responding rapidly to resurgences in violence.

The UK is the largest donor to the Health Pooled Fund in South Sudan, which provided health services to 5,349 survivors of SGBV. Health facility staff who managed cases received SGBV training through the Health Pooled Fund, and the Fund worked with male anti-gender based violence (GBV) champions, radio stations, community leaders and faith leaders to create awareness and encourage survivors to seek healthcare. Through the UK's humanitarian programme, UK funded programmes reached 335,000 people, raising awareness on GBV prevention, and supporting almost 900 survivors of GBV with case management and referral services.

The South Sudanese Minister for Defence, Deputy Foreign Minister, and a civil society delegation attended the UK's Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative Conference in

November. At the conference, the GoSS endorsed the Conflict Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) Political Declaration, and made a national commitment to prevent CRSV and tackle impunity in South Sudan.

In March, the UK led the mandate renewal for the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan (CHRSS) at the UN Human Rights Council. The CHRSS is crucial for investigating, reporting, and collecting evidence of violations and abuses of human rights. In June, South Sudan accepted all three of the UK's recommendations in its Universal Periodic Review, namely, to protect civilians, journalists, civil society and humanitarian workers and uphold the freedoms of assembly and expression; engage with the CHRSS; and implement its Action Plan to prevent grave violations against children.

Several journalists and human rights defenders left South Sudan for fear of persecution in 2022. Radio stations and media houses were shut down by the National Security Services, and self-censorship was endemic. The UK took a leading role in highlighting individual cases of concern, lobbying the GoSS to improve media freedom and civic space. The UK started a project with the Female Journalists Network to

enhance media literacy skills among civil society women leaders, and improve the technical ability of female journalists in South Sudan.

The 2018 peace agreement sets out the necessary steps and institutions to deliver democratic elections, accountability, reconciliation, and justice in South Sudan. From 2021 to 2022, the UK contributed £47.1 million to the UN Mission in South Sudan, which is mandated to support implementation of the peace agreement. In August, the GoSS announced a two-year extension to the peace agreement and an accompanying roadmap with updated timelines for delivery. Despite consistent pressure from the UK, implementation of the roadmap was partial, selective, and behind schedule.

In 2023, the UK will prioritise prevention of CRSV in South Sudan by funding a three-year project to provide CRSV survivors with access to justice and support; upholding the UN arms embargo benchmarks; promoting a reduction in sub-national violence; and mainstreaming CRSV concerns in the peace agreement. The UK will press for renewal of the CHRSS mandate, and for the continued inclusion of human rights monitoring and reporting in the UN Mission in South Sudan's mandate. We will advocate for media freedom, civic space and the safety of human rights defenders. The UK will press the GoSS for progress on their roadmap in 2023, including setting up the Hybrid Court and the Commission for Truth Reconciliation and Healing.

Sri Lanka

Political instability and a severe economic crisis erupted during the first half of 2022, which contributed to some deterioration of the human rights situation in Sri Lanka. While peaceful protests took place freely on many days, the state response on others included incidences of harassment, intimidation, and violence against civil society. The post-crisis government which assumed control in the latter half of



The Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Girls' Education, Helen Grant MP, meeting girls at a school in South Sudan in February 2022.

the year acknowledged human rights concerns and took some initial steps in response.

A large popular protest movement, known as the Aragalaya, developed in the first half of the year against a government that many saw as responsible for Sri Lanka's deteriorating economy. At some stages the government used state of emergency legislation, criminal law and social media bans to limit the rights of citizens to free assembly and expression. Incidences of journalists and social media activists being assaulted or detained while reporting on protests undermined media freedom.

Security responses to protests often featured intimidation and violence against peaceful protesters. Prominent incidents included: the disproportionate use of force by the military in Mirihana in March; the use of gunfire, resulting in one death in Rambukkana in April; the storming of the Galle Face Green protest site by pro-government supporters in May; and a violent military crackdown of the Gota Go Gama protest site in July. The UK condemned such incidents as unacceptable. The Minister for Human Rights, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, raised the situation with the Sri Lankan government, including President Wickremesinghe.

The Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) was used to detain Sri Lankans for long periods, such as activists from the Inter University Students' Federation. Security forces faced accusations of serious human rights violations. The UK continued to call on the government of Sri Lanka to replace the PTA with human rights compliant legislation. The Sri Lankan government implemented limited reforms to the PTA early last year, released some long-term detainees, including lawyer Hejaaz Hizbullah, and committed to further reform.

Minority communities faced continued marginalisation by state authorities. State-supported land appropriation, so called 'land grabs', sparked concerns over their impact on demographics in the north and east and their impact on the freedom of belief of non-Buddhist denominations.

