

Human Rights & Democracy



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office



The 2016 Foreign &
Commonwealth Office Report



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The 2016 Foreign & Commonwealth Office Report

Presented to Parliament
by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
by Command of Her Majesty

July 2017



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Print ISBN 9781474141130

Web ISBN 9781474141147

ID P002863281 07/17

Printed on paper containing 75% recycled fibre content minimum

Printed in the UK by the Williams Lea Group on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Designed in-house by the FCO Communication Directorate

Cover image: Displaced men, women and children after fleeing ISIL-controlled areas in rural Raqqa to Ain Issa, the main staging point for displaced families, some 50 Km north of Raqqa city (November 2016).

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Preface by Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson

Just over two centuries ago, the first holder of the office of British Foreign Secretary persuaded the House of Commons to strike a blow against unconscionable suffering by abolishing the slave trade.

Charles James Fox was desperately ill when he rose to address the House on 10 June 1806 – indeed he had only three months to live – yet after his passionate advocacy had won the day, he declared that he could “retire from public life with comfort and the conscious satisfaction that I had done my duty”.

Thanks to Fox’s skills as a parliamentary gladiator – and the Herculean efforts of, among others, William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson – Britain became the first country to abolish the slave trade the following year, 1807, whereupon the Royal Navy devoted its strength to stamping out a vile traffic in human beings.

When I reflect on the efforts of the modern Foreign Office to promote human rights around the world, I am conscious of the example we must strive to follow. Promoting the values that Britain holds dear is not an optional extra, still less a vainglorious addition to our diplomacy; it is in keeping with centuries of tradition. This is part of who we are.

Our report on the state of human rights in 2016 will, of necessity, make for bleakly realistic reading. In these pages, you will find our assessment of the troubling situations in our priority countries.

But there are also bright spots. You will learn about the groundbreaking conference we held in the Foreign Office last October on how freedom of religion and belief can aid the struggle against violent extremism.

You will find examples of how we are helping millions of girls to attend school; how our diplomats are combating human trafficking, curbing child marriage and campaigning against female genital

mutilation. You will read about Britain’s efforts to protect the rights of LGBT&T people and our actions to cope with the migration and refugee crises.

You will also discover how the Foreign Office is continuing Fox’s work by tackling the cruel phenomenon of modern slavery, a tragedy that blights the lives of people from rich and poor countries alike.

In February, I was delighted to appoint Joanna Roper as the FCO’s Special Envoy for Gender Equality, helping us to place gender equality at the heart of all we do.

In surveying these fields of activity, I am convinced they are right in and of themselves. But Fox and the Abolitionists can teach us another lesson. By straining every nerve and sinew to eradicate the slave trade, Britain did not damage its prosperity; on the contrary, the era when our fleets pursued the traffickers on every ocean was also the time of the industrial revolution.

Human rights are not inimical to development and prosperity; the opposite is true. Freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom to practice whatever religion you want and live your life as you please, provided you do no harm, are the essential features of a dynamic and open society, filled with the spirit of innovation and enterprise that triggers economic growth.

So promoting human rights is an essential aim of the foreign policy of a Global Britain. To do otherwise would be unthinkable for anyone inspired by the example of Charles James Fox.

The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP

Foreign Secretary

Foreword by Minister for Human Rights Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon



It was an honour to be appointed last month as Foreign and Commonwealth Minister with responsibility for Human Rights and Modern Slavery, and as the Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict. I pay tribute to my predecessor, the Rt Hon Baroness Anelay of St Johns, for her dedicated work on these issues.

Human rights are more than just principles enshrined in international law. They are the bedrock of successful and progressive societies. Evidence shows that countries where human rights are respected tend to be more prosperous, democratic and stable. Corruption is less likely to take root, and extremism is less likely to find fertile ground.

That is why safeguarding, promoting and defending human rights, including freedom of religion or belief, is a key and integral part of the work of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. British diplomats put human rights at the heart of everything they do, working in partnership with foreign governments and civil society, particularly in our 30 Human Rights Priority Countries. We also fund frontline work through programme funds, such as our Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy and the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund.

We take great pride in being a consistent champion of human rights at multilateral fora, including the UN and the Commonwealth. The UK was re-elected last October to

serve a further three-year term on the UN Human Rights Council, and remains as committed as ever to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and meeting the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals. The UK was proud to play an instrumental role in securing a mandate last year for the UN's first Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

In the Commonwealth, we work closely with our partners to promote the shared values of human rights, democracy and rule of law enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter. Next April's Commonwealth Summit – which I am delighted will be hosted in London – offers an opportunity to celebrate our strengths and deliver a re-energised Commonwealth that champions democratic values on the global stage.

Our Annual Human Rights Report reviews developments over the last twelve months. This year it paints a stark picture of continued human rights violations and abuses in Syria, Iraq, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and many other countries across every continent.

However, the picture is not unremittingly bleak, and the UK has been instrumental in promoting and protecting human rights in many areas around the world. For example, a landmark Human Rights Council Resolution at the UN, co-tabled and driven forward by the UK, successfully encouraged the Sri Lankan Government to continue making progress on promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights, in line with its commitments.

In Bahrain, the Ministry of Interior committed to address concerns about prison conditions at Jau Rehabilitation and Reformation Centre, following an inspection report by the Prisoners and Detainees Rights Commission – a body established and supported through UK technical assistance.

We have seen a significant breakthrough for LGB&T rights in Belize and the Seychelles, where consensual same sex relations have recently been decriminalised. In Belize, it was UK-based legal organisations which provided support during the three-year court case which resulted in decriminalisation. In the Seychelles, the UK helped to bring about this ruling through a combination of diplomatic lobbying (both locally and in international fora) and low-cost supportive programme work.

All these examples prove that a sustained and determined approach to safeguarding, protecting and promoting human rights can bring about real change. Looking ahead, I would like to highlight three areas that the UK Government will prioritise in the coming months.

The first is modern slavery, a human rights violation that our Prime Minister has pledged to eradicate. Our Modern Slavery Act 2015 was the first formal step. I am pleased to serve on the Prime Minister's Implementation Taskforce, established last year to ensure that all of Government, business and civil society plays its part in eradicating this evil crime. The UK is committed to ending this scourge by 2030 – a goal agreed by all 193 UN Member States at the Sustainable Development Summit in 2015. Our diplomatic network plays a crucial role in building international consensus and translating political will into practical action.

Secondly, we are strengthening our efforts to prevent and respond to sexual violence. As the Prime Minister's Special Representative for Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, this will be a personal priority. I intend to build upon the good work already begun to increase education and understanding of how to eradicate the stigma that unfairly afflicts survivors of sexual violence. 2016 saw the launch of that campaign, through which we held a series of workshops in conflict-affected countries and hosted a conference that identified key recommendations to help tackle stigma. I shall present and garner support for our new Principles for Global Action at the UN General Assembly in September.

The third area that I'd like to expand on is our critical work on freedom of religion or belief. As the Prime Minister said at a 10 Downing Street reception for faith leaders on 28 February, "We must reaffirm our determination to stand up for the freedom of people of all religions to practice their beliefs in peace and safety". It will be a key priority to drive forward our international efforts to build more cohesive, tolerant and peaceful societies, where people of all faiths and none are equal citizens of the country in which they live. This also involves the crucial work of building international consensus and collaboration to tackle extremism and radicalisation online. In October, the FCO convened faith leaders, academics, civil society and diplomats for a groundbreaking conference exploring how tolerant and inclusive societies with a strong respect for human rights are more immune to the disease of violent extremism, and the ideological basis of non-violent extremism. Building on this foundation, I will take a fresh look at how the UK can lead the charge in tackling discrimination and persecution of religious communities around the world.

This Annual Report shows the progress we've made, but also the extensive and urgent work that remains to be done. I look forward to leading a dedicated team to ensure the UK remains a committed and consistent advocate for the promotion and protection of universal human rights.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon

Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict and Minister of State for the Commonwealth and the UN at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office

CHAPTER I: Democratic Values and Rule of Law

Introduction

2016 was another year of mixed results for democracy and the rule of law. Some countries took significant steps forward, but others went into reverse. This reminds us that progress towards wider and deeper respect for democratic values and the rule of law is neither linear nor inevitable. It has to be worked for. Achievements hard won by earlier generations, sometimes over decades, can be lost if subsequent generations do not safeguard that progress. Democracy and the rule of law are still denied to many. Some have never enjoyed these rights. Others have seen them taken away. Others, more fortunately, are living in states and societies where the progress is positive.

The United Kingdom pursues a foreign policy based on deep respect for universal human rights and the rule of law. Our history informs our present and future behaviour. Equal political participation for all men and women took centuries to achieve in the UK; we urge all countries to find ways to allow their citizens to take part in political processes without discrimination. Freedom of Religion or Belief was fought for in the UK over generations; we continue to press for those freedoms to be respected around the world. The UK was a leading force in the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade; and in 2016 the Prime Minister declared our intention to be a leading force in the eradication of modern slavery. Our tradition as a progressive, values-conscious society continues.

Democracy is a multifaceted concept. It includes, but is not limited to, the concept of a system of government and public administration of the people for the people. This cannot be achieved without full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the wide range of international conventions which have been broadly adopted and ratified by the international community in the decades since the Second World War.

The UK will continue to work to promote those rights and benefits where they are currently denied, and as we do so we remind ourselves that the hard-won gains of past decades can never be taken for granted, anywhere.

Democracy

Democracy continued to come under threat in 2016. At the extreme, three countries – **The Gambia**, the **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)** and **Burundi** - saw attempts to delay or avoid democratic electoral processes altogether. Elsewhere, governments increasingly used spurious excuses to justify more authoritarian measures to restrict civil society space. The UK considers such moves to be counter-productive: democracy not only allows individuals to exercise their rights

as citizens but is also the best method of government for promoting both prosperity and security. Societies thrive and prosper when innovation and new ideas are encouraged. Societies in which people are allowed to express their dissent without fear are less likely to see people resorting to take non-democratic means to have their voice heard.

The UK wants to work with others to continue to promote the benefits of democracy – for states and citizens. In December 2016, the UK became the 30th member of the Governing Council of the Community of Democracies, a group of like-minded states which exists to promote democracy and strengthen democratic institutions. We intend to play an active role in the Community of Democracies, including in its working group on protecting civil society. We will also continue to support the work of the Freedom Online Coalition to promote respect for freedom of expression in the virtual world.

Elections

The UK continues to emphasise the importance of free and fair elections as fundamental elements of a functioning democracy.

The observation of elections plays an important part in that work; it gives more credibility to elections in those countries which seek to improve their democratic procedures and sends a powerful message to those who try to abuse the system. Credible observation can help to build voter confidence, reduce fraud and prevent violence and intimidation, supporting the smooth transfer of power and increasing participation in democratic processes. The Commonwealth continued to demonstrate its strength in this area, running observer missions to several countries in 2016. In 2016, the UK provided election observers to observation missions in several countries, including **Russia, Ghana, Serbia** and **Kazakhstan**.

Ensuring that elections are free and fair and that citizens feel empowered and safe to participate is important in all democracies, even those which are long-established. It is particularly important in countries in democratic transition and in fragile states, or where democracy is under threat. 2016 saw successful elections in a number of countries, including **Seychelles** and **Ghana**.

As far as the **Overseas Territories**^[1] are concerned, in December, the **Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI)** elected its first ever female Premier. A commonwealth Parliamentary Association mission observed the election. The mission reported that although the process was broadly well managed, it could be simplified; and that TCI should review its Elections Ordinance. Successful elections were also held in **Ascension Island, Tristan da Cunha** and the **Pitcairn Islands**. Where practicable, the UK Government encourages territories to

[1] Anguilla; Bermuda, Cayman Islands; the Falkland Islands; Gibraltar; Montserrat; Pitcairn, Henderson, Ducie and Oeno Islands (commonly known as the Pitcairn Islands); St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha; the Turks and Caicos Islands; and the British Virgin Islands.

receive independent observers, and stands ready to support any territories that require support.

Westminster Foundation for Democracy

The Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) is an executive Non-Departmental Public Body funded mainly by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Department for International Development (DFID). WFD allows the UK to share its democratic experience and expertise - its work is complementary to the government's diplomatic and development efforts in advancing human rights.

WFD supports the UK's objectives of increasing security and prosperity by supporting democratic systems around the world. It works in partnership with UK political parties and with the Parliaments and Assemblies in Westminster, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to strengthen the effectiveness and accountability of their counterparts in more than 40 countries. It also provides electoral assistance to ensure fair and transparent elections.

In 2016, WFD's work supported actions on human rights in a range of countries. In **Georgia**, WFD's research on parliamentary human rights committees helped a reform of rules of procedure in the Georgian Parliament. This resulted in legislators making substantial recommendations to government on the national 'Human Rights Action Plan' for the first time.

WFD deployed its human rights assessment tool, developed in partnership with the University of Oxford, to help diagnose the state of parliamentary democracy and assess development needs in **Macedonia, Morocco, Serbia, Tunisia, Uganda** and **Ukraine**.

In **Indonesia**, WFD provided training and assistance to parliamentary committee clerks, resulting in provisions for the protection of human rights being added to the draft 'Bill on the Amendment of Counter-terrorism Law'. In **Venezuela**, WFD completed the first year of a two year Magna Carta Fund project to help strengthen the National Assembly's procedures.

Over the last 12 months, WFD has mainstreamed the political participation and representation of women and youth throughout its country programmes. In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, WFD helped to encourage more women to stand as candidates in local elections. In **Kyrgyzstan**, WFD helped develop a women's caucus. It also supported the Coalition of Women MPs from Arab Countries in drafting the Arab League 'Convention to tackle violence against women' and in campaigning to reform sexual violence laws in **Lebanon, Jordan** and **Tunisia**.

From a 'Youth Academy' for Africa to the International Young Democrat Union, WFD continued to enable UK political parties to develop initiatives to encourage greater representation of young people in the political process.

In 2017, WFD is committed to improving representation of marginalised groups in democracies across Africa while it continues to support women's empowerment in the Western Balkans and the Middle East. In **Nigeria, Sierra Leone** and **Uganda**, WFD will activate partnerships with local civil society

organisations to increase youth participation in the political debate.

Freedom of Expression

The rights of individuals to express opinions, peacefully challenge authority and take part in public policy-making and administration are essential to a free and open society. Similarly governments should embrace the concept of citizens working together and creating movements and organisations to share values and promote views, rather than seeing this as a threat. Freedom of expression is essential to exercising human rights; when it is under threat, or restricted, human rights in general are challenged or diminished.

Successful societies encourage innovation and the development of new ideas. Societies which deny freedom of expression also deny themselves the opportunity to benefit from new approaches and fail to make the most of the talents of their citizens. The role of a functioning independent media is more important than ever, challenging "fake news", and providing accurate, independent and verifiable information.

Freedom House's Freedom of the Press report for 2016 estimated that only 13% of the world's population lives in a country with a free press – defined as a country where political reporting is robust, where journalists are able to operate safely and where state intrusion into media affairs is minimal and does not generate onerous legal or economic pressures. At the same time, the role of journalists remains challenging and dangerous.

Reporters Without Borders recorded the deaths of 78 journalists, citizen journalists or assistants in 2016. Impunity for crimes against journalists remains a significant problem in many countries. Governments have used a number of pretexts for restricting media freedom, including security and the need to protect against defamation.

In **Burma**, the 2013 Telecommunications Act has been used increasingly to imprison journalists for defamation.

Malaysia, Vietnam and **Thailand** continued to take action to restrict political expression critical of the government. In **Malaysia** a number of opposition politicians, human rights activists, journalists and social media users were charged under existing laws, including the Sedition Act; some were detained without trial. In **Vietnam** a growing number of bloggers and activists were imprisoned for peacefully stating their views on matters of legitimate public interest. Since the military government took power in **Thailand**, sedition and lèse-majesté laws have been used to restrict the media, free speech and the right to protest, and harsh sentences have been applied in some instances.

Journalists and civil society activists were vulnerable to intimidation and attack in many countries affected by conflict, including **Syria, Yemen** and **Libya**: and general restrictions on democracy and freedom of expression and association were imposed in **Egypt** and **Turkey**. In its latest Global Impunity Index, published in October 2016, the Committee to Protect Journalists ranked **Somalia** as "the worst place in the world

to be a journalist” as a result of the high number of journalists killed without subsequent convictions.

The UK Government strongly believes that the rights people enjoy offline also need to be protected online. We have participated actively in the Freedom Online Coalition, an inter-governmental grouping which seeks to promote and protect internet freedom and to work with business and civil society to address issues relating to online freedom of expression. In 2016, there were deliberate internet shutdowns in more than 50 countries including **Ethiopia, India** and **Uganda**. The Brookings Institute estimated the economic impact of such shutdowns to be around £2 billion. To counter this, the FCO supported the #Keepitopen project, led by Access Now. The project reports on and challenges attempts by governments to disrupt or shut down the internet. In 2016 we also funded civil society organisations to implement work promoting freedom of expression in **Burma, Central Asia** and **East Africa**.



Sirikan Charoensiri, known as June, is a Thai human rights defender and lawyer who faces several charges including sedition, for defending basic legal rights. Her case will be heard in a military court and she could face up to 15 years in jail. The British Embassy in Thailand works hard to support those who are defending human rights. The British government is a long term supporter of Thai Lawyers for Human Rights, funding projects to offer legal assistance and develop their network beyond Bangkok. These projects help to better report and document cases of human rights abuses. The British Embassy has hosted several civil society events, helping members to meet and network, developing wider support. Beyond this the British Government continues to raise June’s case and have also made statements at the UN about the need to increase the protection of human rights defenders. The embassy continues to monitor June’s case closely, providing visible and vocal support.

Human Rights Defenders

Human Rights Defenders are at the forefront of work to promote and protect human rights and democracy, often

at great personal risk to themselves. In many places they are persecuted, imprisoned, attacked or even killed because of their work. Around half of the killings of human rights defenders relate to the issue of environmental protection and land rights, often in connection with business activities and large infrastructure projects or extractive industries. Other disturbing trends include the targeting of the family members of human rights defenders as a tactic of intimidation. Laws restricting civil society space are used in many countries to limit the ability of human rights defenders to operate or to receive external assistance in the form of funding or capacity building.

The FCO continues to work with and support a wide range of organisations committed to helping human rights defenders either through emergency assistance or by building their capacity to protect themselves. In 2016 we worked with the University of York’s Centre for Applied Human Rights in the development of its Human Rights Defenders Hub, which aims to bring practitioners and human rights defenders together to share experience and best practice and develop practical tools for defenders. We also supported the Centre’s Protective Fellowship Scheme, which helps defenders to develop new skills. Working together with the Hub, we organised a visit of human rights defenders to meet FCO country desk officers, an enriching experience which we will repeat.

Using the Magna Carta Fund we supported projects to support the protection of human rights defenders in a number of countries, including **Afghanistan** and **Colombia**.

Restriction of Civil Society space

The restriction of civil society space was an increasing problem in 2016, limiting civil society’s ability to operate and restricting freedom of expression and democracy. Measures included clamping down on media freedom, or introducing regulations to prevent NGOs from operating, for example by limiting their ability to receive funding.

The organisation CIVICUS assesses civil society space as being “closed” in a number of countries, including **Libya, Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia** and **Vietnam**, and “repressed” in many more, including **Russia, China, Turkey** and **Thailand**.

Restrictions often take the form of requirements for organisations to be officially approved and registered or limitations on access to funding. In **Eritrea**, the UN and bilateral aid agencies are prevented by law from funding civil society organisations, and in **Jordan** and **Egypt** advance approval is needed from government bodies in order to receive foreign finance.

During 2016, **Russia** continued to apply the Foreign Agents Law and the Law on Undesirable Organisations, as a result of which 42 domestic NGOs were labelled as “foreign agents” and three international organisations were classed as “undesirable”. The British Embassy intervened when an attempt was made to close the Moscow office of Amnesty International. The definition of activities under the “foreign agents” law was broadened and for the first time the regulation was used to close down an NGO and bring criminal charges.



The FCO welcomes Chevening Scholars from 28 countries to an event considering multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, during Week of Women UK

More positively, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) in 2016 revised its Recommendation 8 (International Standards on Combating Money Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism and Proliferation) and interpretative note covering the abuse of non-profit organisations for money laundering and terrorism. This Recommendation had been misused in many countries to restrict the ability of legitimate civil society organisations to operate. The updated guidance, which the UK supported, takes a more risk-based and proportionate approach, recognising that the risk of abuse for criminal or terrorist purposes applies only to a minority of civil society organisations.

Non-Discrimination

Rights of Women and Girls

In 2016, the UK's gender priorities were the elimination of violence against women and girls, including Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and Child and Early Forced Marriage (CEFM), tackling discriminatory laws and practices, and promoting gender equality (including political and economic empowerment).

At the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in March, the UK advocated an ambitious agenda and worked hard with other UN Member States to secure an agreed conclusions document which reflected all UN adopted Resolutions and pressed for an end to all forms of violence against women and girls, including FGM and CEFM.