Security forces continued to disrupt Tamil commemorative events for victims of Sri Lanka's armed conflict, and arbitrarily accused Tamils of links to terrorist organisations. Activists and families of the disappeared in the north-east faced surveillance, harassment and intimidation by security forces. President Wickremesinghe committed to pursue a political solution with Tamil parties in December. Eight proscribed Tamil Diaspora organisations were also delisted, although some Muslim welfare

organisations and individuals, including poet, Ahnaf Jazeem remained listed.

In a welcome move, the government signalled its readiness to decriminalise same-sex relations and there was some effort towards addressing LGBT+ community discrimination by public officials, including the police.

The 21st amendment to the Constitution re-established a Constitutional Council to approve appointments to independent commissions, including the electoral and police commissions. This should support normal democratic process and protect the independence of such commissions.

There has been little credible progress on transitional justice, and established institutions have lost the confidence of many victims. The composition of the Office of Missing Persons benefitted from new appointments, but a continued lack of sensitivity in its approach distanced the body from affected communities. The government's approach to accountability continued to be limited to a presidential Commission of Inquiry. Cooperation with any other mechanisms has been ruled out.

In September, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) issued a comprehensive report on Sri Lanka. It highlighted the lack of accountability for past human rights abuses and outlined human rights regression and democratic erosion in recent years. Sri Lanka's own Human Rights Commission demonstrates some independence, though concerns around resources remain.

The UK, along with its partners in the Core Group on Sri Lanka, led a new resolution (51/1) at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC). This extended the mandate provided by resolution 46/1 for the OHCHR to report on Sri Lanka, and enhanced its ability to protect and preserve evidence of past human rights abuses to use in future accountability processes. The government of Sri Lanka opposed resolution 51/1. However, it



Lord (Tariq) Ahmad meeting with the former Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, G.L. Peiris, and the then Sri Lankan Justice Minister, Ali Sabry, in February 2022. During the meeting, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad affirmed the need to progress truth, justice and reconciliation mechanisms in Sri Lanka.

committed to make progress on domestic transitional justice processes and to the replacement of the PTA.

The UK will continue to advocate for improved protection of human rights in Sri Lanka. It will continue to deliver support through the 2022 to 2023, £3.7 million Conflict, Stability and Security Fund programme, focused on addressing conflict drivers, democratic fragility and instability. This support complements £3 million humanitarian support provided at the height of the economic crisis to help address immediate impacts.

Sudan

Following the October 2021 coup and the resulting political crisis, the human rights situation in Sudan deteriorated. Military and security forces continued to limit the rights of the Sudanese people to freedom of speech, expression and assembly, by using violence and arbitrary detention against protestors. It is estimated that at least 68 protestors were killed during 2022 and hundreds sustained serious injuries. Hundreds more were arbitrarily detained without charge or trial under emergency laws. The humanitarian challenges facing Sudan worsened, exacerbated by the political crisis. Approximately 18 million people experienced acute food insecurity in 2022. Inter-communal violence in historically marginalised regions also increased, with Sudan now having more than 3.7 million internally displaced persons.

Restrictions continued to be placed on media freedom. Heads of state-media institutions were replaced, radio outlets that were seen to be critical of the military were shut down and journalists were unlawfully detained. The UK supported independent media outlets by offering capacity-building courses to journalists, designed to help them report on issues related to the economy and the political transition. UK funding to the Thomson

Foundation also helped to deliver a digital learning WhatsApp course on disinformation and misinformation, which reached over 10,600 people in Sudan.

Progress on delivering accountability for human rights violations and abuses was limited. The military made commitments to investigate the ongoing violence against protestors since the coup, as well as the killing of protestors on 3 June 2019. These have not materialised. The UK was also concerned by the decision of a Sudanese court to sentence a woman to death by stoning for alleged adultery in July, and FCDO officials in Khartoum raised her case with the Sudanese authorities. Whilst the verdict was later overturned by the appeals court, the sentence highlighted how the coup had placed at risk the significant progress made by the transitional government on human rights.

To ensure continued human rights reporting, at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), the UK successfully secured agreement on a resolution in July to commission further reporting from the High Commissioner and the UN Experts on Human Rights in Sudan. The UK continued to call for accountability for human rights violations in Sudan, and welcomed the start of the trial of Ali Kushayb on 5 April at the International Criminal Court, for alleged crimes against humanity and war crimes in Darfur. During Sudan's review at the HRC Universal Periodic Review, the UK called on the military, and on Sudan's civilian-led government once restored, to fully respect and protect all human rights. The UK additionally urged Sudan to open and fully protect civic space and the right to freedom of expression.

Incidents of intercommunal violence continued to increase across Sudan, with an estimated 300,000 persons displaced due to conflict in 2022. Following violence in West Darfur in April that killed over 200 civilians and injured hundreds, the UK urged Sudanese authorities to deliver on

their obligation to protect civilians. This message was reinforced at the UN Security Council and led to a press statement on 29 April, calling for an end to the violence. The UK also delivered similar messaging at the UN Security Council in July, where it secured a discussion after violence in Blue Nile State left an estimated 97 dead and 14,000 persons displaced.

Via partners including the World Food Programme and the UN-led Sudan Humanitarian Fund, the UK provided humanitarian assistance to those most in need. The implementation of the Juba Peace Agreement and the National Plan for the Protection of Civilians continued to face severe delays and many of the root causes of the conflict remain unaddressed.

The UK continued to support the Sudanese-led movement to eradicate female genital mutilation (FGM). This included working to change social and gender norms and strengthening governmental and non-governmental systems to prevent FGM, and provide support to those affected by the practice. The UK's Sudan Peace and Reconciliation Programme also sought to support national and local transitional justice institutions and civil society towards achieving justice and accountability.

On 5 December, political parties and the military signed an initial framework agreement, making the start of a process to a fully civilian transitional government in Sudan. The UK welcomed this at the time in a public statement alongside international partners.^[163] The UK will continue to urge all Sudanese actors to engage constructively in the political process to secure civilian leadership and deliver the freedom, peace and justice called for by the Sudanese people.

The UK will also continue to call upon the authorities to deliver on their obligation to uphold and protect the human rights of the Sudanese people, and ensure that those

[163] <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/sudan-quad-and-troika-joint-statement-december-2022#:~:text=We%20urge%20all%20Sudanese%20actors,interest%20above%20narrow%20political%20ends.>

responsible for human rights violations and abuses are held to account. The UK will do this by maintaining attention on Sudan at the UN HRC, and by supporting the UN Integrated Assistance Mission in Sudan in its mandate to support institutional reforms and the promotion and protection of human rights. The UK will also continue to support the role of the International Criminal Court Prosecutor in his important work to investigate crimes in Darfur.

Syria

The appalling human rights situation in Syria remained the same throughout 2022; arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, torture, sexual violence and severe restrictions on civil and political rights were widespread. The Assad regime continue to be the main perpetrator of these violations, but abuses were also committed by proscribed terrorist organisations and other armed groups.

The March 2023 UN Commission of Inquiry (COI) report detailing the situation in Syria from 1 July to 31 December 2022 was a reminder of the scale of human rights violations and abuses in Syria. The report noted that the conflict had intensified across multiple front lines, demonstrating the continued risk of military escalation across the country. Syrians have suffered from widespread aerial and artillery bombardments. The UN estimates that over 500,000 people have died during the conflict, and the WHO estimates that 25,000 people are injured each month.

The COI report detailed how rape and other forms of sexual violence continued to occur throughout Syria, compounded by impunity for perpetrators, prevailing gender norms, discriminatory practices and stigmatisation, and noted the current legal framework fails to effectively protect survivors.

The Assad regime continued to deploy direct attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, such as hospitals and gas facilities, and indiscriminate attacks through aerial bombing and artillery shelling in Idlib governorate and western Aleppo countryside.

With the conflict continuing, the humanitarian situation continued to deteriorate. An estimated 14.6 million Syrians are in desperate need of humanitarian assistance. This is the highest level of people in need since the beginning of the crisis.

Around 13 million Syrians are forcibly displaced, more than half of the country's population. Of these, 6.8 million are refugees and asylum-seekers who have fled the country. The remaining 6.9 million people are displaced within Syria. There were cases of displaced Syrians who when returning home, were arrested and detained shortly afterwards by the Assad regime. Furthermore, thousands of families were still waiting to know the fate of their loved ones who disappeared during the conflict.

The UK has contributed over £14 million since 2012, in support of Syrian and international efforts to gather evidence and assist victims of human rights abuses and violations. This includes support to the UN International Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM). The UK signed a MoU with the IIIM on 10 March 2022. This agreement will support the UK's continuing efforts to hold the Assad regime to account for its crimes against the Syrian people. The UK is also committed to the creation of a new UN Mechanism for the Missing, and welcomed the UN Secretary General's August 2022 report,^[164] which highlighted the gendered nature of forced disappearances, and the difficulties families and victims face when seeking answers.

The UK continued to play a leading role in mobilising the international community to respond to the situation in Syria. In May 2022, the

UK pledged up to £158 million at the Brussels Conference on supporting the future of Syria and the region. This funding will target food production, assist women and girls, cross-border aid and humanitarian access. The UK remains one of the largest donors to the Syrian crisis, committing over £3.8 billion in UK aid since 2012.

The UK continued to support Syrian civil society organisations and women-led organisations to build capacity, including in support of meaningful participation in political and decision-making processes. The UK also supported survivor-centred gender-based violence prevention and response work. The Syria delegation to the UK-hosted Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Conference in November 2022 was the largest delegation in attendance, reflecting the UK's continued commitment to Syrian victims of gender-based violence.