Despite the progress that was achieved at the UN level and elsewhere in 2016, significant challenges remained. These included: ending the many different and pervasive forms of violence against women; securing sexual health and reproductive rights; achieving gender equality in the workplace and in political and public life; and women's economic empowerment and equal access to education. But it remained the case that the human rights of women and girls, including adequate healthcare and access to justice, were often restricted at the provincial and community levels even in countries where good domestic protections exist on paper.

Throughout 2016, the UK continued to be a world leader in advancing work on the UN's Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. In September, we hosted the annual UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial with delegates from 80 countries. Our 2016 WPS priorities reflect the importance of non-discrimination in conflict resolution and security work. From November 2016 all UK troops deployed on overseas missions have received WPS training. WPS training will also be included in all training packages delivered overseas. We also prioritised working with **Iraq** and **Afghanistan** in implementing their National Action Plans and promoted women's participation in peace/post-conflict processes in **Syria**, **Yemen**, **South Sudan** and **Somalia**. We also prioritised working for women's participation at relevant international events.

In 2016, the Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy allocated over £1.5 million to 16 women's rights projects, and over £3 million was allocated to a further

19 women's rights projects from the FCO's Rules-Based International System fund. These included projects focused on encouraging political leadership, legislative reforms and regional cooperation in order to produce a safer environment for women and girls in ten **North African and Middle Eastern** countries. We provided funding for a number of women's rights projects in **India**, including one aimed at tackling violence and discrimination against Dalit women, and one on improving women's access to justice. In **Fiji** the UK worked closely with Fijian NGOs to enhance the participation of young women and girls in policy making and human rights advocacy.

The UK hosted visits by several overseas delegations, including from **China** and **India**, enabling us to share experience from our domestic response to the problem of Violence Against Women and Girls. The FCO's "Week of Women 2016", held in association with the Women of the Future Programme and Wilton Park, was aimed at supporting, connecting and inspiring the next generation of female leaders from around the world bringing together more than 300 women from 28 countries. The "Week" included an event hosted at the FCO which looked at the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that hold women back. Around 70 Chevening Scholars – mainly women – attended the event and a subsequent networking lunch with FCO officials working on human rights policy.

In 2016, the decision was taken to create the role of the Special Envoy for Gender Equality; a senior UK diplomat (Joanna Roper) was appointed to the position. In 2017 she will lead the FCO's efforts to deliver on the Foreign Secretary's commitment to a foreign policy that produces tangible results for women and girls' equality.

At the UK–**Overseas Territories** Joint Ministerial Council in December 2015, UK and Overseas Territories Governments reaffirmed their commitment to work together to extend outstanding core UN human rights conventions to those territories where these had not been extended already. The extension of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), to the populated Overseas Territories was one of the recommendations of the CEDAW Committee during its examination of the UK's seventh periodic report on CEDAW. In 2016, the UK marked the 30th anniversary of its ratification of CEDAW, by extending ratification to **Anguilla** and **Cayman Islands**, the first territorial extensions since 1986. This was followed by requests for extension of CEDAW ratification by the **Pitcairn Islands** and by **St Helena, Tristan da Cunha** and **Ascension Island**.



The then FCO Minister for Human Rights, Baroness Anelay chaired a panel discussion on IDAHOBIT (International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia) 17 May with experts from the Human Dignity Trust and Kaleidoscope Trust to consider the ongoing criminalisation in 36 countries across the Commonwealth.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Rights

The authorities in many countries actively persecute LGBT people. Consensual same-sex relations remain criminalised in 75 jurisdictions, including the majority of Commonwealth countries. Even in countries where consensual same-sex relations are legal, many people still face violence and discrimination because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. This results from a number of factors, including: state-sanctioned homophobia, biphobia or transphobia; a lack of adequate legal protection; poor enforcement of existing protections which can lead to impunity for those committing acts of violence or discrimination; harmful social norms; stigmatisation of LGBT people. In many countries, LGBT people are subject to hate crime.

The UK is committed to protecting and promoting the rights of LGBT people and to supporting the legal, cultural and social change required to make equality a reality for LGBT people the world over.

In 2016, both the **Seychelles** and **Nauru** decriminalised consensual same-sex relations, partly in response to international pressure. A successful legal challenge led to decriminalisation in **Belize**. We continue to urge all countries to decriminalise consensual same-sex relations and put in place legislation that protects LGBT people from discrimination - including in the workplace and in the provision of goods and services.

Through our Embassies and High Commissions we monitor and raise human rights concerns around the world. LGBT equality remains a sensitive subject for many countries and much of this diplomatic lobbying is carried out behind closed doors and is not reported on.

In 2016, we continued to support the work of the UN Free and Equal Campaign which raises awareness of homophobic,

biphobic and transphobic discrimination and violence, and promotes tolerance, equality and greater respect for the rights of LGBT people everywhere. The FCO also worked to create space at the international level for LGBT equality to be discussed, debated and celebrated. In June, FCO staff in **Moscow, Ekaterinburg** and **St Petersburg** set up a number of media interviews during Sir Ian McKellen's visit to Russia as a 'Shakespeare in Film' Ambassador. He was able to share his personal story and set out his strong advocacy of LGBT equality.

In November, the Embassy in Bangkok hosted an event on tackling violence and discrimination to tie in with the International Lesbian and Gay Association conference, drawing attention to the UK's efforts to promote and protect LGBT rights, and supporting the role of Human Rights Defenders. Participation in Pride celebrations provided the opportunity for a large number of British diplomats to signal strong solidarity with LGBT communities worldwide.

In 2016, we worked with partner countries and through international organisations, including the UN, EU, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe and the Commonwealth, to promote inclusion and to celebrate diversity. In June, the UK strongly supported the establishment by the UN Human Rights Council of the first ever UN Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. We subsequently used our global diplomatic network and influence to help achieve the necessary support to defend his mandate when it came under attack at the UN General Assembly. We remain committed to supporting Mr Vitit Muntarbhorn in his important work.

The UK is a founder member of the new Equal Rights Coalition, which brings together more than 30 countries which are committed to working together to promote LGBT equality globally. The Coalition was launched at the Global LGBTI Human Rights Conference in Montevideo in July 2016.

The UK Government continues to offer a consular marriage service to same-sex couples (one of whom must be a British national) in 26 countries. By offering these services we have drawn attention to the lack of local legislation for same-sex marriages and prompted wider discussion of LGBT issues.

Between 2016 and 2018 the FCO's Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy will provide over £1.5 million funding to projects promoting and protecting the rights of LGBT people in projects working in over 15 countries.

The UK Government is committed to working with Governments of **Overseas Territories** to tackle all forms of discrimination and strengthen compliance with our shared international obligations. Generally, respect for LGBT rights in the Overseas Territories continued to lag behind the UK mainland. Nevertheless there were some examples of progress in 2016. Same-sex marriage was legalised in **Ascension Island**, the **British Indian Ocean Territory** and **Gibraltar**. In respect of the **Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs) of Akrotiri and Dhekelia**, which have a sizeable UK Armed Forces population, the authorities notified the UK Government that there was no objection to marriages and conversions of civil partnerships being conducted within its territory under UK

Armed Forces laws. The first same-sex marriage in the SBAs took place in September.

Child Rights

Children are impacted disproportionately by violence, discrimination, poverty and marginalisation, affecting their health, education and overall development, and putting them at an increased risk of exploitation, abuse and trafficking. The protection and promotion of children's human rights, including those of children who are victims of armed conflict and children at risk of abduction and exploitation, form an important part of the FCO's wider international human rights agenda.

At the March UN Human Rights Council, the UK co-sponsored the annual Resolution on the Rights of the Child, which had as its theme "information and communications technologies and child sexual exploitation". This called upon all states to recognise that, while information technology is a powerful and transformative force for growth with the potential to enrich young people's lives and offer opportunities which earlier generations never experienced, it also enables new forms of criminality to which children are especially vulnerable. The UK is committed to supporting UN member states in building their capabilities in the area of online child sexual exploitation, and pledged £50 million to tackle this crime.

The UK co-sponsored the Resolution on the Right to Education by Every Girl which was adopted unanimously at the June 2016 UN Human Rights Council. We also hosted the Girls' Education Forum 2016 to stimulate action on the world stage. We have supported education for the most vulnerable. At the **Syria** Conference which the UK hosted in February 2016, global commitments were made for vulnerable and refugee children to have access to education of a high quality. Increasing girls' access to education is linked to population growth at replacement rates, with consequent benefits in areas such as food security. It also acts as a multiplier, by enabling girls to enjoy their human rights, including to equal participation in public life and in making decisions which affect their own lives.

In 2016, the UK continued to build on the success of the Girl Summit held in London in July 2014, through work nationally and internationally to support the international movement to eliminate Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and Child and Early Forced Marriage (CEFM).

The UK is committed to work with its partners to end FGM and CEFM within a generation. On 1 December the Home Secretary hosted a meeting to discuss continuing efforts to tackle this issue, including through UK-led programmes in over 25 high-prevalence countries. At the UN Human Rights Council the UK is a member of the core group for the CEFM Resolution and also strongly supported the CEFM resolution at the UN General Assembly in November.

Our Embassies and High Commissions continued to play an important role in our work to protect and promote the rights of children. The High Commission in Kuala Lumpur facilitated the UK National Crime Agency (NCA) helping the Malaysian authorities to secure convictions for 71 child abuse offences mostly committed in **Malaysia**. In August, the NCA office

at the Embassy in Santo Domingo facilitated access by the authorities in the **Dominican Republic** to technology which will allow its judiciary and investigators to identify individuals using the internet to share images of child sexual exploitation and abuse.

The UK continues to work in partnership with the Governments of the **Overseas Territories** to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Through the development of its multi-year programme, the UK Government aims to harness UK expertise to promote transformative and sustainable change. The UK Government continues to ensure child safeguarding remains a political priority for the **Overseas Territories**.

Rights of Persons with Disabilities

In 2016, much of our work on the rights, promotion and protection of persons with disabilities was focused on the UN. The UK actively engaged on resolutions at the Human Rights Council in 2016 focusing on disability. Themes included “the rights of persons with disabilities in situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies” and “Protection of the family: role of the family in supporting the protection and promotion of human rights of persons with disabilities”.

In May, the UK Delegation to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe in Vienna facilitated the attendance of activists from UK civil society organisation, Scope, at an event on the participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life. The meeting brought together representatives from the governments of the OSCE’s participating states as well as from civil society.

Scope’s representatives were able to share positive practices and experiences from the UK, and to promote its ‘End the Awkward’ campaign, which uses humour to encourage people to think differently about disability, break down negative attitudes towards disabled people, and help people feel more comfortable when talking about disability.

In June 2016, the UK sent a Ministerial-led delegation to the 9th Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The theme of the conference was “Implementing the UN’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals by the year 2030 for all persons with disabilities: ‘Leaving no one behind’”.

We supported the Rehabilitation International World Congress on Disability and Inclusion held in Edinburgh on 25-27 October. This event attracted speakers and delegates from more than 50 countries. It was focused on promoting social inclusion and accessibility.

In November, we hosted a Ministerial panel event entitled: *Delivering on the commitment to ‘Leave No One Behind’: Working together to break down barriers to women’s economic and political participation*. We invited Rahma Elsidig, a Sudanese disability activist and Programme Manager for ADD International – Action on Disability and Development - to speak on the intersection between gender discrimination and disability rights and on ADD’s confidence-building work to enable disabled people to challenge social norms, barriers

and preconceptions that prevent many disabled women from enjoying their rights on a full and equal basis.

In 2016, we continued to advocate that states should sign and ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD), including through use of the Universal Periodic Review mechanism at the UN Human Rights Council.

The **Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK)** ratified the UN CRPD in November. Unfortunately, there is no evidence that the DPRK has implemented any of the other international human rights treaties which it had previously ratified. Together with other partners, the UK maintained its engagement with the DPRK authorities to press for better treatment of the most vulnerable groups in North Korean society, including children, women and disabled persons.

Through announcements made on 3 December (International Day for Persons with Disabilities) and the DFID 2016 Bilateral Development Review, the UK is committed to driving action to improve the lives of people with disabilities in developing countries, ensuring that people with disabilities are systematically included in and benefit from international aid and humanitarian assistance.

Human Rights and the Private Sector

Business and Human Rights

On 12 May, the UK Government published an update to the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights. This followed the publication of our original action plan in September 2013, when the UK became the first government to commit to the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles (UNGPs) on business and human rights.

The updated National Action Plan reaffirms the government’s belief that the promotion of business and respect for human rights go hand in hand. It set out some of the steps we have taken or supported since the original plan was published and the commitments we have met. These include the introduction of the Modern Slavery Act, in particular the Transparency in Supply Chains provision which requires companies with a turnover above £36 million to publish an annual report setting out the steps which they have taken to eradicate slavery throughout their operations and in their supply chains.

We have continued to encourage other governments to develop similar measures for the implementation of the UNGPs both bilaterally and by setting out in international fora our experience of developing our National Action Plan. In 2016 we also participated in the annual UN Forum on business and human rights in Geneva, presenting on the Modern Slavery Act, and in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD) Responsible Business Forum in June.

We have supported a number of other initiatives to promote business and human rights. The Corporate Human Rights Benchmark is collaboration between investors and civil society to measure the human rights performance of leading companies against 100 criteria. The intention is to provide information which allows investors, shareholders and

consumers to carry out their own due diligence and encourage a mutually reinforcing drive to improve corporate behaviour.

Through the FCO's Magna Carta Fund we supported the organisation 'Shift' to create a Reporting and Accountability framework to help companies report against the responsibilities set out in the UN Guiding Principles.

We have also supported the work of the Institute of Human Rights and Business to create a multi-stakeholder coalition to promote respect for human rights in the planning and delivery of mega-sporting events. Large scale sporting events such as the Olympics, World Cup or Commonwealth Games have the potential to make a positive impact on the lives of individuals and communities but also carry the risk of human rights abuses as land is acquired and infrastructure developed. The development of a platform for human rights is intended to share and encourage best practice in this regard.

We will continue to support initiatives on business and human rights, including as an integral part of our ambition to lead global efforts to eradicate modern slavery.

Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights

The Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights (VPS) provide guidance on responsible business practice to oil, gas and mining companies operating in high-risk and conflict-affected areas. This guidance helps companies work responsibly with state security agencies and private security companies (PSCs). It helps them minimise the risk of their security operations leading to human rights abuses or exacerbating conflict. The guidance also helps encourage investment by reducing the operational, legal and reputational risks which companies face in connection with security, especially where their work affects the daily lives of local people.

During 2016, the UK continued to be a strong supporter of the Voluntary Principles Initiative (VPI) which encourages companies, governments and NGOs to work together to support the implementation of the VPs. As an active member of the Steering Committee, the UK has supported the in-country implementation working groups demonstrating "value added" on the ground in **Burma, Ghana, Nigeria** and **Peru**, which support the business case for membership of the VPI and provide a forum through which we can strengthen the VPI's verification mechanisms. We have committed to act as co-leaders of the Burma implementation working group and look forward to working with partners from government, civil society and corporate pillars to develop a work plan for this group in 2017. The development of a "toolkit" for VPI implementation in 2017 will further build the value proposition by demonstrating that membership of the initiative can provide companies with direct access to resources.

In 2016, the UK maintained support for the VPI peer review process. We have participated as peer reviewers for the US Government and AngloGold Ashanti. Through this process we have been able to share good practice and lessons learned amongst members of the government, company and

NGO pillars of the VPI. We have committed to act as peer reviewers for the Government of **The Netherlands** and Newmont Mining early in 2017 and to undergo our own peer review during 2017. As strong supporters of the principle of transparency within the VPI, the UK continues to encourage all participants to publish their annual reports.

In 2016, the UK worked to spread knowledge and understanding of the VPs. For example, the Embassy in Luanda held a conference to develop understanding of the VPs amongst the **Angolan** Government, extractive companies operating in Angola and NGOs. We also funded two projects in **Colombia**, including a project helping the government develop a business and human rights plan for the mining and energy sectors.

In 2017, the UK will continue to work to increase understanding of the VPs, supporting projects which target implementation of security and human rights good practice on the ground.

Private Security Companies

Legitimate Private Security Companies working to high standards play a crucial role in the protection of businesses, NGOs and diplomatic missions operating in complex and dangerous environments. However, the nature of PSCs' work makes it essential that they actively manage and mitigate any negative impact which their work has on local communities and conflicts. The UK is a signatory to the Montreux Document on private military and security companies, which defines how international law applies to the activities of private military and security companies when they are operating in an armed conflict zone.

The UK applies the principles of the Montreux Document in a number of ways. Internationally, the UK has continued to advocate the benefits of PSCs pursuing certification to a recognised standard via membership of the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Providers Association (ICoCA). As active members of the Board of ICoCA since its inception in 2013, the UK has assisted in the development of the ICoCA certification process.

Through certification, we believe PSCs can meet the challenge of effectively managing and mitigating risks involved in their operations. Certification opened on 1 November 2016 and the first company became ICoCA certified in December. We will be encouraging more companies to apply for certification in 2017. We will also support ICoCA's work to operationalise the procedures for monitoring and complaints agreed at the Annual General Assembly in September 2016.

Within the UK, we have continued to work closely with our industry partner, the Security in Complex Environments Group (SCEG), and with civil society to ensure that stakeholders are engaged with the government's policy on PSCs. Working with SCEG has provided a valuable forum to discuss issues in the private security industry and has given the UK Government the crucial opportunity to meet industry representatives on a regular basis. We will continue this engagement in 2017.

Responsible Sourcing

As high value-added products, minerals can provide a source of funding for armed groups and, where funds are diverted from legitimate local producers, can harm local communities which should expect to benefit from a valuable economic resource. In 2016, the UK continued to address both issues through The Kimberley Process (KP) Certification Scheme for trade in rough diamonds, and by encouraging better corporate due diligence on supply chains for minerals.

The Government Diamond Office (GDO) based in the FCO and the UK Border Force is responsible for implementing the requirements of the KP and for preventing illicit diamonds from entering or leaving the UK. In 2016, the GDO continued its work with the UK's rough diamond industry to provide expert advice and audited 13 rough diamond traders as part of its oversight of industry compliance with KP minimum standards. GDO officials also inspected eight shipments of rough diamonds entering or leaving the UK, and issued certificates for rough diamond exports worth over US\$60 million.

Effective due diligence by companies buying minerals which may originate from conflict-affected and high-risk areas complements the diamond-specific work of governments in the KP. In 2016, we continued to support and encourage relevant UK importers in carrying out full and transparent due diligence based on the OECD's Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains of Minerals from Conflict-Affected and High-Risk Areas. This provides specific guidance on gold and tin, tungsten and tantalum, all of which are used in consumer electronics. We also pressed for significant progress in the negotiations between EU Member States towards agreement on the EU Regulation on the responsible sourcing of minerals, which aims to encourage EU importers of minerals to carry out due diligence on their supply chains.

In May 2016, we joined The Netherlands as a founding partner in the European Partnership for Responsible Minerals (EPRM). We believe this initiative, which supports the implementation of the OECD Due Diligence Guidance in Europe, will enable us to work effectively with global partners to increase the proportion of responsibly sourced minerals across the supply chain – from mines to consumers. As a Board Member of the EPRM in 2017, the UK will play an active role in ensuring the EPRM uses its pooled fund to support projects which will increase the proportion of responsibly sourced minerals in developing countries. We will be actively engaged in outreach, with a view to increasing the number of companies and governments supporting the EPRM.

The Open Government Partnership

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) was established in 2011 to provide an international platform for domestic reformers committed to making their governments more open, accountable, and responsive to citizens. The UK was a founding member and since 2011 has helped the OGP grow from 8 to 75 participating countries. In all of these countries, government and civil society work together to develop and implement open government reforms in the form of National

Action Plans (NAPs). Realising the commitments in these plans requires active cooperation between governments and citizens. This principle of supporting civic participation is fundamental to membership. All governments joining the OGP commit to protecting the ability of not-for-profit and civil society organisations to operate in ways which are consistent with the commitment to freedom of expression, association, and opinion.

2016 marked the last year of the UK's participation in the Steering Committee. During our tenure we have promoted various OGP initiatives to drive openness and transparency including the Global Open Data Charter for which the UK is a lead steward and the Declaration at the 4th OGP Summit held in Paris in December 2016, which highlighted the need to protect and defend civil society's space to operate.

The OGP has sought greater protection for civil society organisations working in difficult circumstances. Last year, the OGP's Steering Committee suspended **Azerbaijan** for its crackdown on the operation and funding of NGOs and is closely monitoring other countries where treatment of NGOs is a concern.

As well as providing core funding to the OGP, the UK has directly supported projects in over 20 countries during 2016. This work has included providing advice to countries such as **Bosnia and Herzegovina** on the steps required to become full members of the OGP, as well as more targeted work with civil society and governments in member states including **Serbia** and **South Africa** either to develop their action plans or to achieve specific objectives.