The UK 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. These sanctions target those accused of the most serious crimes, including the use of chemical weapons, sexual violence and systematic torture of civilians. In total, the UK has 375 sanctions listings against the Assad regime, imposing asset freezes and/or travel bans on those involved in the most heinous crimes against the Syrian people.

Throughout 2022, the UK continued to sustain pressure on the Syrian regime to improve human rights, including through UK leadership on three Syria resolutions at the UN Human Rights Council. This included a resolution, which renewed the COI mandate – ensuring human rights violations, and abuses are documented with a view to collecting evidence to support future prosecutions. The UK also led a gender focused resolution in June 2022, in which it asked the COI to produce an updated report on gender issues.

[164] <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/reports/a76890-missing-people-syrian-arab-republic-report-secretary-general>



Development Minister, Andrew Mitchell, meeting with the White Helmets, with whom the UK has a longstanding partnership. The White Helmets, throughout the Syrian conflict, have saved over 115,000 lives and provided essential services to more than four million Syrians.

As the Syrian conflict enters its thirteenth year, the UK will continue its focus on accountability. The UK firmly believes that UN Security Council resolution 2254 offers a clear path out of the conflict which protects the rights of all Syrians, and the UK supports the efforts of the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen, in this regard.

Turkmenistan

The human rights situation in Turkmenistan remained of concern. Freedom of expression was severely restricted, and restrictions continued on freedom of religion or belief and on civil society groups. Prisoners were held without access to communications, and in poor conditions. There were reports of victims of enforced disappearances. Gender discrimination and restrictions on the rights of LGBT+

people persisted.

Freedom House classified Turkmenistan as a “consolidated authoritarian regime” with the lowest possible scores for democracy and political rights. Serdar Berdimuhamedov replaced his father Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov in presidential elections held in March 2022. Few international observers monitored the polls. Those who did could not visit polling stations or engage with the electorate, candidates, or officials without state oversight.^[165]

On media freedom, the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index placed Turkmenistan 177th of 180 countries. The media was under state control. Internet access remained severely restricted, and the authorities increased efforts to block virtual private networks.

The operating environment for civil society remained highly restricted. International human rights NGOs could not operate in or visit Turkmenistan. Given the fear of persecution in-country, most human rights defenders worked from abroad. There were reports that Turkmen activists in Turkey were intimidated by the Turkmen authorities, and were arrested by the Turkish authorities.^[166]

Demonstrations and protests continued not to be tolerated by the authorities and the few reported attempts were broken up quickly. Unregistered voluntary associations were prohibited. The government received two applications to register voluntary associations in 2022.^[167]

Stringent movement restrictions to prevent the spread of Covid 19 were relaxed in 2022, easing travel to and within the country. Some international flights resumed, which allowed some Turkmen citizens marooned abroad to be reunited with family and to renew passports.

[165] <https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores>

[166] <https://www.tmhelsinki.org/article/ae8c6424-42f7-4985-b34a-5280cb601cb4>
<https://www.hronikatm.com/2022/04/activist-released/>

[167] <https://rus.azathabar.com/a/31652255.html>, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolNo=CCPR%2FC%2FTKM%2FRQ%2F3&Lang=en. At June 2023, the applications remain under review.

Registration, or re-registration of religious organisations in Turkmenistan continued to be difficult, and no registration requests were made in 2022. There were no reports of imprisonment of conscientious objectors, but the possible sanction of two years' imprisonment for refusing military service remained in legislation.^[168]

There was no evidence of action towards signing the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture. Conditions in prisons were reported to be harsh. The "Prove They Are Alive!" campaign group claimed that 97 prisoners continued to be subjected to enforced disappearance in the Turkmen prison system. As part of a wider pardon scheme in December, four prisoners whose cases had been raised by international organisations were pardoned and released.^[169]

Gender equality remained a significant concern. Women continued to experience discrimination due to cultural biases. In March, there were reports of restrictions on women's clothing in public places, use of make-up and beauty services, and access to car rides as part of a purported campaign to promote so-called traditional values.^[170]

Results of the first-ever national sample survey on the health and status of women in the family were released in August.^[171] This survey, carried out in partnership with the UN Population Fund with funding from the British Embassy, is a positive step in increasing awareness on gender equality and gender based violence. The survey found that 16 percent of women had experienced at least

some form of domestic violence, including physical, psychological and sexual violence by their husbands or partners. It also found that less than 12% of victims of partner violence turned to the police or other institutions. Working with the UN Population Fund, the UK continued support to a project to promote a human-rights based and gender-transformative approach in the police and among young people.^[172]

There remained a number of violations against LGBT+ people. Turkmenistan's legislation criminalising sexual intercourse between men, with a penalty of up to two years' imprisonment, remained in force.

Allegations of forced labour in the cotton harvest persisted. In a welcome development, Turkmenistan hosted visits by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in September and November. A Council of Experts was established to "study the issue of accession to international conventions and multilateral agreements, including international documents of the ILO".^[173]

In a further positive development, a formal structure for intergovernmental discussions between the UK and Turkmenistan governments on human rights issues was established in 2022. Meetings took place in February and October.

In 2023, the UK will continue to raise human rights matters with Turkmenistan. The UK will also continue to promote human rights through its policy and project work, and will participate fully in Turkmenistan's Universal Periodic Review at the UN Human Rights Council in 2023.

Uzbekistan

The situation regarding human rights in Uzbekistan was mixed in 2022. There was positive progress in some areas, notably the eradication of systemic forced and child labour in the cotton sector, and some relaxing of government control of social media. Legislative changes saw Uzbekistan strengthen legal guarantees on gender equality and anti-discrimination. However, there were significant challenges in other areas, particularly domestic violence, the right to peaceful assembly and the operating environment for civil society. Media outlets remain controlled by the state, and freedom of expression was still highly restricted. Despite legislative progress, authorities still failed to act on high levels of domestic and gender-based violence.

At least 21 people were killed in clashes during mass unrest in Karakalpakstan in July. President Mirziyoyev swiftly rescinded the constitutional proposal that triggered the unrest, visited the region and established a commission, including representatives of independent civil society, to investigate. Following months of delays, the report was not published in 2022, and confidence in the commission's impartiality and independence was diminished. Human rights groups have found credible evidence that law enforcement officers resorted to excessive force and inappropriate use of small arms. While trials of alleged protest leaders began in December, no legal proceedings have been launched against law enforcement officials.

[168] https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2FC%2FTKM%2FRQ%2F3&Lang=en

[169] <https://provetherearealive.org/twenty-years-after-the-start-of-mass-repression-in-turkmenistan-the-international-community-must-take-strong-action-to-stop-enforced-disappearances%ef%bf%bc/>, <https://en.turkmen.news/human-rights/four-political-prisoners-released-in-turkmenistan/>

[170] <https://rus.azathabar.com/a/turkmenistan-puts-severe-restrictions-on-women-s-appearances-and-ability-to-travel/31837016.html>
<https://www.hronikatm.com/2022/04/women-morality/>
<https://rus.azathabar.com/a/31821279.html>

[171] <https://turkmenistan.un.org/en/196699-turkmenistan-releases-first-ever-national-survey-health-and-status-woman-family>

[172] <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11112413/Shocking-moment-husband-beats-wife-visiting-beauty-salon-Turkmenistan-morality-crackdown.html>

[173] https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCCPR%2FCSS%2FTKM%2F51528&Lang=en,
<https://www.mfa.gov.tm/en/news/3331>, <https://www.mfa.gov.tm/en/news/3439>

Uzbekistan successfully eradicated systemic forced and child labour in the cotton sector. Following significant reforms since 2016, an estimated two million children and half a million adults have been taken out of forced labour. In March, the Cotton Campaign coalition of NGOs, trade unions and Brand Associations ended its 13-year global boycott of Uzbek cotton.^[174] The UK's flagship 'Effective Governance for Economic Development' (EGED) programme assisted the Uzbek government in designing a new Labour Code, which was approved in October and improves working conditions, protections against forced labour, and increased equality and social provisions.

The Uzbek government took notable steps towards gender equality: strengthening legal guarantees on equal opportunity and anti-discrimination, introducing a fund to support women setting up businesses, and measures encouraging access to higher education.

High levels of domestic violence continued and legislation, reporting, investigation, and prosecution remained inadequate, despite increased public awareness and high-level political attention. In only 8.5% of cases were protection orders or administrative and criminal liability established against perpetrators. In March, the UK funded a series of events to strengthen the role of civil society in addressing gender-based violence and to promote the protection and empowerment of women.

There were many cases of human rights violations against LGBT+ people in 2022, characterised by extortion and violence. Sexual relations between men remained a criminal offence and individuals were actively pursued, reflecting broader societal stigma. Despite condemnation by the World Health Organization and UNAIDS, forced

anal examination remained widespread amongst medical professionals. In September, the government published, and subsequently withdrew following backlash, a proposed law on mandatory testing for sexually transmitted infections as part of police raids on those they suspected as being "dangerous groups".

Freedom of expression continued to be restricted. Journalists continued to face intimidation, harassment and contentious prosecution, with those reporting on sensitive topics such as corruption receiving threats from the State Security Service. In December, the government published a draft Information Code, which was condemned as contravening international freedom of expression principles. Uzbekistan's media remained dominated by state-controlled outlets. However, access to international outlets improved, and in August, authorities allowed access to social media outlets, including Twitter, which had been blocked for over a year. Coverage of Russia's war in Ukraine was suppressed for months following the invasion, but more informed reporting was later allowed.