As we come to the end of our tenure on the OGP Steering Committee in 2017, the UK remains committed to working with civil society and government to provide the leadership to protect and enhance the necessary civic space for transformative reforms.

Modern Slavery

The Prime Minister has identified modern slavery as one of the greatest human rights challenges of our time. As Home Secretary, she piloted the Modern Slavery Act through Parliament in 2015. This is a landmark piece of legislation which gives law enforcement bodies greater powers to tackle crimes such as sexual exploitation, slavery, forced and child labour and people trafficking. As Prime Minister, she has set out her ambition to tackle these same crimes at the global level. In 2016, she established a Modern Slavery Implementation Task Force which she chairs, and which drives forward action both in the UK and globally.

Although data are difficult to assemble, the Global Slavery Index, produced by the Walk Free Foundation, estimates that there are as many as 46 million people in modern slavery, in its various forms, around the world^[2]. The crimes we understand as modern slavery are covered by a variety of terminology. At the international level they are set out in the universally agreed Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8.7 which calls for *"immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced*

[2] <http://www.globallslaveryindex.org/index/>



Prime Minister Theresa May raised the issue of Modern Slavery in her address to the United Nations General Assembly in September. Credit: UN Multimedia

labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour including the recruitment and use of child soldiers". In addition, SDGs 5.2 and 16.2 call for an end to trafficking and exploitation, of women and of children respectively.

The Prime Minister raised modern slavery in her address to the UN General Assembly in September and held a special side-meeting of selected world leaders to discuss the issue. She set out her determination to pursue perpetrators and support victims in her comments in Westminster Abbey marking Anti-Slavery Day on 16 October. She also used these speeches to set out her determination to put Britain "at the forefront of this fight" and mobilise the rest of the international community to combat these heinous crimes.

In 2016, we supported the development of two initiatives which have the potential to make significant contributions to tackling modern slavery. "Building Responsibly" is an initiative to promote the rights and welfare of workers in the construction and engineering sectors, with a particular focus on the Gulf. As part of the development of this initiative the FCO hosted a roundtable event in May 2016 at which Karen Bradley, then Home Office Minister for Preventing Abuse, Exploitation and Crime, spoke about the UK's Modern Slavery Act and the government's commitment to taking action. FCO officials also spoke at the launch of the Institute of Human Rights and Business' "Leadership Group for Responsible Recruitment" which aims to radically improve the way migrant

workers are recruited including through the eradication of recruitment fees.

The FCO will use its entire network of posts to urge greater global activity against modern slavery, to share the UK's experience through the implementation of the Modern Slavery Act, and to promote areas for practical measures to prevent modern slavery and to support victims. We will give particular focus to those countries which are believed to have the highest prevalence of modern slavery and where we believe the UK is well placed to make a difference. However, acknowledging the fact that modern slavery exists in every country, including the UK, our work will be global – relying on contributions from all posts in our diplomatic network. This reflects the Prime Minister's identification of modern slavery as a foreign policy priority.

We will also push for action at the multilateral level, building on the good work which has been done by others including the US' Trafficking in Persons report, the Australia-Indonesian chaired "Bali Process" and the Spanish-led UN Security Council Resolution (2331) on trafficking in conflict. Our aim is to create a greater sense of urgency and broad global consensus in favour of more determined action.

Tackling modern slavery is an enormous challenge; but it also provides an opportunity for the international community and the UN system to show how it can come together to provide a coordinated and coherent response. We will be encouraging all relevant parts of the UN system to work together, including around the creation of Alliance 8.7, a coalition designed to

accelerate and intensify action towards achieving the goal of eradicating modern slavery.

Modern Slavery will be a major focus of our work in 2017, both bilaterally through our network of posts and in multilateral fora.

Department for International Development (DFID): Work on Economic and Social Rights

Respect for human rights underpins sustainable development. The Global Goals which were agreed by world leaders at the UN General Assembly in September 2015 are at the heart of the UK Aid Strategy. The goals focus on eradicating extreme poverty and finishing the job of the Millennium Development Goals in key areas like health, nutrition and education. The goals also represent a commitment to achieve substantive, measurable improvements in global economic, social and political human rights. The overarching commitment in the Global Goals to “leave no one behind” is an expression of commitment to the protection of human rights.

A range of DFID programmes that protect and promote human rights in areas such as security, peace and justice are referred to elsewhere in this report. This section describes DFID’s work in 2016 relating to economic and social rights.

Rights of Women and Girls

In 2016 the UK was instrumental in the UN Secretary General’s High Level Panel on Women’s Economic Empowerment, which will see millions more women into jobs and a platform for new partnerships and actions which will catalyse the transformational change needed for women’s economic empowerment. The UK hosted the Girls’ Education Forum, securing commitments to supporting more of the most marginalised girls through quality primary and secondary education. Through its Girls’ Education Challenge programme, DFID supports work to change community and social attitudes to girls’ education and is enabling one million of the world’s most marginalised girls to complete at least one full cycle of schooling.

The UK is committed to tackling all forms of violence against women and girls at home and overseas, including intimate partner violence, child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) and female genital mutilation (FGM). The UK’s flagship “What works to prevent violence” research and innovation programme is producing rigorous evidence on the most effective approaches to drive down global rates of violence against women and girls. DFID has also increased its support for local women’s rights groups through the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women. Through the work of two other flagship programmes, 22 countries now have National Action Plans in place to address CEFM and/or FGM. The latest data from the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C), of which the UK is the largest donor, suggests that over 15,000 communities representing some 17 million people declared their commitment to abandoning the practice.

At the World Humanitarian Summit in May the UK’s call to put gender equality at the heart of 21st century humanitarian action was echoed by many, with strong agreement on the need to go beyond protection to ensure the empowerment of women and girls in emergencies. DFID has also supported programmes to increase women’s political engagement such as the £9m support programme with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy 2016-21 which provides technical assistance to parliaments, political parties and local governments around the world.

Health

Worldwide, millions of people continue to die from preventable diseases, especially in the poorest and most vulnerable populations. The UK is committed to building global health security to reduce the risk from future threats such as Ebola, and supporting developing countries in strengthening their health systems to enable better access to good quality and responsive healthcare. The UK continues to invest in research and product development, including through the joint DFID and Department of Health Ross Fund. In 2016, DFID-funded programmes delivered over 127 million treatments through Mass Drug Administration to help control neglected tropical diseases such as blinding trachoma, and achieve near eradication of Guinea Worm.

UK support helps the Global Polio Eradication Initiative administer polio vaccines to more than 400 million children every year, and stay on track for 2017 to be the last year a case of polio is seen globally. By the end of 2015 DFID support had also helped 9.9 million additional women to use modern methods of family planning, had ensured that 5.6 million births were delivered with the help of nurses, midwives or doctors, had kept 9.2 million people alive and on treatment for HIV, had distributed 49.7 million insecticide-treated bed nets, and had immunised 67.1 million children against preventable diseases.

Education

After a decade and a half of good progress in getting children into school across the world, out-of-school numbers started to rise in 2015. 59 million children currently have no access to education and at least 250 million children cannot read or count, even if they have spent four years in school. The UK wants children to be in school and learning. Between 2010 and 2015 DFID supported 11 million children in primary and lower secondary school, and trained 380,000 teachers to improve the quality of education. The UK’s focus is on the most disadvantaged children and through the Girls’ Education Challenge DFID is supporting one million of the world’s poorest girls to learn. DFID has again pledged to support 11 million children with a decent education by 2020.

Water and sanitation

At the start of 2016, 2.4 billion people did not have access to sanitation and 663 million people did not have access to clean water. Inadequate access to water and sanitation is the principal cause of diarrhoeal disease which kills nearly 1,000 children every day. The UK recognises the right to water and

sanitation as rights derived from the right to an adequate standard of living under Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Between 2011 and 2015, DFID helped 64.5 million people gain access to water and sanitation. The UK Government has committed to helping 60 million gain access to water and sanitation between 2015 and 2020. During 2015-2016, DFID helped 11.5 million gain access to these services

Economic empowerment

DFID's new Economic Development Strategy sets out a strong focus on ensuring that economic growth delivers opportunities and benefits for the poorest, women and girls, people with disabilities, and other marginalised groups. The Strategy includes a commitment to tackle gender discrimination across all DFID's economic development work and deliver safer, more secure and high-return work for women. In addition, the UK has played a prominent role in the UN Secretary General's High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment, which brings together global leaders from business, civil society and government. The first report of the Panel, published in September 2016, identified seven drivers of change and issued a global call to action to address gender inequality. Latest figures show that since 2011, DFID has improved access to financial services for over 36 million women and helped three million women gain secure land rights.

Social protection

Social protection is important to help the poorest and most vulnerable meet their basic needs, have more control over their lives, and allow them to take advantage of economic opportunities. DFID supports social protection through 16 of its bilateral country programmes, as well as through countries in the Sahel and Middle East and North Africa regions.

CHAPTER II: Human Rights for a Stable World

Migration and Refugee Crisis

Over 360,000 migrants crossed the Mediterranean in 2016, compared with more than one million who made the journey in 2015. However, the number of dead and missing increased to over 5,000, the highest annual total recorded to date. The UK continues to pursue a coordinated and comprehensive approach to the crisis, tackling the root causes of irregular migration as well as their consequences. The UK is also a major contributor to the humanitarian response to the Mediterranean migration crisis, having committed over £100m since October 2015.

At the London “Supporting Syria and the Region” Conference in February 2016, the UK pioneered a new approach to protracted crises going beyond people’s basic needs and investing in education, jobs and livelihoods for refugees and the host communities. At a Leaders’ Summit organised by President Obama in September 2016, the UK announced an additional £660 million in humanitarian funding for 2016/17, bringing the total to £1.5 billion, including £2.5 million seed funding for a new global fund to resettle refugees. The UK also committed £80 million to a jobs compact with the Government of Ethiopia, World Bank and European Investment Bank to create 100,000 new jobs for Ethiopians and refugees.

By the end of 2016, the UK had granted humanitarian protection to 5,706 vulnerable people under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. In 2016, we transferred over 900 unaccompanied minors to the UK from Europe, including more than 750 from France as part of the UK’s support for the Calais camp clearance.

The UK supported the EU-Turkey Statement of March 2016 which contributed to a reduction in arrivals in Greece from 1,500 per day in February to around 50 per day in December. The UK provided 115 expert staff to help the Greek authorities accelerate the processing of asylum claims. We have allocated more than £39 million in humanitarian assistance to migrants and refugees in Greece. The UK also supported Turkey, including through committing €328 million to the €3 billion Facility for Refugees in Turkey.

The UK provided a significant contribution to Operation SOPHIA, the EU’s counter-migration operation in the Central Mediterranean, which has destroyed over 330 smuggling boats, apprehended 100 suspected smugglers and saved over 29,000 lives. Through the multi-agency Organised Immigration Crime Taskforce, we also provided expertise and assistance in disrupting organised immigration crime and in reducing human smuggling and trafficking in source and transit countries.



Religious leaders address the audience at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s two day London summit on how freedom of religion or belief can help prevent violent extremism, October 2016.

At the UN General Assembly in September, the Prime Minister called for a more effective international response to mass movements of refugees and migrants, based on the principle of seeking refuge in the first safe country reached; a clear differentiation between refugees and economic migrants; and the rights of states to control their own borders. We will continue to promote these principles throughout 2017 in consultations on new UN Migration and Refugee Compacts.

Freedom of Religion or Belief

In 2016, the UK emphasised Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) as a freedom which helps to create societies that are more resilient against violent extremism. With this in mind, in October 2016 we held a groundbreaking conference, bringing together experts in FoRB with those working on countering violent extremism. Participants considered how protecting FoRB can help to combat violent extremism by building inclusive societies.

At the UN HRC, we continued to play an active role in negotiations to maintain consensus on the adoption and implementation of both the EU led 'Freedom of Religion or Belief' resolution and the 'Combating Religious Intolerance' resolution led by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

We also continued our policy of raising cases of persecution in individual countries. In September, the Foreign Secretary launched the global 'Bringing Daesh to Justice' campaign to support justice efforts, and to recognise and address the harm suffered by victims of Daesh crimes in Syria and Iraq.

In **Burma**, we were aware of incidents of violence and hate speech against Muslims and Christians, particularly the Rohingya community in Rakhine State. The UK continued to work with the new civilian government to support and encourage them in tackling this issue.

In **China**, we regularly raised our concerns about FoRB, both through the UK-China Human Rights Dialogue in October 2016, and as part of our broader relationship.

In **Iran**, the Baha'i faith in particular was subject to mounting persecution, and we were concerned by state efforts to identify, monitor and arbitrarily detain Baha'is. The UK regularly called on Iran to allow the Special Rapporteur on FoRB to have access to the country.

In **Russia**, we lobbied the Russian Government about the implementation of the new "Yarovaya Law" aimed at tackling religious extremism. Its vaguely defined ban on "missionary activity" means that in theory certain religious activity cannot take place outside registered religious buildings.

In **Indonesia**, we have made representations encouraging the Indonesian Government to respect freedom of religion or belief as guaranteed in the Indonesian Constitution, including for those who do not practice one of the six religions recognised under Indonesian law. We welcome statements by Indonesian President Joko Widodo reaffirming his commitment to pluralism and religious diversity.

In **Pakistan**, we raised our concerns about the misuse of the blasphemy laws and discrimination against religious minorities, in particular Ahmadiyya and Christian communities.

In **Sudan**, FoRB continued to be an issue which we raised through our ongoing human rights dialogue with Sudan.

We also supported various projects through our Magna Carta Fund, such as support for a network of human rights defenders in South Asia, and a project to support including FoRB in the curriculum of secondary schools in the Middle East and North Africa region. The FCO also continued to run religious literacy training to help its staff understand the key role which religion plays in shaping the views of the majority of the world's population.

Post-Holocaust Issues

The government continued to attach great significance to learning in practical terms from the lessons of the Holocaust and encouraging greater joint working from the international community. We also worked actively on outstanding issues, such as property restitution. Sir Eric Pickles, the UK Envoy for Post-Holocaust Issues, regularly discussed these matters with relevant countries as part of his mandate. Earlier in the year he joined the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation's International Committee.

In January 2016, together with the Israeli Embassy we hosted an event to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day which brought together a number of high profile speakers including a Holocaust survivor. The main aim of the event was to raise awareness among members of the London diplomatic community of the importance of remembering the lessons of the Holocaust.

During 2016, we continued to play an active role in the management of the International Tracing Service archive as a member of its International Commission. We also worked to strengthen international co-operation on Holocaust education, remembrance and research, including through our membership of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA).

The UK welcomed the notable achievement by Romania, IHRA's Chair during 2016, of securing IHRA's adoption of a Working Definition of anti-Semitism, which sets out in detail how contemporary anti-Semitism may manifest itself. In December, the Prime Minister announced that the UK would formally adopt this definition for UK domestic use, reaffirming that there is no place for such hatred in our society, however it is portrayed.

Looking ahead, we will continue to work actively to encourage greater international collaboration on these issues, in particular by supporting the efforts of IHRA experts to ensure that the in-depth analysis available on the Holocaust and its causes is taken into account by those seeking to prevent future genocides. We will also pursue progress on post-Holocaust restitution and work with international partners to advocate the full implementation of the Terezin Declaration, pressing for due recompense for those still affected by the legacy of the Holocaust.



UK Special Envoy for Post-Holocaust issues, Rt Hon Sir Eric Pickles, addresses the audience at the FCO Holocaust Memorial Reception in London, 26 January 2016

Countering Extremism

The UK attaches a high priority to countering violent extremism and the ideological basis of non-violent extremism. The government set out in its 2015 Counter Extremism strategy how it planned to protect communities and safeguard individuals from the influence of extremists. We are keen to work closely with international partners on this issue, including by identifying opportunities for sharing best practice. The UK is also part-funding the new Commonwealth Countering Violent Extremism Unit which will advance the Commonwealth's role in the international effort to counter extremism. In 2017, a key aspect will be encouraging implementation of the UN Secretary General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism with Member States and across the UN system.

Daesh

For obvious reasons, the government does not recognise Daesh as a state actor. However, given the atrocities Daesh committed in 2016 and the impact on people's human rights, we consider it appropriate to include reference to those atrocities in this report, noting the distinction between human rights violations, committed by state actors, and human rights abuses, committed by non-state actors, such as Daesh.

Despite significant defeats at the hands of local forces and the Global Coalition, Daesh continued to commit horrific

crimes in **Iraq, Syria** and across the world in 2016. They were responsible for systematic and widespread abuses of human rights including kidnapping, forced marriage, rape, torture and execution.

The majority of Daesh's victims in Iraq and Syria continued to be Sunni Muslims, with Yezidis, Shia, Christians, Mandeans and other minority groups also facing severe abuse. Women and girls were repeatedly sold as slaves, forced to become wives of Daesh fighters and killed if they refused. In March, Daesh forces reportedly killed at least nine Iraqi Shia women belonging to the Turkmen minority for refusing to marry Daesh fighters after Daesh forces killed their husbands. In June, the independent UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria published a report on Daesh's treatment of the Yezidi community^[3]. It detailed cases of killings, sexual slavery, enslavement, torture, forcible transfer, mental harm, and the infliction of conditions that bring about a slow death. It estimated that 3,200 Yezidi women remain under Daesh control.

Reports continued of Daesh's use of public executions in front of large crowds, often including children. Charges in 2016 included apostasy, theft, adultery, black magic and homosexuality. Corpses were often left on public display. The Syrian Human Rights Observatory estimates that between June 2014 and March 2016 Daesh executed 2,197 civilians. Human rights organisations, including Amnesty International, also reported public floggings, lynchings and amputations as means

[3] http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/ColSyria/A_HRC_32_CRP.2_en.pdf

of punishment by Daesh in Libya^[4]. Reports continue to surface of Daesh using civilians as human shields. When operations began to liberate Mosul in October, Daesh began forcibly evacuating civilians, killing those who tried to flee.

The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights reported that Daesh installed rocket launchers and snipers on the rooftops of civilian houses. Daesh used families as human shields, placing them between Daesh fighters and Iraqi forces^[5]. Several reports have been made on Daesh's use of chemical weapons. The UN's Joint Investigative Mechanism on chemical weapons use issued a report on 20 August which concluded that Daesh used sulphur mustard in Marea on 21 August 2015^[6]. Human Rights Watch's World Report 2017 reports that in September and October, Daesh launched at least three chemical attacks on the Iraqi town of Qayyarah, south of Mosul, causing painful burning and blistering of the skin^[7].

Daesh continue to pose a threat to liberated areas through the planting of hidden improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Civilians returning to their homes have been injured and killed by IEDs placed in doorways, under mattresses and in television sets. Civilians have been killed and injured by such devices in Al-Mabrouka, Hasakah; Tal Akhdar, Derb Hasan, Raqqah; and Merweh, Aleppo. Human Rights Watch reported that on 27 September, three boys were killed by an IED left in a school classroom in the Seif al-Dawla primary school in Manbij.

The UK continues to pursue a comprehensive strategy to defeat Daesh, working as a leading member of the 68 member Global Coalition. Since 2014, Daesh has lost 62% of its territory in **Iraq** and 30% in **Syria**. Their finances have been hit, their leadership is being killed and their flow of foreign fighters has dried up. Since 2015, almost 1.4 million displaced people in **Iraq** have been able to return to their homes. 100% of the population of Mukeshfehah city has returned and the primary healthcare centre and water works have been rehabilitated. 95% of the population of Tikrit have returned home, and the university re-opened.

In September, the Foreign Secretary launched the 'Bringing Daesh to Justice' campaign to ensure Daesh are held accountable for the heinous crimes they have committed. The campaign has three complementary objectives: to support national and international justice efforts; to recognise and address the harm suffered by victims of Daesh crimes; and, through this pursuit of justice, the unification of communities – local, national and international. This is about justice for all Daesh victims, those who have lived under Daesh and those who have been victim to its terrorist attacks. While investigative and prosecutorial work is already underway across the world, we are cooperating with international partners to identify ways to take this agenda forward, including at the UN.

Counter-Terrorism

In 2016, the international community continued to face a severe challenge in combating terrorism, with a number of high profile terrorist attacks around the world, including major incidents in Turkey, France, Germany and Belgium. These attacks highlighted the continued need for the UK to invest in capacity building to help our partners detect and respond to a wide range of terrorist threats, as well as to counteract radicalisation and extremism. Human rights compliance training underpins all of this assistance, and is an integral part of the UK approach to countering terrorism.

Death Penalty and Torture Prevention

2016 saw a minority of states taking backward steps on the **death penalty** by:

- > continuing to pass death sentences and to execute;
- > going back on established moratoria on the use of the death penalty;
- > failing to apply the safeguards and restrictions set out in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
- > advocating the use of the death penalty, in some cases in breach of previous international commitments.