Uzbekistan attended the UK's global conference on freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) in July. The UN Special Rapporteur on FoRB noted some progress on freedom to practise faith, with a reduction of political prisoners and removal of the ban on wearing religious attire in public. However, the Uzbek government maintained a monopoly on religious education, and the State Committee on Religious Affairs was still run by state security personnel. There was an increase in arrests on extremism charges in 2022 and, in her March report,^[175] the UN Special Rapporteur for Protecting Human Rights while Countering Terrorism criticised the wording of terrorism-related offences in domestic law, raised concern about the potential misuse of the Criminal Code, and the use of security service

'expert evidence' in trials behind closed doors.

There was minimal progress on torture – concerns about prevention and oversight remained considerable and Uzbekistan was still not a signatory to the UN Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture. Of 126 official complaints of torture by law enforcement, only four cases resulted in criminal charges.

The operating environment for civil society became more restrictive. The registration process for NGOs remained arbitrary and opaque, with increased reporting requirements for the limited number of genuinely independent NGOs operating. In June, a resolution was issued, assigning each foreign-funded project a government institution to oversee implementation. This increases government oversight and interference in NGO activity.

Uzbekistan's UN Human Rights Council (HRC) Universal Periodic Review will take place in 2023. The UK will encourage Uzbekistan to engage fully with this process and with the HRC. The UK will continue its five-year Effective Governance for Economic Development (EGED) project to strengthen civil society and support the Uzbek government to develop evidence-based policy.

Venezuela

Venezuela's human rights and humanitarian crises continue to be a major concern. Whilst there were some signs of limited progress, civic space remained significantly threatened. Challenges for civil society, restrictions on freedom of expression, arbitrary detention, particularly of journalists and opposition, allegations of torture and restrictions on the rights of LGBT+ people persisted. Venezuela continued to face a severe humanitarian emergency, with millions unable to access adequate health care and nutrition.

[174] In its report on the final harvest under its supervision (2021), the International Labour Organisation found that 99% of those involved in the harvest worked voluntarily.

[175] <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc4945add1-visit-uzbekistan-report-special-rapporteur-promotion-and>

According to the UN, high-level authorities and intelligence forces continued to follow a plan designed to repress opponents to the regime.^[176] Until December, civil society registered 245 political prisoners,^[177] including the director of the human rights NGO FundaRedes, arbitrarily detained since July 2021. In July 2022, then Minister for Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Vicky Ford, called for his immediate release. The UK further advocated for Venezuela to release all political prisoners and those arbitrarily detained.

Though it was encouraging that the number of registered attacks against human rights defenders decreased by 47% compared with 2021, authorities continued to harass and persecute them. Civil society reported harassment, intimidation and criminal prosecution as mechanisms to criminalise and

terrorise the human rights movement.^[178] Throughout 2022, the UK supported human rights defenders to strengthen their networks and build capacity on documenting and reporting of human rights abuses and violations. This included supporting a project to strengthen civil society's capacity to monitor and support improvements to electoral conditions.

Women and girls continued to face serious challenges to access sexual and reproductive health services, aggravated by the ongoing humanitarian emergency. Debates on the decriminalisation of abortion were still not included in the regime legislature's agenda. The UK has continued to prioritise women and girls in its programming. The Embassy launched the first edition of the Ambassador for a Day competition in Venezuela: the

winner was a young activist on women's rights.

LGBT+ rights did not progress in 2022. Reforms to allow same-sex marriage and the enforcement of existing legislation enabling name changes for transgender people did not occur. The UK supported and participated in the largest civil society-led Pride in Venezuela's history, and the British Embassy in Caracas championed LGBT+ rights.

Rights of indigenous people continued to deteriorate, particularly in the Arco Minero del Orinoco Region. Human rights violations were particularly aggravated by a context of illegal mining, gender and sexual violence, modern slavery and human trafficking.

A further decline of socioeconomic conditions and increased inequality contributed to the continuing mass exodus of Venezuelans – by the end of 2022, more than seven million people had left the country. While emigration rates had slowed, outflows were still larger than returns. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimated that there are at least seven million people in need, including 3.2 million children. Due to a lack of infrastructure, supplies and medical staff, 83% of services were inoperative in public hospitals.^[179] In November, the Maduro regime and the opposition resumed their talks in Mexico, and they signed a "Social Agreement" that would enable the distribution of \$3 billion in funds administered by the UN, "to support the implementation of social protection measures" in Venezuela.^[180]

In September, the UK voted in favour of the renewal of the UN's International Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela for two years, and to extend the human rights monitoring activities of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the ground.



UK Chargeé d'Affaires, Becks Buckingham, meeting with Feliciano Reyna, founder and executive president for Acción Solidaria, an HIV/AIDS service organisation created in 1995.

Since 1995, this NGO has been dedicated to making visible the social impact of HIV/AIDS in Venezuela, while developing strategies and actions to reduce its effects among the affected population. In particular, it has focused on promoting effective prevention measures to minimize the effects of this disease, as well as its ability to respond to different health areas that affect Venezuelans.

[176] <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/ffmv/report-ffmv-september2022>

[177] <https://www.elnacional.com/venezuela/foro-penal-hay-245-presos-politicos-en-venezuela/>

[178] <https://centrodefensores.org.ve/?p=495>

[179] <https://humvenezuela.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/HumVenezuela-Informe-Marzo-2022.pdf>

[180] <https://monitoreamos.com/venezuela/documento-lea-el-nuevo-acuerdo-social-suscrito-por-el-regimen-y-la-plataforma-unitaria>

In November, the International Criminal Court (ICC) Prosecutor, Karim Khan, requested the Pre-Trial Chamber to resume the investigation into alleged crimes against humanity and the failure of the national judicial system to investigate them adequately. In 2022, the ICC opened a mechanism for victims to send relevant information.

The UK will continue to promote human rights through its policy and project work, particularly through its support to civil society in Venezuela, with a focus on gender equality and LGBT+ rights. In 2023, the UK expects the operating environment for NGOs to become still more challenging. The UK will continue to call out human rights violations and abuses, and will continue to lobby for the release of those being arbitrarily detained. The UK will work with like-minded partners to support the Mexico negotiations as the only way to alleviate the deepening humanitarian crisis.

The UK will also continue to encourage all parties concerned to do everything necessary to bring about a return to democracy and to hold free, fair presidential elections in 2024, in accordance with international democratic standards.

Yemen

The human rights situation in Yemen did not improve during 2022. Despite truce-like conditions since last April, international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL) violations continued in pockets of the country. There was a significant rise in deaths and casualties caused by explosive remnants of war, which particularly affected children, due to increased freedom of movement since April.

There was also no independent accountability mechanism since the UN Security Council's decision not to renew the mandate of the UN Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen in October 2021. The Group provided

crucial human rights reporting on the conflict.^[181] The government of Yemen does have a national commission to investigate alleged violations of human rights, but this is not as comprehensive nor impartial as the UN Group.

Since the conflict began, there has been a significant increase in reports of gender-based violence (GBV). During 2022, the UK provided funding to the UN to create a more inclusive political dialogue through non-governmental channels and civil society, particularly focusing on the inclusion of marginalised groups, including women. As part of the UK's funding to UNICEF, the UK supported over two million pregnant women and new mothers with nutrition counselling and education since 2018. In Houthi-controlled areas, restrictions on women and girls increased, particularly Mahram requirements.

In 2022, there were violations against children, including child soldier recruitment, forced displacement and evictions. In April, the Houthis and the UN signed an action plan to prevent violations against children, but reports continued of child soldier recruitment in Houthi-controlled areas. The UN Panel of Experts reported 1,201 children were recruited and trained by the Houthis between July 2021 and August 2022. In June, the UN de-listed the government of Yemen armed forces for the violation of recruitment and use of children, owing to the progress in the implementation of its action plan and to the significant decrease in the number of violations. Parties that remain listed for committing grave violations are Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, pro-government militias, including Salafists and the Houthis.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Special Procedures, who are independent human rights experts with mandates to report and advise on human rights, were initiated in relation to gross human rights violations against migrants, including

torture, arbitrary detention, trafficking persons, discrimination against women and girls and sexual abuse on Yemen's border with Saudi Arabia.

The UK monitored allegations of IHL violations related to Coalition airstrikes in Yemen, although since the truce began in April 2022, there have been no Coalition airstrikes. The UK regularly raised with Saudi Arabia the importance of IHL and of conducting thorough investigations into alleged violations. The UK also 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.

Persecution of Christians, Jews and the Baha'i continued, including the imprisonment of one member of Yemen's Jewish community, Levi Marhabi, and members of the Baha'i community. The UK government monitored the treatment of Baha'is, including meeting the Baha'i community in the UK.

The UK has been one of the largest donors of humanitarian support since the war began, contributing over £1 billion. The UK provided £88 million for the 2022 to 2023 financial year. This helped feed 200,000 people every month, provided lifesaving healthcare to 800,000 women and children, and treated 85,000 severely malnourished children. Four sanctions designations were made by the UN in 2022, which the UK automatically adopted, on grounds including diversion of humanitarian assistance.