However, a large majority of UN member states re-confirmed their commitment to abolition in a vote at the General Assembly in December.

China remains the country which carries out most executions, which are generally carried out in secret after an opaque legal process. Of the world's recorded executions 87% took place in just four countries: **Iraq**, **Iran**, **Pakistan**, and **Saudi Arabia**. FCO Ministers have condemned the fact that many executions in **China** and **Iran** are conducted in secret and that the death penalty is widely applied to offences which are not – to quote the UN standard – 'the most serious'. Ministers have also expressed concern about particular cases: non-implementation of a moratorium continued in **Somalia**; the execution in **Nigeria** of three prisoners in December ending its unofficial moratorium; leaders in the **Philippines** and **Turkey** speaking positively about the death penalty, despite their countries' treaty commitments to abolish it.

While there have been setbacks in some countries, 166 of the 193 member states of the UN carried out no executions in 2016. **Benin**, **Fiji**, **Guinea**, **Madagascar**, **Mongolia**, **Nauru**, the **Republic of Congo**, and **Suriname** abolished the death penalty. There were no executions in Europe outside Belarus; nor any in the Americas outside six states of the **USA**. There were fewer than 100 executions in the whole of Africa, where many states have established long-term moratoria and are considering abolition. In most of the world, the death penalty is the exception, not the norm.

The FCO continued to fund projects in 2016 aimed at establishing a global culture of torture prevention. The UK's

[4] <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/libya#b97851>.

[5] <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=20948&LangID=E>.

[6] http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/888&referer=/english/&Lang=E.

[7] <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/iraq#14bd81>.

own experience is that two steps are necessary to effectively prevent torture from occurring: a clear political will to end the practice, and the establishment of a National Preventative Mechanism (NPM). The pathway to establishing an NPM is laid out in the UN's Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT). The UK calls on all states to ratify and implement the OPCAT. FCO project spending on torture prevention is focused on this goal. We welcome **Cabo Verde's** ratification of the OPCAT on 1 April 2016.

It remains the case that the political will to end **torture** is lacking in many countries. Some states continue to believe – and even to suggest publically – that torture has a role to play in countering terrorism. The UK rejects such views absolutely. Torture is banned under international law and is always wrong. The UK calls on all states to investigate any complaints of torture swiftly and openly.

Conflict

Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI)

In July, the Minister for Human Rights Baroness Anelay was re-appointed by the Prime Minister as her Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict (PMSR). Baroness Anelay continued to build on PSVI's achievements, by encouraging further training on the International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict ("the International Protocol"), promoting UK military expertise on sexual violence issues and providing further support to affected communities. In 2016, she visited a number of conflict and post-conflict countries, including **Colombia, Burma and Sri Lanka**, to promote PSVI and encourage greater progress in its implementation.

Survivors of sexual violence in conflict are often ostracised from their communities, shunned by their families, denied justice and cut off from critical support networks. In 2016, the UK increased its work to tackle the stigma associated with sexual violence and to challenge the negative attitudes and misunderstandings that cause further suffering to survivors and children born as a result of rape.

We held a series of workshops in countries including **Burma, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, DRC, Iraq, Kosovo, Nigeria, Somalia** and **Sri Lanka** which brought together survivors, experts, local governments, civil society, media and faith groups to identify and understand some of the issues associated with and challenges to tackling stigma. These findings were subsequently discussed at a UK conference hosted by Baroness Anelay in November. The report and the conference outcomes will contribute to the development of a set of principles and recommendations that will help inform the work of other donor governments and the international community in this area.

In 2016, we provided financial support to projects to tackle stigma in **Colombia, Mexico, Nepal, Nigeria, Somalia, DRC, South Sudan** and **Uganda**. These projects have helped identify the political, social and economic consequences of the

stigma which survivors of sexual violence suffer. They have also contributed to combating stigma by working with faith leaders, community members and youth groups to change attitudes, improve response systems and prevent stigmatisation.

Since launching the International Protocol at the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict in 2014, we have worked with governments, the judiciary, police and civil society in countries such as **Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, DRC, Iraq, Nepal** and **Uganda** to provide training on the International Protocol, to help them gather evidence and bring prosecutions against perpetrators of sexual violence. By boosting the capacity of States to prosecute offenders and offer justice to victims, and by encouraging human rights defenders and grass roots organisations to press for specific changes to domestic legislation, the International Protocol is making a real and practical difference to the fight against impunity and to tackling sexual violence in conflict.

The International Protocol was always intended to be a living document, to be updated as best practice evolved and in light of the feedback we received on its use. In 2016, we launched this revision process and a second version of the International Protocol will be available from March 2017. The revised version contains a number of additions, including guidance on the specific context, challenges and techniques required for interviewing and documenting conflict and atrocity-related sexual violence against children and against male victims; further guidance on trauma; and a focus on analysing evidence and establishing patterns of violations.

In April, the House of Lords Select Committee on Sexual Violence in Conflict published their report '*Sexual Violence in Conflict: A War Crime*'. The report made over 120 recommendations and observations for our work on PSVI. Our response to the report was presented to Parliament in June. We welcomed the subsequent establishment of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Sexual Violence in Conflict as an opportunity to continue our engagement and look forward to doing so throughout 2017.

Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC)

Children are often the most frequent victims of the devastating consequences of conflict, including through their unlawful recruitment and use as soldiers, suffering acts of sexual violence, killing, maiming, and abduction, the destruction of schools and hospitals which severely impacts their life chances, and the denial of humanitarian access to alleviate their suffering. The UK Government is strongly committed to supporting the rights of children caught up in conflict, and believes that children are entitled to an education and should feel safe within their communities. Failure to protect children affects a country's ability to emerge from conflict, undermining the prospects of future generations and the potential of future leaders.

The UK has continued to play a key role on the UN Working Group on CAAC, which leads the international response to the issue of child soldiers and child protection. This has included pressing those countries listed in the UN Secretary-General's annual report on CAAC to agree concrete action plans with

the UN to verify and release any child soldiers associated with armed groups and forces, in compliance with international law.

The UK has continued to support the campaign of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for CAAC, 'Children, not Soldiers', to end the recruitment and use of children by government armed forces in conflict. To assist the office of the Special Representative, the UK has also committed to increase its funding for the next four years (2016-17 to 2019-20) to support her work to implement the UN action plans, including through technical missions to monitor violations committed against children. The UK has also continued to push for the inclusion of child protection in peacekeeping responses through UN mandate renewals and resolutions.

Over the past year a number of government forces and non-state armed groups listed in the UN Secretary-General's annual report for committing violations against children have made welcome progress on this agenda. In March 2016, Sudan signed an action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by its security forces. In May 2016, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General oversaw the signing of the historic agreement between the Colombian Government and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) to begin the separation and reintegration of all children under 18 associated with the FARC-EP. The non-state group, Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N), signed an action plan with the UN in November 2016 to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children in conflict.

UN Peacekeeping and Human Rights

UN peacekeeping missions play a vital role in supporting the transition from conflict to peace in some of the most fragile regions in the world. The destabilising effects of such conflicts,

particularly the violence and displacement that they produce, often leave civilian populations vulnerable to human rights violations and abuses. Peacekeeping missions contribute to reducing that threat, and the protection of civilians is at the heart of their objectives.

The UK contributes strongly to both the policy and the delivery of peacekeeping. As a member of the UN Security Council, the UK has a key role in setting the mandates for peacekeeping missions. Working alongside our partners in the Council, we seek to ensure that all missions are mandated to protect civilians where relevant to the situation. All new UN peacekeeping missions since 1999 have included an element on the protection of civilians in their mandate, and for some it is the primary goal. The UK has also been a champion of the use of 'phased mandates' which prioritise the delivery of certain tasks, such as the protection of civilians, within a mission's overall mandate.

In September, the UK hosted the UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial: London 2016, which brought together 74 countries and international organisations to discuss how to improve peacekeeping. The London Communiqué, signed by 63 countries, provides a blueprint for peacekeeping reform based on improvement in three areas which we call the 3Ps of peacekeeping – planning, pledges and performance. By encouraging the UN and its member states to focus on these three areas, the UK aims to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of peacekeeping missions and their ability to protect civilians.

The Defence Ministerial included a clear focus on the role of women in peacekeeping, which all participants recognised as critical to its future effectiveness. The final communiqué called on the UN Secretary-General to double the number of women in UN military and police contingents by 2020 and to



Chamber of the UN Human Rights Council. Credit: UN Multimedia

prioritise the appointment of more women in senior leadership positions. More women in peacekeeping will enable more effective engagement with communities, as well as improved cultures and behaviours across the force – important for preventing incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse, and for the prospects of successful conflict resolution. We will continue to encourage the Secretary-General to meet these ambitions.

The UK has committed to doubling the number of UK troops serving in UN peacekeeping missions. The UK is delivering on this commitment through its existing deployment to the UN mission in Cyprus, and through new deployments to UN operations in Somalia and South Sudan. Both of these missions have a strong focus on the protection of civilians. The first troops are already on the ground and more will follow during 2017.

Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding encompasses efforts to prevent and reduce conflict and strengthen the resilience of political, socio-economic, and security institutions, in order to lay the foundation for sustainable peace and development in the longer term. The promotion of the rule of law, good governance and human rights is fundamental to sustaining peace. Peacebuilding is central to the UK's national security objectives and integral to safeguarding and promoting the human rights of those living in such states.

The UK pursues many of its peacebuilding goals through the UN, which plays a key role in addressing and preventing conflict. The UK is encouraging a more coordinated UN approach to peacebuilding. This includes working to strengthen the UN peacebuilding architecture and the UN's political, humanitarian, security and development tools so that they can work together more effectively.

Two of the UN tools for delivering peacebuilding activities in conflict-affected states are Special Political Missions (SPMs) and the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF). The UK takes a strategic approach to SPMs, including evaluating their mandates, leadership and resourcing. They operate in countries important to UK interests, such as **Somalia, Libya, Afghanistan** and **Iraq**. Many SPMs are mandated to monitor and protect human rights. For example, the UN Operation in **Somalia** (UNISOM) is helping build the Federal Government's capacity to promote respect for human rights and women's empowerment, advance child protection, prevent conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, and strengthen justice institutions. In **Afghanistan**, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) is mandated to monitor and promote human rights and the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

In 2016, the UK co-hosted a High-Level Pledging Conference which broadened the number of donors to the PBF. At the Conference, the UK pledged to provide £32 million over four years. **The PBF is currently supporting more than 120 projects in 25 countries.** Its purpose is to strengthen international support for post-conflict states, filling the gaps where other funding mechanisms cannot help. For example, in **Somalia** it provided project funding to increase the role and participation of women in Peacebuilding.

In 2017, we will continue to support UN institutions in their efforts to prevent conflict and help countries emerging from violence to progress towards sustainable peace. We support the Secretary-General's vision for an inclusive approach to conflict prevention, peace and development - the "Peace Continuum" - and his commitment to achieve the reforms needed to deliver it. The government has made clear that we support the UN deploying all of its tools, at the right time. In many cases that means we should deploy them sooner: warning rather than reacting and mediating rather than peacekeeping. We will also continue to ensure that our funding is used to strengthen the UN's efficiency and capacity to address conflict prevention, mediation and peacebuilding.

Responsibility to Protect, and Mass Atrocity Prevention

In 2016, the UK continued its support for the principle of the Responsibility to Protect, and mass atrocity prevention. We provided funding for the UN's Joint Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and Responsibility to Protect, and the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. This was used to strengthen understanding of the concept of R2P ('Responsibility to Protect'), raise awareness of countries at risk and support programmes in regions at risk of, or suffering from, mass atrocities, focused on promoting tolerance, improving governance and aiming to prevent the escalation of violence.

Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

The UK remains deeply concerned about continued allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) committed by UN Peacekeepers, including military, police and civilian personnel. In addition to the irreparable trauma this causes victims, it undermines the reputation and credibility of the UN. We want the UN to make every effort to reform the system to improve prevention, protection and response measures with the aim of eradicating SEA for good. We will continue to press for the mandatory training of peacekeepers both before and upon arrival in mission, for more effective reporting systems and for a more robust UN response to allegations.

The UK fully supports the UN Secretary-General's efforts to enforce a zero tolerance policy and we welcomed the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2272 in March 2016. This ground-breaking resolution reflects the Security Council's determination to tackle the scourge of SEA. It endorses the Secretary-General's decision to repatriate contingents where there is evidence of systemic SEA or if troop or police contributing countries fail to take appropriate steps to investigate allegations. We continue to urge all troop and police contributors with allegations against them to take the same, strong stance by carrying out investigations promptly and transparently and to report their findings to the UN.

The UN Secretary-General's Special Coordinator for SEA, Dr Jane Holl Lute, has coordinated a range of activity across the UN to address fragmentation in the UN system, including producing detailed response manuals for Missions and adopting a victim-centred approach to minimise further harm to the victim. In his first month the new UN Secretary-General

has asked the Special Coordinator to convene a high-level task force “to develop as a matter of urgency, a clear, game-changing strategy to achieve visible and measurable further improvement in the [UN]’s approach to preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse”.

The UK has provided £1 million of funding to support UN efforts on SEA. This has allowed the Department of Field Support’s Conduct and Discipline Unit to enhance pre-deployment vetting and training. The UK has also agreed to fund a communications strategy, currently under development, which will increase awareness within communities of how to report allegations of SEA and of the medical, financial and legal assistance available to victims and their families.

Overseas Security and Justice Assistance

The demand for UK security and justice assistance overseas is growing. Our expertise is highly valued across the world and improves the standards and capabilities of law enforcement and security agencies operating in the most challenging environments. Through this work we aim to improve the lives of people in the world’s most insecure regions, by enhancing the abilities of states to uphold the rule of law. However, it is important that we ensure that the skills and expertise we share are not used to cause harm. The Overseas Security and Justice Assistance Guidance is HMG’s tool for assessing the human rights risks of our work and identifying measures to mitigate those risks.

We have consulted human rights NGOs with an interest in this issue on a revision of the guidance to strengthen and clarify the process. The revised guidance was published in January 2017.

CHAPTER III: Strengthening the Rules-Based International System

United Nations

The UN is the leading forum for the development of collective standards on human rights; scrutiny of human rights violations and abuses; and dialogue between states on the major issues of the day. The main intergovernmental forum on human rights is the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council (HRC), of which the UK is currently a voting member. Other important UN fora include the UN General Assembly (UNGA) Third Committee, the UN Security Council (UNSC) and the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

The UK is a strong advocate of the need to consider all three UN pillars of peace and security, development and human rights in the round.

During 2016, the UK supported increasing dialogue on human rights at the Security Council, and briefings to the UNSC by the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The UK supported the then Secretary-General's call for an increased focus on prevention through his Human Rights Up Front Initiative, for example through funding the deployment of light teams to assess situations at risk of violations, atrocities or conflict, with the aim of contributing to a UN strategy for action. The UK raises the human rights of women and girls at all relevant UN fora.

The UK also supports the work of the UN's expert human rights mechanisms, including the treaty bodies (bodies of experts set up to monitor state compliance with their human rights treaty obligations) and special procedures (expert individuals or working groups mandated to monitor and review country or thematic issues), as well as the UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and its field presences, which translate political commitments into action on the ground.

The UK maintained its financial support for UN human rights, providing £2.5 million on top of our contribution to the UN Regular Budget. We provided a further £496,377 to support OHCHR field presences around the world.

As a major donor to the UN's human rights machinery, we work to ensure an efficient and sustainable delivery of its mandated work, via DFID's Multilateral Development Review and the UK's wider policy on UN Reform.

Human Rights Council

On 28 October 2016, the UK was re-elected to serve a further three year term on the Human Rights Council. Our campaign pledges reflected UK priorities at home and abroad, and drew on a tradition of democratic and inclusive values: strengthening the protection of human rights in the UN's work; translating the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development into action, leaving no one behind; making a stand for freedom of religion or belief at a time when too many are persecuted for their

beliefs; working to end violence against women and girls and promoting women's full participation and leadership in political and economic life; ending modern slavery; and promoting open societies and challenging the threats to civil society. We will also continue to use our voice to help strengthen the Council, to support countries working to improve their human rights record, and to hold to account states that commit serious and systematic violations against their citizens.

Country issues

Supporting reconciliation and reform in **Sri Lanka** remained important throughout 2016. In June the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein provided an update on implementation of HRC resolution 30/1 on Sri Lanka. The UK will continue to support the Government of Sri Lanka in its fulfilment of resolution 30/1, encouraging determined political leadership and inclusive consultations with all communities.

The UK continued to lead action in the Council on **Syria**. The March Resolution renewed the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry on Syria. In general, the Resolution demanded access for the Commission, supported the political talks led by UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura, called for the release of those arbitrarily detained, secured new language condemning Daesh, and condemned the regime's military offensive in eastern Aleppo. The September Resolution established a high level panel to take place in March 2017 to discuss enforced disappearance and arbitrary detention in Syria. The UN Third Committee resolution on Syria focused on accountability, the use of chemical weapons and humanitarian access.

In March, the HRC renewed the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on **Iran**. The vote at HRC was extremely tight, but the Canadian-led resolution at UN General Assembly Third Committee saw a significant increase in the vote count. The UK issued a statement setting out our concerns about the human rights situation in Iran, particularly the number of executions. We remain concerned about limitations on the right to freedom of religion or belief, restrictions on freedom of expression, the operation of the rule of law and women's rights.

The EU and Japan jointly led a resolution on the **Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)** at the HRC and UN General Assembly Third Committee. The HRC resolution renewed the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the DPRK, and established a group of experts to advise on holding perpetrators to account for crimes against humanity.

The UK supported the EU-led consensual resolution to renew the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on **Burma** and urged the establishment of an OHCHR country office. At the June HRC, High Commissioner Zeid delivered a critical report on violations against Rohingya and other minorities

in Burma. For the first time in many years, a resolution on Burma was not pursued in UNGA Third Committee. It is clear that the international community wishes to support Burma in its political transition, whilst ensuring that human rights are protected and monitored in the process.

At the June HRC, the UK supported a Ukrainian-led resolution on human rights violations in **Crimea** and eastern **Ukraine**, which maintains quarterly briefings of the HRC. This was preceded by a Joint Statement at the March HRC, which expressed the international community's concern at the situation in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, and urged Russia to end its illegal occupation and annexation. At the 71st session, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution tabled by **Ukraine** on human rights in Crimea and the City of Sevastopol, which called on **Russia** to allow human rights monitors to be given access to the peninsula.

The UK worked closely with the authorities of **Libya** and the African Group to agree a resolution designed to help the new Government of National Accord improve human rights. The resolution mandated the UN to continue its monitoring of human rights violations and abuses in Libya, including by Daesh, for a further 12 months, including a review of progress at the 33rd session of the HRC in September 2016.

The UK worked with the US at the March HRC to create a new monitoring and reporting mandate focused on accountability and transitional justice in **South Sudan**. At the September HRC, the UK helped broker a consensus resolution to renew the mandate of the Independent Expert on **Sudan**.

A consensus resolution on the human rights situation in **Yemen** was agreed at the September HRC. This provides for an enhanced investigatory role for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, independent HRC reporting timelines, and a clear message that the domestic human rights commission needs to improve.

The establishment of a Commission of Inquiry on **Burundi** marked the first time a serving HRC member had faced action under item 4 (countries of concern). This followed a series of interactive dialogues on Burundi, and a cross-regional joint statement which urged the authorities to uphold commitments made during high level UN visits, and to extend full cooperation to the group of independent experts.

The UK also worked with UN partners to renew the mandates of (amongst others): the Special Rapporteurs on **Eritrea** and **Belarus**; the independent experts on **Mali**, **Cote d'Ivoire**, **CAR** and **Somalia**; and the Special Envoy to **Haiti**. The UK also supported cross-regional statements on the human rights situations in **China**, **Burundi**, **DRC** and **Abkhazia** and **South Ossetia**, and raised concerns about a number of countries, including **Bahrain** and **Egypt**, through our national statements.

The UK called for two Special Sessions of the Human Rights Council during 2016: on Aleppo and on South Sudan. In September, the Council passed a resolution calling for an end to the indiscriminate attacks on civilians in Aleppo must cease, and for those responsible being held to account. It mandated the existing UN independent Commission of

Inquiry, responsible for gathering evidence about human rights violations and abuses committed in **Syria**, to conduct a special enquiry into the events of Aleppo.

In response to UN reports of ethnic cleansing and rape, the HRC convened an urgent session on **South Sudan**. The UK and US led a resolution which called on the South Sudanese Government to act to prevent genocide and requested that the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan focus on individual accountability. It also requested that the Commission submit recommendations to prevent further sexual violence and urged South Sudan to appoint a Special Representative on sexual and gender-based violence.

Thematic issues

The UK led a resolution to renew the UN mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, a priority issue for the Prime Minister. The resolution enables the Special Rapporteur, Urmila Bhoola, to visit and work with states to combat slavery and strengthens her role within the international system. Ms Bhoola met the Prime Minister at UNGA, as well as the FCO Minister responsible for Human Rights Baroness Anelay.

The June HRC supported the adoption of resolutions on ending Female Genital Mutilation, discrimination against women, and violence against women and girls. Hostile amendments were defeated. In the process, the strongest language yet in a HRC text was agreed on Comprehensive Sexuality Education. The UK was also active at the 60th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, promoting action on women's rights as essential to achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

One of the highlights of the June HRC was the leadership shown by a coalition of Latin American states (**Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Costa Rica, Brazil**) in running a resolution to create the UN's first ever monitoring mandate to report on violence and discrimination on the grounds of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. The mandate faced numerous attempts to derail it. The UK worked with like-minded partners and through our network of diplomatic missions to support the Latin American states in making the case for this groundbreaking initiative to pass. The votes at every stage of the process were extremely tight, reflecting the still sensitive nature of LGBT rights.

In partnership with Morocco, the UK led a cross-regional statement on the rule of law at the June HRC. In September, we led a further initiative stressing the importance of states promoting the rule of law at the national and international level in the implementation of Goal 16.3 of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

The UK was active in defeating vexatious amendments against resolutions on human rights defenders and on peaceful protests. This included supporting the rights of accredited NGOs to speak at the HRC, and for civil society and other stakeholders to participate during informal negotiations of HRC.

The biennial UNGA Third Committee resolution on the moratorium on the use of the death penalty incorporated new language on the role of National Human Rights Institutions, the importance of national debates on moratoria, an expansion of the transparency criteria relating to those on death row and to clemency and pardons.

The UK worked to secure agreement on the two religion-related resolutions at the HRC and Third Committee: Freedom of Religion or Belief (led by the EU) and Combating Intolerance (led by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation).

The UK believes that the whole spectrum of internationally recognised human rights standards and principles apply to older persons, as they do to all individuals without distinction. The UK engaged constructively in international debate, including at the HRC and UNGA Third Committee sessions; and at the annual session of the Open Ended Working Group on Ageing. In November Baroness Anelay hosted a roundtable for civil society organisations, academics, National Human Rights Institutions and key government departments to discuss the issues facing older persons, and the standards likely to be called for in a UN convention.

Universal Periodic Review

The second cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), a UN process in which the human rights records of UN member states are subject to peer review, concluded in 2016. As a strong supporter of the UPR process, the UK participated actively in the reviews. We will continue to promote best practice as the third cycle commences in 2017, when the UK will undergo its own examination.

Treaty Monitoring Bodies and Special Procedures

British experts continued to play prominent roles on a number of human rights treaty monitoring bodies in 2016. Professor Sir Malcolm Evans was re-elected as Chair of the Sub-Committee on the Prevention of Torture. Diane Kingston was vice-chair of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities until December 2016 and Professor Sir Nigel Rodley was chair of the Human Rights Committee. Sir Nigel Rodley sadly passed away in January 2017, following a long and distinguished career as a human rights academic and practitioner.

The UK underwent examinations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) during the spring/summer 2016. Reports on the UK and concluding observations of the Committees overseeing the treaties are available on the OHCHR website.

The UK extends a standing invitation to any UN Special Rapporteur who wants to undertake an official visit. In 2016, the UK received the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Assembly and Association, Mr Maina Kiai. The UK also welcomed a number of unofficial visits by UN Special Rapporteurs in 2016, including the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Guarantees of Non-Recurrence Pablo de Greiff, and (as noted above) the

Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, Urmila Bhoola.

Overseas Territories

The UK Government is ultimately responsible under international law for ensuring that the Overseas Territories comply with their international treaty obligations, including those governed by the United Nations Human Rights Treaty Body System. In 2016 Overseas Territory Governments contributed to the UK Government's treaty examinations under ICESCR, CRC and CERD.

At the Joint Ministerial Council in November, Overseas Territory Governments agreed to conduct a review of all reservations against core UN human rights treaties ahead of the UK's third UN Periodic Review in 2017. They also pledged to work in partnership with the UK Government to further develop the capability of Territories' National Human Rights Institutions, in line with international standards set out in the Paris Principles relating to the status and functioning of national institutions for the protection and promotion of human rights, and to promote understanding of our shared international human rights obligations.

Sanctions

Sanctions, such as arms embargoes, asset freezes and travel bans, are one of the tools used by the international community to promote human rights and democracy, particularly in conflict and post-conflict situations. Targeted measures can be effective in either coercing a change in the target's behaviour, constraining their ability to continue that behaviour, or signalling disapproval as a way of stigmatising and potentially isolating them. The UK is active on the UNSC and within the EU to promote "Smarter Sanctions" that are legally robust and effective in delivering our human rights goals.

The UNSC and EU have established a number of sanctions regimes that include measures targeting human rights abuses or violations, in countries such as **Central African Republic, DRC, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Iran, Libya, Sudan, Syria** and **Yemen**. Every year these measures are reviewed to ensure they remain effective. In the UN, the UK co-designated the head of Jaish-e-Mohammed, Masood Azhar, under UNSC Resolution 1267 (1999). In addition to new listings, the UK supported proposals to suspend FARC's listing under EU Common Position 2001/931/CFSP as part of our commitment to support the Colombia peace process.

Sanctions are also used to counter terrorist groups that commit human rights abuses such as Al Qaeda and Daesh. In 2015, the UNSC responded to the growing terrorist threat by adopting a series of resolutions, including new measures to choke off financial support for Daesh, and a call for increased co-operation between UN member states in the fight against terrorism.

Export Controls

International export control regimes provide the political will and technical expertise which underpin national export

controls. Their application through export licensing controls is a fundamental part of the international rules-based system. UK export licensing processes are key to ensuring responsible UK defence and security exports. All export licences are assessed on a case-by-case basis against the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria (the 'Consolidated Criteria'). The FCO will not recommend that the Department for International Trade issues a licence if to do so would be inconsistent with our international obligations, including those related to sanctions or to the Arms Trade Treaty, or where there is a clear risk that the items exported might be used for internal repression, for the commission of a serious violation of International Humanitarian Law, or for aggression against another country, or for asserting a territorial claim by force.

The Commonwealth

The UK is strongly committed to the Commonwealth. As an organisation it has a role to play in dealing with shared global challenges, such as promoting democracy and development. In 2016 we continued to work with Commonwealth partners to achieve a greater degree of commitment to uphold the values enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter.

Baroness Scotland assumed office as Commonwealth Secretary General in April. We supported the Secretary General's plans to reform and revitalise the Commonwealth Secretariat, and worked with her and our Commonwealth partners to ensure the Commonwealth realises its full potential by promoting freedom, democracy and human rights.

The UK continued to work closely with members of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) to help it explore its strengthened mandate for the protection of standards of governance and human rights. We value CMAG's contribution in encouraging countries to adhere to the Commonwealth Charter. In New York in September CMAG expressed deep disappointment at the lack of progress which the Maldives had made in priority areas previously outlined by CMAG earlier in the year. In October, the Maldives announced their decision to withdraw from the Commonwealth. The Foreign Secretary expressed his disappointment, and reaffirmed the UK's belief in the Commonwealth and its commitment to improving the lives of people across all its member states.

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) continued to Chair the Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (CFNHRI). The FCO is providing financial support to the NIHRC to fulfil this role. The CFNHRI plays an important role in enhancing respect for human rights by member countries. The NIHRC is highly regarded on the international stage, and well-placed to work with Commonwealth members to ensure that they establish National Human Rights Institutions which comply with the Paris Principles relating to the status and functioning of national institutions for the protection and promotion of human rights.

The UK has also supported continuing work through Commonwealth universities to build tolerance and respect

for religious beliefs and thus counter violent extremism, and on strengthening the capacity, coordination and strategic approach of Commonwealth NGO networks to promote more inclusive and stable societies, specifically the human rights of LGBT people. We are monitoring progress closely and look forward to seeing tangible results in late 2017.

In April 2018 the UK will host the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in London. This provides an opportunity to build on the excellent progress made at the previous Heads of Government Meeting in Malta and reinforce the need for all members to observe the values outlined in the Charter. We will continue to work with the Commonwealth Secretariat and all members, in partnership with Parliament, non-governmental bodies and civil society, to strengthen adherence to Commonwealth values.

Europe

The European Union (EU)

As the UK moves towards leaving the European Union, we will continue to play a full and active role by working in partnership with the EU institutions and other member states, to amplify our work to promote and protect human rights and democracy around the world. This includes coordinating positions with the EU and other like-minded partners in multilateral fora, such as the UN.

The EU's actions are guided by the **EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy** adopted in 2015. On 20 June 2016, the EU published its latest **Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World**^[8]. The report detailed the human rights work undertaken in 2015 by the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, and by the **EU Special Representative for Human Rights** (EUSR), Stavros Lambrinidis, and the network of 139 Delegations around the world. In 2016 the EUSR led the first exploratory talks on human rights with **Iran**.

The EU is a major supporter of **transitional justice**, ensuring accountability for perpetrators and redress for victims, using measures that promote justice, truth, reparations and guarantees of non-recurrence.

The UK will continue to support countries working towards the EU **accession process** and remains committed to driving reform, embedding stability and addressing shared challenges such as security and migration in the Western Balkans and Turkey. In some of the accession countries, freedom of expression continues to present a particular challenge. There continues to be a need for better protection of minorities, in particular Roma, who continue to suffer from discrimination and difficult living conditions. Discrimination and hostility towards other vulnerable groups, including LGBT persons, remains a serious concern.

Similarly, the **European Neighbourhood Policy** offers a privileged relationship to 16 of the EU's neighbours in the east and the south. Human rights and democracy are a core element of the policy. The EU uses both "hard and soft

[8] <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10255-2016-INIT/en/pdf>

instruments”, such as its economic influence and financial aid, to promote political reforms in the countries of its neighbourhood in order to consolidate democracy, and strengthen the rule of law and respect for human rights. The EU links its support to the level of democratic reform, offering more to those partners who make progress, while reconsidering support where reform is not forthcoming.

Council of Europe

The UK used its membership of the Council of Europe (CoE) to advance its human rights objectives in Europe and beyond. It engaged with other member states and with CoE institutions to encourage implementation of standards on human rights, democracy and rule of law, to raise any concerns about developments, and to support the CoE’s provision of technical and other assistance.

The UK funded projects in a number of member states to support human rights and democracy including a CoE roundtable event on the abolition of the Death Penalty in Belarus funded from our Magna Carta Fund; and human rights training for the Armenian armed forces supported by the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund.

Thorbjørn Jagland, the CoE’s Secretary General, continued to lead efforts to ensure that the CoE’s standards were observed across Europe and to highlight political, constitutional and human rights situations of concern in a number of member states including Russia, Azerbaijan, Poland, and Ukraine.

The CoE’s response to the attempted coup and subsequent developments in Turkey demonstrated the way its institutions can work together to support human rights. The Secretary General travelled to Turkey shortly after the attempted coup – the first International Governmental Organisation leader to do so. The Secretary General made a number of public statements condemning the coup attempt and calling for understanding of the challenges it had brought to the democratic institutions in Turkey, while simultaneously calling on the authorities to uphold their obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights.^[9] He also clarified the CoE’s position on the death penalty. Following the Secretary General’s visit, an expert level dialogue was initiated between the Turkish authorities and CoE judicial experts.

The Venice Commission (the CoE advisory body on constitutional matters) supported member states in addressing a series of potential constitutional reforms. The Commission provided an Opinion on the suspension of the parliamentary inviolability of members of Turkey’s Grand National Assembly, and in November a delegation of the Venice Commission visited Ankara to discuss the emergency Decree-laws. Their draft Opinion was adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe plenary session in December.

The CoE’s Commissioner for Human Rights, Nils Muižnieks, continued in 2016 to focus on the promotion and protection of the human rights of migrants and refugees. He also published and submitted to the European Court of Human Rights written

observations on a case concerning the killing of prominent Russian human rights defender Natalia Estemirova, highlighting the Russian authorities’ failure to prevent intimidation of human rights defenders in the North Caucasus.

European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR)

The Court’s caseload continues to be high. Its backlog of pending cases stood at 75,250 by the end of 2016, although the number of new cases allocated for consideration fell by 24%. A major issue for the Court is the significant number of cases from Hungary and Romania relating to prison conditions and prison overcrowding. Ukraine, Russia and Turkey have the largest number of cases before the ECtHR. In 2016, there were 399 applications against the UK allocated for consideration by the Court. Of these, the Court produced judgments in 14 cases, finding no violation in seven of them. This compares well with other similar-sized countries.

Article 15 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) allows contracting states to derogate from certain rights guaranteed by the ECHR at times of war or other public emergency threatening the life of the nation to the extent strictly required by the exigencies of the situation, provided that such measures are not inconsistent with the state’s other obligations under international law. On 10 October 2016, aiming to protect the UK armed forces from future vexatious litigation, the UK’s Secretary of State for Defence announced that the UK Government “intends derogating from the European Convention on Human Rights, where this is appropriate in the precise circumstances of the operation in question. Any derogation would need to be justified and could only be made from certain Articles of the Convention”.

Committee of Ministers (CoM)

The CoM, comprising the governments of member states, is the CoE’s principal decision-making body. It discusses issues of a political nature, and holds member states to account on human rights, democracy and the rule of law, including by supervising the implementation of ECHR judgments.

On 7 September, the Ministers’ Deputies held an exchange of views with Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkey, attended by several foreign affairs ministers and other high-level representatives of member states. Thereafter the situation in Turkey was regularly discussed by the Deputies. We welcomed the Secretary General’s engagement with the Turkish authorities and joined support for democracy and rule of law in Turkey whilst highlighting the need for proportionate action in line with international human rights obligations. The CoM also focused on developments in Ukraine.

The CoM discussed the Secretary General’s third annual report on human rights which identified five building blocks for democratic security: an efficient, impartial and independent judiciary; freedom of expression; freedom of assembly and a vibrant civil society; legitimate democratic institutions; and inclusive societies. Thematic areas of debate included freedom

[9] <http://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/-/turkey-secretary-general-jagland-concerned-about-state-of-emergency-measures-and-freedom-of-expression>

of assembly and association, and freedom of expression – with the CoE noting the strong ground-swell of support for freedom of expression after the Paris attacks of January and November 2015. The CoM repeated condemnations of, and adopted declarations on, executions carried out in the United States, Japan and Belarus.

In its supervisory role, the CoM debated and adopted decisions expressing significant concern at Azerbaijan's ongoing failure to implement the judgment in the case of Ilgar Mammadov (the politically motivated detention and prosecution of the leader of an opposition party). Exceptionally, the Committee decided, in June 2016, to make this a standing item on the CoM agenda. The most recent decision, adopted in December 2016, made clear for the first time that the Committee stood ready to consider using all methods available (including some of the procedures set out in the Convention in the case of non-compliance) to pursue implementation of this case by Azerbaijan. UK cases debated included those relating to Northern Ireland (*McKerr*) and prisoner voting rights (*Hirst*).

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's concept of security places equal emphasis on human rights and fundamental freedoms alongside politico-military and economic-environmental dimensions. We support the OSCE's efforts to hold states to the human rights commitments they have made and to help states implement them, by working with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFOM), and the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM). We are also committed to safeguarding and enhancing the vital role that civil society plays in holding states to account, at a time when civil society space is under pressure in some states.

The UK Government values the OSCE's work as an important element of the rules-based international system and as an amplifier of the UK's commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms. This was underlined by the Foreign Secretary's attendance at the informal meeting of foreign ministers in Potsdam and by the Minister for Europe's attendance at the formal ministerial in Hamburg during the German Chairmanship. The Minister for Human Rights and Prime Minister's Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict also visited the OSCE in July and addressed the Permanent Council on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, and addressed the Forum for Security and Cooperation on Women, Peace and Security.

Throughout 2016, the UK worked with like-minded partners in the OSCE to raise human rights concerns. We were instrumental in generating a number of statements on human rights at the weekly OSCE Permanent Council. We also organised events at the OSCE on media freedom and violence against women, and provided expert speakers for events on disability rights and on gender.

The UK was active during the OSCE's annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) in Warsaw, the largest human rights meeting in Europe. The UK delivered six national

statements, as well as two statements on behalf of the EU and its member states. The UK also organised events on Women, Peace and Security and on combating hate crime, and participated in an event on freedom of religion or belief. Regrettably, no new human dimension decisions were agreed at the December Ministerial Council. However, we secured the support of a majority of the states for a joint human rights statement.

We continued to work with like-minded partners to resist attempts to undermine the work of the OSCE autonomous institutions. We seconded an adviser to the office of the RFOM, and nominated a candidate for High Commissioner on National Minorities.

Looking ahead, we will work to safeguard the mandates of the OSCE's institutions, and support the Austrian Chair-in-Office, appointing high-calibre successors to the RFOM, the HCNM and Director ODIHR. The UK will be chairing the Human Dimension Committee in 2017. Working closely with Austria as Chair-in-Office we will focus work on fundamental freedoms and tackling intolerance, while supporting the Austrian Chair's priority of rebuilding trust within and between states.

International Justice System and International Criminal Court

The UK firmly believes that perpetrators of atrocities should be held to account for their actions, and that victims should see justice done. International justice does not stop with punishing the perpetrators – it goes further by helping victims of atrocities and their communities to come to terms with the past, starting the healing process and deterring those who might otherwise commit such violations in the future.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague is the world's first permanent independent international criminal court with jurisdiction over the most serious crimes of international concern. At the end of 2016, there were ten situations before the ICC: Uganda, DRC, Darfur, Central African Republic I, Kenya, Cote d'Ivoire, Libya, Central African Republic II, Mali and Georgia. In addition, there were ten preliminary examinations: Afghanistan, Colombia, Nigeria, Guinea, Iraq, Burundi, Ukraine, Gabon, Registered vessels of Comoros, Greece and Cambodia, and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

The annual ICC Assembly of States Parties (ASP) took place in The Hague in November. The main focus was on how to react to notifications of withdrawal from three states parties. We regret the decision of any State Party to leave the ICC as this reduces the universality of the Court. Other priorities included enhanced cooperation between the ICC and States Parties and finalising a budget which balanced the needs of the ICC and the financial constraints of states. The then FCO Minister of State Baroness Anelay delivered the UK address in the plenary session. In 2016, the UK contributed £8.12 million to the ICC.

The UK continued to support the ICTY as it moves towards closure. In March, the ICTY found Radovan Karadžić guilty on one count of genocide, five counts of crimes against humanity and four counts of violations of the laws or customs of war.

He was sentenced to 40 years in prison. In 2016, the UK contributed £1.1 million to the ICTY.

The Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals (MICT) took on the residual work (appeals, witness protection, sentence enforcement etc) of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). In 2016, the UK contributed £770,000 to the MICT, and £400,000 to the ICTR.

The UK also contributed £1 million in voluntary funding to the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) and smaller amounts to the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) and Residual Special Court for Sierra Leone (RSCSL).

International Humanitarian Law (IHL) is a body of law, distinct from International Human Rights Law, which regulates the conduct of hostilities in armed conflict. It is codified primarily by the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols. The UK National Committee on IHL coordinates the government's efforts for the promotion and full implementation of IHL. The UK continued actively to support the state-led process, facilitated by the ICRC and the Government of Switzerland, to strengthen respect for and enhance the implementation of IHL, which was renewed at the 32nd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in December 2015.

The UK made a number of pledges at the conference, on issues such as the promotion and dissemination of IHL, respecting and protecting health care in armed conflict and other emergencies, and preventing sexual and gender-based violence. The UK is taking action to fulfil these pledges and will report on progress at the next International Conference in 2019.

CHAPTER IV: FCO Human Rights Programme Funds

In 2016-17 the FCO reaffirmed its commitment to supporting human rights, democracy and an effective rules-based international system, through the doubling of the Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy to £10.6m, and the launch of the new Rules-Based International System Fund (RBIS) at £9.8m. Taken together, these two funds supported over 160 projects in more than 80 countries. The Magna Carta and RBIS Funds support projects primarily in Official Development Assistance (ODA) eligible countries (98% of funding overall). The FCO provide further details on ODA project on an annual basis, which can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/official-development-assistance-oda-2>. Outside of our ODA projects, the Magna Carta Fund in 2016/17 also supported Human Rights and Democracy projects in developed countries such as Russia and Bahrain.



Participants of a workshop run by Christian Solidarity Worldwide and supported by the Magna Carta Fund. The project worked to promote the right to Freedom of Religion or Belief in South Asia by providing human rights defenders with key advocacy and documentation skills.

Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy

The expansion of the Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy has strengthened the FCO's commitment to our principles on human rights and democracy through increasing the FCO's contribution to supporting project work on the ground.

The Magna Carta Fund supported 118 projects in 2016-17 compared to 101 projects the previous year. The fund has expanded the scope of these projects to include multiyear proposals and has also increased the average value to projects from £62,000 per project per annum in 2015-16 to an average project value of £96,000 per project per annum in 2016-17.

The Magna Carta Fund supports projects across a range of Human Rights and Democracy themes including strengthening civil society, abolition of the death penalty, promoting democracy, freedom of religion and belief, freedom of expression, preventing torture, promoting women's rights, LGBT Rights and the rule of law.

The Magna Carta Fund operates across the world, in over 60 countries in total, but the majority of spending is focused in the 30 Human Rights Priority Countries set out in this report. These projects vary in method of engagement and theme including working with major institutions such as the Venezuelan National Assembly to promote more effective and transparent governance procedures. Recently the Venezuelan project has supported workshops on Climate Change and Rule of Law; over 120 people attended the two workshops including various Venezuelan MP's, with the majority showing an increased understanding of the area under discussion.

We also promote more "bottom up" approaches in delivering human rights goals with projects such as support for promoting the inclusion of religious tolerance and legal protection for freedom of religion in secondary school curriculums across the Middle East and North Africa, in order to create more inclusive societies in the long term.

In 2016/17 the Magna Carta Fund also began to support a number of two year projects where we believed that better outcomes could be achieved with longer term programme support. We tended to support multiyear projects predominantly in Human Rights Priority Countries which had established long term human rights goals, such as in Bangladesh where we supported project work promoting workers' rights in the garment, leather and tanner industries to protect against modern slavery and other human rights abuses. The project focused on providing training to 200 factory workers and trade unions at management and shop floor levels to provide people with the tools to challenge human rights violations and to understand the UN Guiding Principles to increase accountability.

The Rules-Based International System Fund

The rules-based international system (RBIS) is founded on relationships between states and through international institutions and frameworks, with shared rules and agreements on behaviour. Additional ODA funds were secured in the last Spending Review expanding the FCO's Strategic Programme Fund (SPF) for the Financial Year 2016/17. The RBIS Fund was established in July 2016 to support delivery of Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) commitments to strengthen and adapt the rules-based international system.

The Fund supports work on strengthening global peace, security and governance; strengthening resilience and

response to crises; tackling extreme poverty and helping the world's most vulnerable; and promoting global prosperity through five work strands: Strengthening the Commonwealth; Strengthening the efficiency and capacity of the UN; Supporting the International Criminal Court; Promoting the active participation of women in peace-building discussions and expanding the reach and implementation of our Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI); Working with business to build stability in conflict zones.

The Fund is helping the new Commonwealth Secretary General modernise and reform the Commonwealth and will enable the Commonwealth to make distinctive contributions to international efforts to tackle global challenges. Under its UN programme, the Fund helps improve the UN's delivery of services in developing countries, strengthens the UN's support for stabilisation and reconstruction in fragile and conflict-affected states, strengthens the UN's role in managing protracted crises, and promotes the developmental benefits of the global digital economy.

CHAPTER V: Consular Assistance to British Nationals Overseas

Introduction

Consular assistance is at the heart of what the FCO does. This is essentially advice and practical support provided by UK officials to support British nationals overseas when something goes wrong.

Human rights work is integrated with consular priorities. In 2017, the UK will continue to provide assistance to British nationals overseas, lobby against the death penalty, provide support to those in detention, and raise allegations of torture and mistreatment where appropriate.

Death Penalty

At the end of 2016, 13 British nationals faced the death penalty worldwide and 63 were detained on charges that could attract the death penalty if the defendants were found guilty. The UK opposes the use of the death penalty in all circumstances. When a British national is exposed to the death penalty, we intervene at whatever stage and level is deemed most effective, from the moment a death sentence becomes a possibility, in order to prevent the execution of any British national. We work closely with legal teams employed by British nationals facing the death penalty, and are supported in this endeavour by two NGOs: Reprieve and the Death Penalty Project (DPP). In 2017, we will continue to intervene in death penalty cases as and where necessary.

Torture

The UK takes all allegations or concerns of torture and mistreatment very seriously. Consular staff are required to take urgent action if they receive an allegation or suspect that a British national (including dual nationals) has been subjected to torture or mistreatment. We will try to ensure the British national involved is safe. With the British national's permission, we raise the allegation with the local authorities, requesting a full, transparent and independent investigation, in line with international standards. In addition to raising individual cases, where we have received a number of allegations we will raise concerns with the state authorities about the prevalence of mistreatment and torture allegations. When responding to an allegation, consular staff will avoid any action that might increase the risk to the detainee concerned.

In 2016, we provided torture and mistreatment awareness workshops overseas to help our staff take appropriate action in high-risk countries. We also held reviews of all consular mistreatment cases with the aim of identifying regional trends and developing strategies to engage and lobby the local authorities.

Overseas prisoners

We offer consular assistance to all British nationals and dual nationals in a third country, whether they are in police custody, awaiting trial, or serving a prison sentence. In certain exceptional circumstances, we can help dual nationals in the country of their second nationality and nationals of other European and Commonwealth countries.

We aim to contact British detainees as soon as possible after being told about their arrest or detention. Depending on the individual, country, and local circumstances, we will also seek to visit them as soon as possible. Our primary role is to monitor their welfare and to provide basic information about the local legal and penal system, including a list of English-speaking lawyers and interpreters, and the availability of legal aid.

We work in close partnership with the charity Prisoners Abroad to support the welfare of British detainees overseas. Prisoners Abroad offers grants and vitamin supplements to improve the health and well-being of prisoners held overseas, and provides resettlement assistance on return to the UK. We work with Prisoners Abroad on over 1,000 cases a year, particularly those of prisoners with medical concerns.

Forced Marriage

The UK remains a world leader in tackling forced marriage. It is recognised as child abuse, domestic abuse, a form of violence against both women and men, and ultimately a serious abuse of human rights.

In 2016, the Forced Marriage Unit (FMU), a joint FCO and Home Office Unit, provided advice or support related to a possible forced marriage case in over 1350 cases, involving over 60 countries. We delivered over 100 outreach events to a wide range of agencies, schools and communities. The sessions are aimed at raising awareness of forced marriage, by highlighting the risks and enabling professionals to recognise the warning signs, in order to ensure that the right action is taken to help safeguard children and adults from this abhorrent abuse. We also funded eight UK-based NGOs to deliver projects raising awareness of forced marriage and the support available for those at risk.

In 2017, the FMU will continue to provide assistance and raise awareness of the issue across communities in the UK. We also aim to complement this work through engagement with like-minded countries.

CHAPTER VI: Human Rights Priority Countries

In 2015, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) designated 30 “Human Rights Priority Countries” (HRPCs)^[10]. We designated HRPCs following careful consideration against three separate criteria: the human rights situation in the country; the country’s human rights trajectory; and the UK’s ability to influence change. The purpose of selecting HRPCs was to help us prioritise our efforts. This is not to say that we do not work on human rights in many other countries in the world, and indeed through multilateral fora.

HRPCs have been treated as priorities for funding from the Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy. The cut off point for this report is 31 December 2016. At <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2015-priority-country-reports> you will find our latest assessments of human rights in the HRPCs.

Afghanistan

The overall poor security situation and the ongoing insurgency in Afghanistan continued to limit progress on human rights in 2016. Whilst the Afghan Government continued to show commitment to an agenda of ambitious reform, outlining this at the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan in October 2016, implementing this agenda presented serious challenges. A UN report on the Protection of Civilians^[11] showed a 3% increase in the number of civilian victims in the conflict (the highest number since UN records on civilian casualties began), including a 24% increase in the number of child casualties. The majority of these were attributed to armed insurgency groups, including the Taliban and Daesh, but a rising number were a result of Afghanistan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) actions. Concerns around rights of women, democracy, and protection for human rights defenders (HRDs) also remain.

A lack of recognition of women’s rights has left women and girls susceptible to violence, poverty and exploitation. The Afghan Government places a strong emphasis on improving the position of women in Afghanistan. The UK continues to work with the Afghan Government, civil society and the international community to implement Afghanistan’s National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Other programme and political activity includes supporting victims of violence, raising awareness of the right to access to justice, support for women’s economic empowerment, supporting an increase in the number of female graduates from the Afghan National Army Officers Academy (ANAOA) and increasing the number of female prosecutors.

In addition to support for the rights of women, our human rights objectives in 2016 focused on supporting the development of Afghanistan’s electoral system and promoting improvements to the rule of law. We are also helping to develop human rights institutions, particularly the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC). Moreover, we are supporting a project to train HRDs to protect themselves better in hostile environments.

The death penalty was carried out on six individuals following conviction for terrorism offences. These were the first instances of the use of the death penalty since 2014.

The UN reported that over 650,000 Afghans were forced to flee their homes in 2016, a record number of internal displacements. Another 600,000 Afghans returned, predominately from Pakistan. The UN estimates up to another million are likely to return in 2017 and almost half a million are expected to be displaced internally. This is likely to place a further strain on the country’s capacity to both respond to the needs of its population and maintain people’s right to an adequate standard of living.

Displacement on this scale could increase vulnerability to modern slavery. The UK is seeking to support work to tackle modern slavery through aspects of our programme work focusing on understanding, prevention, protection and prosecution.

We will continue to encourage the Afghan Government to deliver on commitments it made in October 2016. We will continue to provide support to the development of the AIHRC to increase its capacity to investigate allegations of abuse by security forces.

Bahrain

There was a mixed picture on human rights in Bahrain in 2016. Compared with the region, Bahrain remains progressive in women’s rights, political representation, labour rights, religious tolerance and institutional accountability. In the bicameral Parliament, the Council of Representatives is multi-faith. Across the two chambers, 15% of parliamentarians are women. Women in Bahrain are also present at all levels in business and government, including ministerial, judicial and ambassadorial positions. In 2012, the government established independent human rights and oversight institutions such as the Ministry of Interior (MOI) Ombudsman, the Prisoners’ and Detainees’ Rights Commission (PDRC), and the Special Investigations Unit (SIU), which work to safeguard human rights and provide independent oversight of police behaviour and detention

[10] Afghanistan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Burma, Burundi, Central African Republic, China, Colombia, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Libya, Maldives, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Yemen and Zimbabwe.

[11] https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_annual_report_march_2016_final.pdf

standards. These were the first of their kind in the region and remain unique in the Gulf.

However, the UK voiced its concern over measures taken by the government in 2016 which further restricted some civil liberties, including freedom of expression and assembly. These include the dissolution of the main Shia opposition political society in Bahrain, Al Wefaq; the arrest of prominent Bahraini human rights activist Nabeel Rajab in relation to tweets issued in 2015; and the announced revocation of citizenship of Bahraini Shia cleric Sheikh Isa Qassim. We are concerned over the alleged prevention of some Bahraini activists from travelling to the UN Human Rights Council in June and September 2016. We also have concerns over the deprivation of citizenship where this renders individuals stateless.

The UK Government has discussed its human rights concerns with the Government of Bahrain both in public and in private. In 2016, the UK continued to work with the Government of Bahrain to encourage the development of effective and accountable institutions, strengthening the rule of law and justice reform. The UK continued to provide technical assistance to the National Institute of Human Rights (NIHR), the Ombudsman, the PDRC, and the SIU, amongst other institutions. To give one example of progress: in May 2016, the PDRC released a report on its independent inspection of Jau Rehabilitation and Reformation Centre, and highlighted a number of key concerns in respect to prison conditions, which the Ministry of Interior has committed to implementing.

In 2017, the UK will continue to work with the Government of Bahrain to support the Bahraini-led reform agenda. We welcome the Government of Bahrain's commitment to continue, into 2017 and beyond, with implementing its own series of socio-economic reform programmes which are designed to improve opportunities for all Bahrainis and which include developing new ways that all citizens can hold government institutions to account.

We continue to oppose the use of the death penalty in all circumstances and countries. The Foreign Secretary made a statement on 15 January 2017 following the execution of three men convicted of carrying out an IED attack against members of the Police Force. The Bahraini authorities are fully aware of our position and the Foreign Secretary has raised the issue with the Bahraini Government.

People's Republic of Bangladesh

There was no improvement in the overall human rights situation in Bangladesh during 2016. Pressure on freedom of expression persisted and extremist attacks and sectarian violence against religious and other minority communities continued. An increasing number of terrorist attacks, including at the Holey Bakery restaurant in Dhaka on 1 July in which 22 people died, saw the government pursue a strict "zero tolerance" approach to terrorism. There were allegations of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, torture and enforced disappearances involving Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs). Concerns about the treatment of women and girls remain, and the death penalty is still a legal punishment for a wide range of offences. New laws were introduced that had the

potential to restrict freedom of expression. Civil society groups have expressed concern that the Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) law passed in 2016 may hamper the ability of Bangladeshi NGOs to deliver vital programmes and hold government to account.

In 2016, the UK urged the Bangladesh Government to treat all those arrested in line with Bangladeshi law and international standards. The UK was also clear that there must be no impunity, irrespective of the individual circumstances of the victim or alleged perpetrator. We encourage the government to implement fully the Supreme Court's judgement on provisions of arrest without warrant and on interrogation on remand.

In 2016, the High Commission supported a review on implementing the Rabat Principles and how legitimate restrictions on freedom of expression to prevent hate speech should be applied in Bangladesh.

The UK also worked closely with international partners to link bloggers under threat from extremist attacks with organisations that provide shelter and support for human rights defenders. Through the Magna Carta Fund, we supported work to draw up clear sentencing guidelines for judges. This will help ensure that, where the death penalty is retained, it is applied in a manner that meets international standards - a step on the path to eventual abolition.

Despite impressive progress towards middle income status and promoting gender equality, Bangladesh continued to score poorly against some indices. The 2016 Global Slavery Index (GSI) placed Bangladesh 21st out of 167 countries for the estimated percentage of people living in conditions which the GSI described as modern slavery. The FCO has supported work to help UK businesses in Bangladesh meet their obligations under the UK's Modern Slavery Act (2015). Through our partnerships with local human rights NGOs and projects in the justice sector, the UK pressed for improved implementation of policies protecting and promoting the status and empowerment of women and girls.

Looking ahead, we will engage constructively with all Bangladeshi political parties and our international partners, to strengthen democratic accountability and capacity to hold participatory elections. The formation of the next Election Commission provides a vital opportunity to build confidence that the political process can be free and fair. We will press for zero tolerance against inhumane treatment and abuse of due process in the justice system and by LEAs. And we will encourage the Bangladeshi Government to uphold the international human rights standards it has signed up to and to keep open the space for debate and challenge, including through our support to media and civil society.

Burma

There was some progress on human rights in Burma during 2016. Following the National League for Democracy (NLD) Government's inauguration on 30 March, the positive trend on civil and political rights continued. The government showed early commitment to repealing repressive legislation by setting

up a commission to identify priority laws for repeal or reform. The government also showed commitment to addressing the underlying issues in Rakhine State by setting up the new hybrid Burmese/international Rakhine Advisory Commission headed by Kofi Annan, to provide advice and recommendations for a durable solution. However, the situation in Rakhine State deteriorated following attacks on Border Guard Police posts on 9 October. There were widespread allegations of torture, ill treatment, extrajudicial killing, arson, mass rape and other forms of sexual violence committed by security forces. Limited media, diplomatic and humanitarian access made it difficult to verify facts, and initial statements from the government's Investigation Commission set up by the government were not credible. The intensification of military operations in Kachin and Shan States led to civilian casualties and widespread displacement of civilians. Some NGOs have documented shelling of civilians. Arbitrary arrest, restrictions on movement and limited humanitarian access are also deeply concerning.

UK human rights priorities in 2016 focused on supporting the democratic transition, in particular the new civilian administration. Although the military respected the outcome of the election, they remained in control of the key Ministries of Defence, Borders and Home Affairs, as well as the powerful General Administration Department, which staffs regional and state-level governments. In August, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi launched a new peace initiative ("Union Peace Conference: 21st Century Panglong"), which brought most of the key actors to the table for dialogue. This has been followed up with a number of regional-level dialogues on the peace process. However, continued military offensives in the north-east diminish trust and hamper progress in the peace process. The UK remains active in supporting the peace process through funding and political dialogue, including via the multi-donor Joint Peace Fund which supports a nationally-owned and inclusive peace process in Burma.

The interim recommendations of the Rakhine Advisory Commission, led by Kofi Annan, are expected in spring 2017. The UK stands ready to provide support for these recommendations, as well as wider efforts to resolve on-going conflict situations and ease the plight of the Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine. We will monitor freedom of expression and religion, in particular the increasing use of Section 66(d) of the 2013 Telecommunications Act, which effectively limits online freedom of expression and carries a penalty of up to three years in prison. The UK will continue to provide support for legislative reform, as there are still many laws that do not comply with international standards, including some which have already been reformed. In light of ongoing concerns over human rights in Burma, we will also aim to maintain the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Burma at the Human Rights Council.

Burundi

The human rights situation in Burundi showed no signs of improvement in 2016, following the political crisis that began in 2015. A pattern of arbitrary arrests and detentions, torture, enforced disappearances and unlawful killings was observed. The Burundian authorities banned or suspended several

human rights NGOs and continued to subject human rights defenders, journalists and opposition supporters to harassment and intimidation. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) raised concerns over the risk of ethnically-motivated violence due to instances of ethnic hate speech and teachings in the country. There is also an increasing trend in modern slavery, linked to the human trafficking of girls to work overseas as domestic servants in Gulf Arab households.

In multilateral fora, the Burundian Government adopted a policy of non-co-operation, failing to appear before the UN Committee Against Torture to respond to allegations of widespread human rights violations and rejecting a report presented to the UN Human Rights Council by the United Nations Independent Investigation on Burundi (UNIIB). The report exposed numerous grave human rights violations and documented examples of horrific sexual violence. In October the Burundian Government suspended its co-operation with OHCHR in Burundi, and began the process of withdrawing from the International Criminal Court (ICC).

The UK's human rights objectives in Burundi in 2016 focused on preventing mass violence and offering humanitarian support to the growing number of at-risk Burundians. The UK funded a nationwide human rights monitoring and reporting programme supporting a network of investigators and local human rights activists, and placed particular emphasis on the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence. The latter included support to women's associations to reduce stigmatisation and increase women's engagement with decision-makers, and the development of early warning and investigation processes. The Department for International Development (DFID) provided £3 million in humanitarian assistance in Burundi and £46 million for Burundian refugees in neighbouring Rwanda and Tanzania. The UK also worked through the EU and UN, championing a Human Rights Council Resolution to intensify international monitoring and reporting of human rights abuses; supporting a UN Security Council Resolution authorising the deployment of UN police in Burundi; and backing a rollover of EU restrictive measures against individuals whose activities included violence, repression or serious human rights violations.

Looking to 2017, improved respect for human rights will remain the UK priority in Burundi. Given that the protracted political crisis in Burundi has been the root cause of the deterioration in human rights since 2015, we will strongly support international efforts, led by the East African Community and former Tanzanian President Mkapa, to find a peaceful political solution in line with the Arusha Peace Accords. We will continue to support targeted and high level interventions to combat modern slavery and improve human rights and security, including the relationship between security forces and the general population. We will also look to raise greater domestic and international awareness of sexual violence in Burundi, with increased access to justice for survivors.

Central African Republic (CAR)

During 2016 the human rights situation in the Central African Republic (CAR) showed no sign of improvement. Armed groups

continued to commit human rights abuses with impunity, including unlawful killings, torture and other ill-treatment, abductions, and sexual violence. There was evidence of progress in the political sphere, with a smooth transition of power following the elections, followed by commitments from the CAR Government to prioritise work to eradicate security-related problems.

The UK's main human rights objective in CAR for 2016 was to continue to work towards ending impunity, which would first require the implementation of robust processes of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) and Security Sector Reform (SSR). The lack of a properly functioning judicial system in particular meant that little action could be taken by the CAR authorities to address human rights abuses by non-state actors and bring perpetrators to justice. 2016 saw some further progress on the creation of a Special Criminal Court to aid the fight against impunity, but sufficient funding and qualified judges and legal staff were still being sought.

In July 2016, the UK supported the replacement of the EU Military Assistance Mission by an EU Training Mission (EUTM RCA), mandated to advise on the reform of CAR's defence sector and train the national army (FACA). This strand of SSR will play a crucial role in ensuring that CAR has the resources to tackle non-state actors and to prevent future state actor violations, such as the attacks on civilians which followed the murder of a FACA commander in October.

The United Nations (UN) took steps to address the persistent problem of allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by UN Peacekeepers from the UN Multidimensional Integrated Mission in CAR (MINUSCA). MINUSCA established joint protection teams, appointed Investigation Officers, and carried out targeted training and local outreach activities. The UK provided £1 million of funding to support training, vetting and implementation of the necessary reforms to the UN system in support of the Secretary General's zero tolerance policy.

Wider international community support for CAR's development was channelled via a donor conference in Brussels in November 2016, at which more than \$2 billion was pledged. The UK committed £36 million in humanitarian funding and £24 million in contingency funding. These funds will help support CAR's Humanitarian Response Plan.

Looking ahead to 2017, it will be important for the CAR Government to implement its National Plan for Recovery and Peacebuilding. This should provide a framework to return to stability and help reduce the number of human rights violations and abuses in CAR. The UK will continue its support of the UN peacekeeping mission, MINUSCA and the EUTM. In 2017 the EU Mission will help deliver SSR objectives by training battalions of CAR armed forces and by supporting the CAR authorities in developing their own training and education systems. The UK will work with both international partners and President Touadéra's Government towards achieving these goals, including by providing diplomatic and financial support.

China

In 2016, the UK continued to have significant human rights concerns in China, particularly in relation to civil and political rights which were subject to increasing restrictions. There were some improvements in economic and social rights. China introduced White Papers on judicial reform which included emphasis on governance through law. The UK and China co-operated to reduce modern slavery and law enforcement agencies worked with China to tackle human trafficking.



Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson raised human rights, including the crackdown on lawyers and activists in China at the 2016 UK- China Strategic Dialogue

Space for civil society was constrained. New laws and regulations, including China's first Cyber Security Law, further restricted freedom of expression. China's first Charity Law helped put more domestic NGOs on a legal footing. However, a new Foreign NGO (FNGO) Management Law, which took effect on 1 January 2017, risked disrupting links with civil society outside China. Courts accepted some cases against the government on LGB&T issues. However, 'conversion therapy' remained widely available despite criticism by the UN Committee Against Torture.

There were continued restrictions on minority and religious groups, particularly in Tibet and Xinjiang. Online and media censorship continued and prominent bloggers, including Druklo (aka Shokyang), were sentenced to prison. In Tibet, there were reports of demolitions of homes and religious buildings and self-immolation. Requests for human rights monitoring visits to the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) were refused.

The UK was increasingly concerned about the '709' human rights lawyers and associates. Many, including Li Heping, continued to be held without trial. Others, like Zhou Shifeng, were tried without their choice of legal counsel. Some, including Wang Yu, were released following televised confessions but remained subject to strict bail conditions. Family members and friends were targeted. The handling of these cases ran contrary to China's commitment to rule of law reforms.

The UK continued to monitor developments closely and supported projects in priority areas including modern slavery, torture prevention, the death penalty, women's rights, and

civil society. We assess that this co-operation contributed to improvements in women's rights, including strengthening implementation of China's first domestic violence law.

The UK raised human rights with China robustly and at every level. The UK-China Human Rights Dialogue remained an important channel for relaying a full range of concerns and cases. The 2016 Dialogue focused on pre-trial detention and the importance of an active civil society. We continued to act on cases of concern, including working with international partners and NGOs in China and the UK.

The UK attempted to observe trials, though we were often obstructed by the authorities. We maintained contact with human rights defenders and their families. We raised human rights in China in bilateral and joint statements at the UN Human Rights Council. We supported EU statements and called publicly for the release of detained human rights lawyers and related cases.

In 2017, restrictions are likely to continue, affecting groups that may include lawyers and members of NGOs. Some of those detained in the '709' crackdown may face trial. The operating environment for some foreign NGOs is likely to become more challenging as a result of the FNGO Management Law. We expect to work with China bilaterally and through the UN and G20 to combat all forms of modern slavery.

We will continue to raise human rights and values issues through a range of channels, both publicly and privately.

Finally, in this 20th year since the handover of Hong Kong to China, we assess that the Special Administrative Region is generally working well. Its success continues to be based on the high degree of autonomy, rule of law, independent judiciary and other rights and freedoms set out in the legally-binding Sino-British Joint Declaration. We continue to monitor implementation of the Joint Declaration through Six Monthly Reports to Parliament, and to act on cases of concern. For example, during 2016 we consistently raised concerns relating to the case of the Hong Kong bookseller Lee Po.

Colombia

2016 was an historic year for Colombia, with the signing of a peace agreement on 24 November between the Colombian Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), which ended the longest running conflict in the western hemisphere. This followed six weeks of intense negotiations, after an initial deal was rejected by the Colombian people in a plebiscite. Despite progress there are continuing concerns about conflict-related violence, including abuses committed by illegal armed groups. According to the UN, 63 human rights defenders (HRDs) were killed in 2016, 50% higher than in 2015; 75% occurred in rural areas. Civil society reporting suggest this number could be as high as 125.

It is unclear whether there is an ideological pattern behind the killings, but many have taken place in areas vacated by the FARC as illegal armed groups have stepped in. The Colombian Government has taken welcome steps to investigate some of

those murders and in December the President announced the formation of a new commission, involving the military, police, government and civil society to help accelerate investigations of these crimes. There are also continuing concerns about the need to improve prison conditions and access to justice for victims, including those of sexual violence.

There are reports of continuing discrimination against the LGBT community. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reviewed Colombia's Seventh Periodical Review^[12] in November, noting positive developments, including the adoption of a National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking.

Prime Minister Theresa May discussed human rights with President Santos during the Colombian State Visit to the UK in November 2016, when we reaffirmed our shared commitment to human rights in a Joint Declaration. The UK promoted the protection of HRDs through project funding, field visits, high level engagement and joint work with the EU and UN. The Embassy also hosted a visit by the UN Special Rapporteur for HRDs in September 2016. During the review period, Her Majesty's Ambassador continued to take an active role in the "Ambassadors with Defenders" initiative, which launched a media campaign in December to highlight the work of HRDs.

Our Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict (PSVI) projects with women's organisations helped to report and document cases of sexual violence using the International Protocol (1,200 criminal reports and 507 cases documented to date). We also supported the attendance of three Colombian experts at the Wilton Park conference to develop a Global Action Plan against Stigma. The UK chaired the International Cooperation Working Group on Gender Justice and Peace in Bogota in 2016. This initiative was designed to address women's political participation in Colombia.

The Colombian Government reports that it has begun to implement their National Action Plan for Business and Human Rights, which was first launched in December 2015 following collaboration with the UK. We are working with the Colombian Ministry of Mines on a project that focuses on inclusion of the "remedy" pillar of the UN Guiding Principles, which will encourage companies to address adverse affects of their activities on local communities, by resolving them through legitimate processes.

In 2017, the UK will continue to focus on three human rights priority issues in Colombia: HRDs, PSVI and business and human rights. We will continue to work with the Colombian Government to ensure that respect for human rights, access to justice and preventing sexual exploitation continue to be guiding principles during implementation of the peace process with the FARC.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)

There was no sign of improvement in human rights in the DPRK during 2016. We continue to have grave concerns

[12] http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR/C/COL/CO/7&Lang=En

about the DPRK's disregard for, and violations of, international human rights norms and obligations. As documented in the UN Commission of Inquiry report on Human Rights in the DPRK, there are widespread violations, including torture; rape; summary executions; disappearances; and using starvation as a means of control and punishment.

In the field of disability rights, there was a small sign of progress in December, when the DPRK Government ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. However, in March the country disengaged itself from the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), following the adoption of a Japan-EU-led resolution on the DPRK. The DPRK Foreign Minister stated at the time that the DPRK would never be bound by international resolutions that he claimed were politically motivated. For the remainder of the year, the DPRK continued to refuse meaningful engagement with the international community on human rights and rejected resolutions passed by the UN HRC and UN Security Council (UNSC). Despite this, they have continued to highlight and criticise human rights concerns elsewhere (particularly in the EU, Republic of Korea and the United States).

The UK continued to urge the DPRK Government to acknowledge the existence and extent of its human rights violations and to demonstrate a willingness to take steps to address these issues. The Ambassador and Embassy officials raised human rights issues at a number of meetings with DPRK Government officials in Pyongyang. Senior FCO officials used meetings in London with DPRK Embassy officials to raise concerns over human rights issues, including those documented in the Commission of Inquiry report. UK officials urged the DPRK Government to uphold its human rights obligations, to agree to a visit by the UN Special Rapporteur and other UN officials, and to engage with the international architecture on human rights.

We also maintained pressure on the DPRK through international fora such as the UN General Assembly, the UNSC and the HRC, where UK Government lobbying helped secure widespread support for strong resolutions. The Japan-EU-led resolution on DPRK at the HRC was adopted without a vote on 23 March and included the renewal of the mandate for the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the DPRK.

As part of the UK's policy of critical engagement with the DPRK, we will continue to work bilaterally and with international partners, including on further resolutions, and will raise human rights issues with the DPRK Government at every opportunity. We will continue to support small-scale humanitarian project activities in the DPRK which provide assistance to the more vulnerable elements of DPRK society in remote communities outside Pyongyang.

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

The human rights situation in the DRC deteriorated further during 2016, particularly as a result of activity by armed groups in eastern DRC, who remain responsible for the majority of abuses. However, there has been a significant increase (400%) of abuses related to elections. There was continued shrinkage

of democratic space, particularly in relation to the electoral process as President Kabila's constitutional mandate drew to a close in December. The United Nations Joint Human Rights Office (JHRO) documented a total of 1,102 human rights violations, a huge increase since last year. The majority of incidents, for which the state was reportedly responsible, related to arbitrary arrests and detentions; spurious charges against opposition figures; attacks on freedom of speech; and extrajudicial killings by state agents. State human rights violations continued, including the disproportionate use of force by the security services of the DRC against supporters of the political opposition. Additionally, there have been accusations of grave and widespread human rights violations by security forces in the Kasai region in response to a local uprising. In August, the DRC's Family Code was revised, which was a positive outcome for gender, LGB&T and minority rights. The DRC currently ranks in the top ten countries for numbers of people in modern slavery, with more than 80,000 people affected.

The UK's human rights work focused on protecting political space and preventing sexual and gender-based violence. The FCO funded projects to help victims of sexual violence in conflict to obtain justice and worked with the DRC Government to encourage use of the International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict by legal and medical practitioners. The UK continued to contribute towards long term stability in eastern DRC, through support to the MONUSCO (UN Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the DRC); the work of the Department for International Development (DFID); and projects and programmes supported by the UK's Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF). We remain deeply concerned about the risk of further massacres in and around the city of Beni, and are supporting MONUSCO in its work to prevent future incidences and reduce human rights violations and abuses in the east of the country. Our office in Goma has facilitated and driven the sharing of information about the massacres amongst those investigating a number of massacres in Beni territory.

In 2017, the UK will continue to focus on preventing human rights violations and abuses during the electoral period. We will monitor arrests, detentions and disappearances of opposition and civil society figures, and will raise any concerns with the DRC Government. We will continue to encourage the DRC Government to take concrete steps to improve respect for human rights, particularly by taking action against armed groups in the east. We will look for ways to include work against modern slavery and people trafficking in our existing and forthcoming programme activity. We will also continue our work on the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative, funding a number of grassroots projects and working closely with the DRC President's Personal Representative on the Fight Against Sexual Violence and Child Recruitment, as well as other relevant ministries.

Egypt

The human rights situation in Egypt in 2016 saw increased restrictions on civil society, freedom of expression and reports of police abuses.

In 2016, reports of torture, police brutality and enforced disappearance continued. A report released by the Egyptian NGO, the Nadeem Centre, documented 535 individual cases of torture, 123 deaths in detention (of which 21 were due to torture) and 980 cases of enforced disappearance. These figures were compiled from media reports; we are unable to verify them independently.

In 2016, journalists continued to be imprisoned in Egypt, which is the world's third-worst jailer of journalists, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). The arrests of journalists, activists, protesters and human rights defenders, as well as the pressure imposed on civil society, continue a worrying trend of restrictions on freedom of expression, association and assembly.

Restrictions on civil society worsened significantly in 2016. Several human rights defenders and NGOs were banned from travelling and/or had their assets frozen in connection with the ongoing 'Foreign Funding Case' against NGOs. On 29 November 2016, Egypt's Parliament passed a draft NGO law which, if ratified, will significantly restrict NGOs' ability to register, access funding and operate freely. There has been international scrutiny of the draft law, including a joint statement by 60 domestic and international NGOs stating the law would "wipe out independent civil society". The current status of the law remains unclear.

In November, Egypt's President Sisi set up the Detained Youth Committee, an initiative to release youth detained in protest or freedom of expression related cases. The formation of this Committee was welcome. In the same month, 82 individuals received a presidential pardon. This was also welcomed. However, pre-trial detention periods which extend beyond the legal limit continue to be a matter of concern. Local NGO the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights has documented 1,464 cases of pre-trial detention used beyond legal limits. Photo-journalist Mahmoud Abu Zeid was detained in August 2013 and remains in pre-trial detention.

During 2016, the UK Government was active on several fronts in support of human rights in Egypt. The then FCO Minister for the Middle East and Africa, Tobias Ellwood, issued public statements on the restrictions on civil society. His statements included concerns regarding the new draft NGO law which will create obstacles to international support to Egypt, and the ongoing 'Foreign Funding Case'. We have sent representatives of the Embassy in Cairo to observe hearings linked to the Foreign Funding Case. We have raised human rights concerns at ministerial and senior levels, including during Prime Minister Theresa May's meeting with President Sisi in September. The UK also raised human rights concerns through statements at the UN Human Rights Council.

The death of Italian Cambridge University PhD student Giulio Regeni was raised with the Egyptian authorities in London and Cairo, including calling for a full and transparent investigation and full cooperation with the Italian investigators. The Embassy started work on two Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy projects to strengthen accountability and the rule of law and improve documentation of human rights abuses in Egypt. We are working with the Egyptian authorities to strengthen capacity to counter human trafficking and

smuggling and provide protection for vulnerable groups who could become victims of modern slavery. Finally, we worked within the EU to ensure human rights were incorporated into the EU/Egypt partnership priorities.

Following the terrorist attack against El-Botrosiya Church on 11 December 2016, claimed by Daesh, the Prime Minister wrote to the President of Egypt to express her deep condolences. The UK Government has been clear that freedom of religion or belief needs to be protected and that the ability to worship in peace is a vital component of a democratic society. We welcome President Sisi's consistent calls for peaceful coexistence and the Government of Egypt's expression of support for the rights of Christians and for religious tolerance, and we hope to see further progress in tackling the drivers of sectarianism.

During 2017 we will continue to raise our concerns with the Egyptian authorities in public and in private, both bilaterally and in multilateral fora. We will also continue to explore options for programmatic interventions to improve the human rights situation. Our priorities will continue to be detention of political activists, police abuses, and restrictions on civil society.

Eritrea

Human rights concerns persisted in Eritrea throughout 2016, with little improvement. Eritrea is a one party state with no political opposition; there is no anti-discrimination legislation to protect LGBT&T rights; citizens are subject to arbitrary extensions to periods of already prolonged national service; and severe constraints persist on freedom of religion or belief and freedom of the press. Of grave concern in 2016 was the final report delivered on 21 June by the UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea, which stated that there were "reasonable grounds to believe that crimes against humanity have been committed by the Government of Eritrea". The Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Eritrea continues to be denied access to the country.

However, there were small signs of increased engagement. The Government of Eritrea showed an enhanced willingness to cooperate on human rights by working with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) who visited Eritrea in early 2016. The Government of Eritrea also signed a four-year implementation programme with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to take forward the 92 recommendations from the 2014 Universal Periodic Review (UPR). We welcomed these developments. There continues to be no evidence to suggest that modern slavery exists in Eritrea and women in Eritrea remain protected by law with Female Genital Mutilation being banned.

In 2016, the UK continued to focus on three areas we consider essential for human rights improvement in Eritrea. Firstly, clarification of the conditions of national service and an end to arbitrary extensions; secondly, full implementation of the constitution; and thirdly, enhanced cooperation with international human rights bodies to implement the UPR recommendations. The UK worked with the Eritrean authorities and with our international partners in the EU and the UN to encourage Eritrea towards implementation of

these improvements. In 2015, the Government of Eritrea had already committed to limiting national service to 18 months. However, by the end of 2016 this had still not been officially implemented and the service period continued to be extended arbitrarily. Furthermore, the government said that work on drafting a new constitution was under way; but we saw no evidence of this in 2016. Whilst cooperation with human rights bodies was increasingly taking place, there had been no substantive implementation of any UPR recommendations by the end of 2016. Eritrea remained one of the top sources of irregular migration to Europe and we made clear to the Government of Eritrea that the poor human rights situation was one of the main drivers. In 2016, Eritrea continued to engage with international partners through the African Union/ EU Khartoum Process which aims to tackle forced migration and human trafficking.

In 2017, the UK will continue to press the Government of Eritrea to improve its human rights record and to work with international partners. The UK will work with Eritrea to stem the flow of irregular migration and put in place sustainable projects where human rights objectives and preventing trafficking will be the core components.

Iran

There was little improvement in the human rights situation in Iran in 2016. Areas of serious concern were the frequent use of the death penalty, freedom of religion and freedom of expression.

Although not all executions are made public, estimates suggest that there were over 530 in Iran over the course of the year. This represents a decrease on the record number seen in 2015. Iran continued to use the death penalty against juveniles and in cases that are not deemed the “most serious” under international law, such as drugs offences.

Homosexuality continues to be illegal and punishments can range from 100 lashes to the death penalty for both men and women. In July, 19 year old Hassan Afshar was hanged after he was convicted of forced male to male anal intercourse when he was 17.

Religious minorities continue to face restrictions in Iran. Members of both constitutionally recognised and unrecognised religions continue to suffer discrimination for peacefully manifesting their beliefs. There were several reports of church property being seized and converts being harassed by security services. May 2016 saw the eighth anniversary of the incarceration of seven Baha’i leaders who have been sentenced to 20 years imprisonment. Arrested in 2008, the seven are amongst the longest serving prisoners of conscience in the world.

The Iranian authorities continue attempts to limit the freedom of citizens in cyberspace. In December the owners of the most followed channels on the messaging app, Telegram, were required to seek official permits in order to operate. There were also repeated reports of popular Telegram channels being hacked by the Iranian cyber police and the owners of these channels being interrogated. This follows on from

the November 2015 arrest of 170 individuals for publishing “obscene” content online.

Towards the end of the year, President Rouhani announced a Charter on Citizens’ Rights. The charter is the first of its kind in Iran and has the potential to have a positive impact. However, it appears to repeat many rights that are already legally enshrined and it remains to be seen whether the rights of citizens will improve as a result.

The UK has consistently pressed Iran to improve its human rights record, both through bilateral engagement and with our international partners, including through the UN and the EU. In 2016, we strongly supported the renewal of the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur. In December, we welcomed the UN General Assembly’s adoption of the Resolution on Human Rights in Iran. The UK lobbied hard for global support and the Resolution passed with an increased number of positive votes.

In 2017, we will continue to engage with our international partners to hold Iran to account for its human rights record. In particular we look forward to working with the new UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Iran, Asma Jahangir, and call on Iran to allow her access to the country. We will also support the upcoming EU/Iran dialogue on human rights.

Iraq

The human rights situation in Iraq remained of grave concern in 2016. Despite the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) reclaiming a large proportion of formerly Daesh-held territory, Daesh continued to commit atrocities in those areas that remained under their control, including targeting civilians in Eastern Mosul with mortar rounds and indiscriminate shooting. Reports allege that the ISF and Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) were involved in torture, forced disappearances and extrajudicial killing against those fleeing the fighting in Fallujah and other areas. The Government of Iraq (GoI) has taken steps to address this issue, repeating its commitments to investigate all reports of abuses and violations and to ensure that those responsible are held to account. Reports also allege that the Kurdish Security Forces (KSF) have engaged in the unlawful demolition of buildings and homes in liberated areas. The Kurdish Regional Government also undertook to investigate all allegations of violations by the Kurdish Security Forces.

During 2016, we continued to engage with the GoI on human rights issues, particularly the protection of civilians during the military campaign, combating violence against women and girls, preventing sexual violence in conflict – including support for victims - and freedom of religion or belief. The UK has continued to support implementation of Iraq’s National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, and provided funding for workshops to raise awareness of the importance of female participation in decision-making. But women and children from all communities continue to be at heightened risk of suffering violence.

We have supported efforts to promote religious tolerance across Iraq by encouraging key leaders, teachers and students to raise awareness of freedom of religion or belief.

The UN estimate that there are now over 3.2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Iraq and that 10 million are in need of humanitarian assistance. Prime Minister Abadi stated that the protection of civilians and meeting the needs of the displaced population are priorities. The imperative to protect civilians has been at the forefront of the Mosul campaign. Through the Department for International Development (DFID), the UK has been one of the largest donors towards the UN's Mosul Flash Appeal. The UK is also the largest contributor to the Iraq Humanitarian Pooled Fund, through which we fund projects to meet the most urgent needs of displaced Iraqis. That includes emergency healthcare, water and sanitation, and protection services for women and girls. The UK committed £90m of humanitarian assistance in 2016, taking our total contribution since 2014 to £169.5m.

Iraq's election to the UN Human Rights Council for 2017-19 provides an opportunity for the UK to deepen cooperation and coordination with the GoI on areas of mutual interest, in particular working to end sexual violence against women and girls, tackling modern slavery, and promoting women's full participation in political and economic life. In addition, we will continue to focus strongly on protecting civilians during the Mosul campaign and providing humanitarian assistance to those most in need.

The State of Israel and The Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs)

We continued to be concerned by the human rights situation in Israel and the OPTs in 2016. We were concerned by the Israeli Government's violation of international human rights and humanitarian law in the context of Israel's occupation of the OPTs. We also had concerns about human rights infringements by the Palestinian Authority (PA) and grave concerns over those by Hamas in Gaza.

The upsurge in violence, which began in late 2015, continued until April with 'lone-wolf' style terror attacks on Israelis, and clashes between Palestinians and the Israeli security forces. Attacks were characterised by random stabbings, shootings and vehicle rammings. We were concerned by the apparent role of incitement, particularly on social media. President Abbas condemned the violence in general terms in January but did not comment on specific attacks. On 9 March, the then FCO Minister for the Middle East and Africa, Tobias Ellwood, issued a statement condemning the violence. Some of the measures Israel introduced in response (including punitive house demolitions, and restrictions on movement and access) exacerbated existing human rights concerns. We were concerned over possible use of excessive force by the Israeli security forces against Palestinians.

Israeli demolitions of Palestinian structures increased significantly, marking the highest incidence since 2009, and resulting in the displacement of more than 1,600 Palestinians in the West Bank including East Jerusalem. The UK was deeply concerned by the scaling up of Israel's systematic policy of settlement expansion. On 23 December, the UK supported UNSCR 2334 which reaffirmed that settlements were illegal under international law. Mr Ellwood issued a statement on

8 December expressing concern at the introduction of the Land Regularisation Bill to the Israeli Knesset, which seeks to 'legalise' settlement outposts considered illegal even under Israeli law.

The number of Palestinians Israel held in administrative detention increased, with 700 being held at the end of the year. We continued to seek improvements in the treatment of Palestinians in detention, particularly children.

We were also concerned by continued reports of mistreatment towards detainees by the Palestinian security forces in the West Bank. For example, in August a detainee in Nablus was beaten to death by the Palestinian security forces.

We continued to have concerns about abuses of human rights under the Hamas de facto authorities in Gaza. 17 death sentences were issued and three were carried out without the ratification of the Palestinian President. We continued to have concerns over restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly and respect for LGBT&T rights. We remained deeply concerned that Hamas and other militants were re-arming, re-building tunnels, and holding military training camps.

In 2017, we will continue to work for a negotiated settlement to the conflict based on a viable and secure two state solution. We will continue to oppose aspects of the Israeli occupation that violate human rights and international law, including demolitions and settlement construction, and to advocate improvements in the treatment of detainees. We will support efforts to promote Palestinian reconciliation, which will ultimately alleviate the humanitarian situation in Gaza by helping create the right conditions for easing movement and access restrictions which would aid reconstruction. We will challenge the PA to make substantive progress on human rights, including on incitement.

Libya

The human rights situation in Libya remained a serious concern in 2016. Although the signature of the Libyan Political Agreement in December 2015 led to the formation of a Government of National Accord and Presidency Council in Tripoli in March, ongoing conflict and armed groups acting with impunity continued to impact on the civilian population, as well as crimes by Daesh; intimidation and attacks on journalists and human rights defenders; arbitrary detentions and summary executions. There were grave concerns over abuses of migrants by militia groups as they attempted to transit Libya. Conditions in migrant detention camps were a particular concern.

Reports by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and NGOs including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, documented that armed groups from all parties of the conflict disregarded international norms for civilian protection and committed violations and abuses of human rights, including abductions, extrajudicial executions, unlawful killings, torture and other ill-treatment. In most of the country, the judicial system was unable to bring those responsible to justice. There were also frequent reports of intimidation, detentions and assassinations by all parties.

The findings of an investigation by the OHCHR underlined the seriousness of the situation to the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) during its 31st session in March 2016. During this session, the UK co-sponsored a new HRC Resolution on Libya, which commits Libya to implement recommendations stemming from the OHCHR investigation and requested follow-up assessments by OHCHR. The UK noted with concern that the Libyan authorities had limited capacity to investigate human rights violations and abuses and bring perpetrators to justice.

On 27 September, Martin Kobler, the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General to Libya updated the Human Rights Council in Geneva on the situation, reflecting that little or no improvements had been made.

The UK continued to work in support of a sustainable political settlement under the framework of the Libyan Political Agreement, resulting in a stable and inclusive government able to meet the needs of the Libyan people and contribute to wider regional stability and security. We worked closely with international partners, including in the region, the EU, and the UN in pursuit of this objective.

Through the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, the UK has funded programmes in Libya to support peace mediation and local level stability, women's rights, civil society and freedom of speech. The UK has provided humanitarian support to people affected by the conflict, including supplies and technical support to medical centres, assistance to those who have been forced to flee their homes, and support to migrants held in detention. We continued to encourage the Libyan Government of National Accord to prioritise respect for universal human rights, especially the most vulnerable such as migrants and minority groups.

During 2017, we will continue to raise our concerns with the Libyan authorities in public and in private, and through international mechanisms such as the UN Human Rights Council. We will explore further options for programmatic interventions to improve the human rights situation in Libya.

Republic of Maldives

2016 saw the Government of Maldives take further steps to squeeze democratic space and erode political and civil freedoms. The UK, along with other international partners, was vocal in raising concerns, including over the lack of an effective separation of powers, and the continued use of anti-terrorism legislation to silence opposition voices. Several high-profile political figures, including opposition leaders, received long sentences following trials that lacked transparency and judicial independence, and failed to follow due process. The space for journalists and civil society to operate freely and independently was further reduced with the passing of a Defamation and Freedom of Speech Act. Several journalists were arrested and news organisations raided, threatened or closed down. The Freedom of Assembly Act passed in August restricts the right of assembly, and has been criticised as being unconstitutional.

The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) expressed its disappointment with Maldives' lack of progress

in these areas and placed Maldives on its formal agenda in September. In October, Maldives responded by announcing its withdrawal from the Commonwealth. The UK expressed regret at the decision to withdraw from an organisation which Maldives has benefited from in many spheres, and which is committed to the development of free and fair societies, democracy, good governance and human rights.

In the first half of 2016, the Government of Maldives took steps towards the reintroduction of the death penalty after a moratorium of more than 60 years. No executions took place, but several death sentences were upheld by the courts. In three cases the convicts were under 18 at the time of the crime, in breach of Maldives' international obligations.

The UK continued to engage with the Government of Maldives to raise human rights concerns, including on the death penalty, rule of law and the shrinking democratic space. Former FCO Minister for Asia, Hugo Swire, raised these issues when he met President Yameen in Malé in January; and in September, the then FCO Minister for Asia and the Pacific, Alok Sharma, had further discussions with Maldivian Foreign Minister Dr Mohamed Asim in London. The UK continued to work with international partners, including the UN, to encourage the Government of Maldives to reverse its negative trajectory on human rights, and to enter into a genuine dialogue with opposition parties. These diplomatic efforts were reinforced by UK funded project work with civil society aimed at strengthening human rights and democracy in Maldives. This included funding a human rights conference in Maldives to mark Human Rights Day in December, as well as work to build the capacity of women's organisations to improve gender equality.

In 2017, the UK Government will continue its bilateral engagement with the Government of Maldives, opposition parties, civil society and the media, including through public and private messaging by ministers and senior officials on our democracy and human rights concerns. The UK will continue to encourage greater democratic space ahead of local elections in 2017 and the presidential elections scheduled for 2018.

Pakistan

Pakistan's human rights situation in 2016 remained of significant concern. Serious violations of women's and children's rights continued throughout the year. Terrorist incidents persisted despite a continued improvement in the security situation. The country's minority communities, including religious minorities - in particular Ahmadiyya, Christian and Shia communities - suffered widespread persecution. Pakistan maintained its use of the death penalty, albeit at a reduced rate: there were 87 executions in 2016 compared to over 325 in 2015. Modern slavery continued to be a major problem. The operating space for international and domestic NGOs remained restricted.

Throughout 2016, the Government of Pakistan continued to put in place the institutional and legal framework needed to address the many human rights challenges the country faces. Building on work started in 2014 and 2015, including the establishment of a human rights ministry and National

Commission for Human Rights, in February it launched a comprehensive human rights action plan. National and provincial assemblies enacted legislation to protect women from honour crimes and violence, improve Hindu minority rights and outlaw forced conversions in Sindh province. However, the government made only limited progress in harnessing these positive developments to effect real improvements to the lives of Pakistan's citizens. Performance against the action plan was patchy and implementation of human rights legislation remained a major challenge.

The UK's human rights objectives for Pakistan for 2015–2018 focus on six themes: the death penalty; women's and children's rights; freedom of religion or belief and minority rights; respect for the rule of law and democracy; freedom of expression; and economic and social rights, including modern slavery. In all these areas, we raised our concerns and urged Pakistan to adhere to its international obligations. Ministers and officials pressed Pakistan to reinstate the moratorium on the death penalty. We repeatedly expressed concerns about violations of freedom of religion or belief and misuse of the blasphemy laws. Under the Government's Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy, we supported projects to promote religious freedom and build human rights capacity in provincial administrations and civil society. Our support for criminal justice reform was extensive, provided through programmes to improve civilian capacity to investigate, prosecute and convict criminals, including terrorists, in line with international standards. The EU's Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus promoted economic development and compliance with 27 international conventions (including seven human rights conventions). Pakistan remained a priority for UK development assistance with programmes designed to help its most vulnerable citizens exercise their social and economic rights, and embed democracy.

The review of Pakistan's human rights performance under the UN Universal Periodic Review process in November 2017 is an opportunity for the government to demonstrate real progress on its human rights commitments. A decision not to extend the use of military courts to try civilian terrorist cases, a major concern given their lack of transparency, would be a welcome sign. In 2017, the UK will continue to support the Government of Pakistan in building a more secure, prosperous and democratic country where the rights of all citizens are respected regardless of gender, ethnicity or belief.

Russia

The human rights environment in Russia deteriorated further in 2016.

The UK was deeply concerned about the ongoing crackdown on civil society and freedom of expression. The government increasingly used legislation to restrict civil society organisations, including broadening the definition of "political activity" under the "Foreign Agents" law. The introduction of the "Yarovaya Law" in July, aimed at tackling religious extremism, resulted in increased restrictions of online freedoms and a clampdown on religious activity. State media television continue to promote a narrow, pro-government, narrative.

State Duma Elections in September, whilst transparently administered, featured numerous procedural irregularities. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) monitoring mission noted it was negatively affected by restrictions to fundamental freedoms and political rights. Modern slavery remained a serious problem in Russia with an estimated one million people in Russia living in slavery (according to the Global Slavery Index). Although the government took legislative measures to deal with this, they fell far short of what would be needed to tackle the problem. LGBT persons continued to be at significant risk of persecution and violence, with the Russian Government taking little action to combat homophobia among the Russian population.

The UK's human rights work in Russia focused on five priority themes: civil society and democracy; equality and non-discrimination; rule of law; the North Caucasus; and freedom of expression. We sponsored a range of projects, including a visit by Sir Ian McKellen that raised the profile of LGBT rights. We continued to raise our concerns publicly, through multilateral organisations, and directly to the Russian authorities.



Shakespeare Lives on Film Ambassador Sir Ian McKellen holds a copy of the Russian constitution during a visit to Ekaterinburg with the British Council where he spoke to the local LGBT community.

Severe human rights abuses by the de facto Russian authorities in Crimea continued. Ukrainians opposed to the Russian annexation have been sentenced, arrested or investigated under fabricated charges of extremism; others face pressure to renounce their Ukrainian citizenship in favour of Russian citizenship or be denied access to basic services. Some have been forced into exile. In some cases Ukrainian citizens have been transferred outside Crimea to prisons in Russia.

Ethnic minority Crimean Tatars continued to suffer particular human rights abuses. A number of Crimean Tatars have been imprisoned, and homes and mosques were regularly raided. The UK has frequently raised human rights abuses in Crimea with the de facto Russian authorities. In December, the UK supported a successful UN General Assembly resolution which called for Russia to uphold its obligations in Crimea

under applicable international law, and to allow access for international human rights monitors.

In eastern Ukraine, the Russian-backed conflict continued to devastate communities. At the end of 2016, the UN estimated the conflict had cost 10,000 lives and internally displaced almost 1 million people. Russia continued to violate its commitments under the 2015 Minsk Agreement by supplying personnel and weapons to separatist forces. The UK has called for investigations into reports that Ukrainians opposed to the regimes in separatist-controlled territories risk arrest, physical and sexual violence and summary execution.

Russian actions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia led to deterioration in the human rights situation in both regions. There was increased pressure on freedom of movement, including through denial of access to documentation, closure of crossing points and installation of razor wire fences along the Administrative Boundary Lines. Georgian language education has been severely curtailed and laws have been passed restricting the residency and property rights of ethnic Georgians. The UK continued to call on Russia and the de facto authorities in both regions to allow international human rights organisations access to Abkhazia and South Ossetia. FCO Minister Sir Alan Duncan reiterated the importance of this during a visit to Georgia in November.

Despite a considerable lack of progress, the UK will continue to support human rights in Russia in 2017. We will attend trials and speak out on human rights violations, whilst working with EU partners and through multilateral organisations to hold Russia to account. Russia will also be a priority country for our global efforts to combat modern slavery.

Saudi Arabia

There were some signs of modest progress in certain areas such as women's rights in Saudi Arabia in 2016, but we continue to have concerns about gender discrimination, the death penalty, freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression.

We also remain deeply concerned about the application of the death penalty. Amnesty International reported that 153 people had been executed in 2016, compared to 158 people in 2015. This included the simultaneous execution of 47 people on 2 January 2016. On 5 January, the then FCO Minister for the Middle East and Africa, Tobias Ellwood, made a statement to Parliament reiterating our clear position on the death penalty. As the principle of the death penalty is enshrined in Saudi Arabia's Sharia law, total abolition in the near future is unlikely. We continued to ensure that the Saudi authorities are aware of our strong opposition to the death penalty at the most senior levels.

In particular, the UK, together with our EU Partners, continued to press for a reduction in death sentences and executions and for the application of EU minimum standards and the provisions of Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. We continued to raise the cases of Ali

al-Nimr, Dawood al-Marhoon and Abdullah al-Zaher who have all been sentenced to death for crimes committed when they were juveniles. Our expectation remains that the sentences will not be carried out. The Shura Council, the consultative body in Saudi Arabia which drafts laws, put a bill to the King recommending that the age of majority be codified in law at 18. We continue to press for the draft law to be finalised.

We continued to raise our concerns about restrictions on freedom of expression, including in relation to the case of Raif Badawi. Our expectation remains that he will not receive further lashes. While Embassy officials have had some contact with human rights defenders, it is often the view of the defenders that involvement with foreign representatives and organisations can make pressing for reform harder. However, we continue to press for reform independently, including for better treatment of human rights defenders.

We continue to call for women in Saudi Arabia to be able to participate fully in society. This means modernising legal and cultural barriers like the guardianship system. We continue to discuss women's rights with the Saudi Government and with women's organisations and leaders. There were some gradual reforms by the Saudi Government through the expansion of education and employment opportunities.

The British Government strongly supports the right to freedom of religion or belief as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent international human rights instruments. The key to increasing freedom in this area is to focus on tolerance. We continue to look for opportunities to work with Saudi Arabia to identify areas where different faiths could work together.

In 2017, we will continue to work to limit the application of the death penalty; and to ensure that, if it is applied, it is carried out in line with international minimum standards. We will continue to monitor closely cases which relate to freedom of expression and of religion or belief. We will also look for opportunities to promote greater participation by civil society and by women in Saudi public life.

Somalia

Human rights progress in Somalia continued to be blighted by serious violations and abuses perpetrated by state and non-state actors in the ongoing internal conflict and by a culture of impunity. The parliamentary and presidential electoral process made progress in 2016 and was largely peaceful, although there were increased Al Shabaab attacks, including against civilians. There were frequent reports of civilian casualties and a marked increase in the numbers of children in armed conflict. Sexual violence remained endemic. Access to justice remained very restricted. The Committee to Protect Journalists' annual Impunity Index named Somalia, for the second time, as the worst place in the world to be a journalist. The death penalty continued to be applied and carried out, including in Somaliland^[13].

[13] Somaliland is not internationally recognised. HMG's position has long been that it is for Somalia and Somaliland to decide their future, and for regional neighbours to take the lead in recognising any new arrangements

In 2016, the UK's promotion of human rights in Somalia focused on establishing effective human rights institutions and instruments and empowering women. The UK was instrumental in the achievement of a strong and constructive resolution on Somalia at the UN Human Rights Council. The African Union peacekeeping force (AMISOM) began to deploy investigative teams in relation to alleged violations. A law establishing an independent Human Rights Commission was passed in June. The UK provided ongoing support to the Ministry of Women and Human Rights Development to: deliver on a Human Rights Action Plan; develop and launch a national gender policy; mainstream gender objectives into the draft National Development Plan for 2017-2020; and to integrate human rights into a New Partnership Agreement between Somalia and the international community. UK political and programming support was instrumental in achieving an increase in women's political participation in Somalia, from 14% to 24% of seats in the newly elected Parliament. The UK increased its humanitarian expenditure in response to the increasingly severe humanitarian crisis, exacerbated by ongoing drought, and to address the needs of returnees to Somalia from Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya.

In 2017, the UK will maintain its focus on strengthening the capacity of Somali institutions to protect and uphold human rights, particularly for vulnerable groups, and will support an enabling environment in which the media and civil society are able to hold these effectively to account. The UK will call upon the newly elected Somali leadership and government to respect its existing obligations and to make further efforts by implementing key human rights legislation swiftly and effectively. The UK will host an international conference in London to accelerate progress on security sector reform, wider governance and accountability, and economic and social development, all of which will contribute to improving the overall human rights picture. A New Partnership Agreement will link international community support to progress in these areas. The UK will encourage strengthened Somali cooperation to address modern slavery. The UK will continue to support women's economic and political empowerment, and to support survivors of sexual violence. In Somaliland, the UK will call for timely and credible delivery of delayed presidential and parliamentary elections, to uphold Somaliland's democratic credentials.

South Sudan

There was further deterioration of the human rights situation in South Sudan in 2016. In July, violence broke out in the capital, Juba. Government and rebel forces both breached commitments to end hostilities and fighting spread to areas of the country not previously affected by conflict. This led to serious human rights violations by state actors, abuses by non-state actors and breaches of International Humanitarian Law. Child soldiers continued to be recruited and, as on previous occasions, women bore the brunt of the violence. Some were attacked and raped outside a UN Protection of Civilians camp in full view of UN peacekeepers who did not intervene. Others were gang raped in a hotel used by international NGOs, where a journalist was also executed. A UN Panel of Experts

report concluded Government forces had deliberately targeted civilians on the basis of their ethnicity, and perpetrated unlawful killings, arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances. Incidents of hate speech and calls for armed conflict increased and the government cracked down on fundamental freedoms by harassing and intimidating journalists, arbitrarily closing media outlets and further narrowing the space for political participation and protest. Despite promises by the government to investigate the July violence, nobody was held to account.

The UK's ability to meet its objectives in 2016, including the prevention of sexual violence, was severely hampered by the July crisis, which led to the evacuation of the majority of Embassy staff. Most have now returned, as have our partner NGOs that had scaled down their activities for security reasons. At the 31st Human Rights Council (HRC) in March the UK co-tabled a Resolution setting up an International Human Rights Commission on South Sudan, with a mandate to monitor and report on the human rights situation. The Resolution included the express commitment by South Sudan to cooperate with the Commission. The HRC held a Special Session on South Sudan in December in response to the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide's warnings that the country could be on a path to genocide, prompted by reports of ethnically motivated violence. The UK lobbied for a strong outcome and the subsequent Resolution enhanced the ability of the Commission to focus on impunity and accountability, and identify priority steps the government must take to prevent further sexual violence.

The UK's key objective for 2017 is a cessation of hostilities, so that the peace process can get back on track. The President's announcement of a National Dialogue in December was a welcome step, but it remains to be seen whether this is a genuine effort to bring peace. If it is, it could enable implementation of the 2015 peace agreement, which should allow human rights abuses to be investigated through the setting up of a hybrid court by the African Union, as a mechanism for holding individuals to account. We will continue to press for action on human rights, support human rights organisations and drive work at the HRC to strengthen the mandate of the Commission *inter alia* to address the prevalence of sexual violence.

Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

The human rights situation in Sri Lanka saw some improvement in 2016. The Government of Sri Lanka made progress against some of its commitments reflected in UN Human Rights Council (HRC) Resolution 30/1, but much remains to be done. The UK welcomed the passing of legislation establishing an Office of Missing Persons. This was an important step towards reconciliation, although it is yet to come into operation. A constitutional reform process is underway. It is hoped that this will address issues of devolution and introduce a Bill of Rights. The Sri Lankan Government is committed to repealing the much criticised Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and is drafting new counter-terrorism legislation which it intends will be compliant with international human rights standards. These

would be important steps in removing historic grievances and strengthening human rights and the rule of law in Sri