A total end to the conflict is needed to see sustainable improvement in human rights in Yemen. The UK will continue to work with the UN Special Envoy for Yemen, the international community, and the parties to the conflict to find a political solution to the conflict, to protect human rights and address the humanitarian crisis.

[181] The UK supported the Group's mandate renewal and urged the parties to investigate allegations and take action to promote and protect human rights.

Zimbabwe

There were some positive steps in Zimbabwe in 2022, such as the criminalisation of child marriage and approval of the Independent Complaints Commission Act. However, the overall human rights situation did not improve. Human rights monitoring group Zimbabwe Peace Project recorded 2,857 human rights violations, up 19% from 2021, and broadly consistent with levels seen since 2018, while pressure on civic space increased. There was no significant movement in Zimbabwe's medium-term trajectory on a range of international human rights indices.

In 2022, Zimbabwe held its first by-elections since the introduction of COVID-19 regulations in 2020. Although by-elections were largely peaceful, they were frequently preceded by peaks in violence and restrictions on freedom of assembly. Between 15 and 17 October 2022, for example, at least five separate incidents of inter-party violence were recorded, such as the intimidation, harassment and assault of opposition Citizens' Coalition for Change activists, including Jasmine Toffa MP. Ahead of by-elections in March, which were observed by the British Embassy, the police prohibited two of twelve planned Citizens' Coalition for Change rallies, despite the party having obtained police clearances.

Preparations for general elections in 2023 also progressed through voter registration drives, a census, and a subsequent boundary delimitation report. The UK continued to advocate for progress on the principal recommendations of the 2018 electoral observation missions, including independence of the Electoral Commission, publication of an accurate voters' roll, and equal access to state-owned media. Constraints around access to basic documentation continued to prevent some Zimbabweans from participating in elections and benefiting from essential services.

The government continued to target its critics through lengthy pre-trial detention, with 52 individuals held without bail for 120 days or more.

Following the death of Citizens' Coalition for Change activist, Moreblessing Ali, in June 2022, 17 opposition members were detained for their alleged participation in protests. In November, after more than five months in prison, 16 were released on bail, while MP Job Sikhala's detention was ongoing at the end of December. On 23 November, 34 members of the opposition Zimbabwe Transformative Party were convicted for holding an unauthorised protest, after already spending 139 days in detention.

The Independent Complaints Commission Act was approved in October, but the institution's Commissioners were still to be appointed at the end of 2022. There was no other meaningful progress on the implementation of the Motlanthe Commission of Inquiry recommendations in response to post-election violence in 2018.

Civic space remained under pressure. The Private Voluntary Organisations Amendment Bill, which will extend state control over the operations of civil society organisations, progressed through parliament. In December, the government tabled its Criminal Law Code Amendment Bill, which includes clauses that will criminalise acts deemed to undermine the sovereignty and dignity of Zimbabwe, potentially including engagement with foreign governments.

The Media Institute of Southern Africa reported 137 media freedom violations, including 33 incidents of journalists being attacked, arrested or harassed. This represented a slight increase on the annual average of 129 violations recorded over the last five years. In March, the Media Institute of Southern Africa reported instances of authorities restricting internet access around by-elections.

In a welcome development, the 2022 Marriages Act criminalised marriage before the age of 18, and improved women's access to property rights. However, reports suggested that early pregnancy rates continued to increase, while female politicians were subjected to inter-and intra-

party violence. The UK piloted innovative approaches to tackling gender-based violence through the Stopping Abuse and Female Exploitation programme, including supporting 5,498 women at GBV response facilities.

In July, Zimbabwe established a National Coordination Committee to support implementation of its National Disability Policy. However, by the end of 2022, the committee was yet to meet and passage of the Disability Bill into law was expected to slip to 2024.

In June, Zimbabwe reached the milestone of removing 150,000 landmines since demining operations began, supported by over £12.6 million in UK funding since 2016.

Zimbabwe's health and education systems continued to struggle with poor funding, lack of basic supplies, and the emigration of frontline workers. In an effort to stabilise essential services, the government passed a new Health Services Bill, which could see health workers imprisoned for undertaking industrial action. The UK continued to support healthcare, including by procuring essential medicines and prepositioning disease outbreak responses. The UK also shared information on emigrant rights.

Schools reopened in January for the first time in two years due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Primary education pass rates remained low but increased from 41.7% in 2021 to 42.6% in 2022. The UK provided school improvement grants to support 4,283 of Zimbabwe's poorest schools and ensure that the most marginalised girls were able to remain in secondary education.

In 2023, the UK will encourage the Zimbabwean government to allow space for political opposition and for civil society organisations to operate in the lead-up to fair, inclusive and credible elections. The UK will sustain its support to human rights defenders and continue to provide development assistance to help Zimbabwe's most vulnerable people access basic services and improve their livelihoods.

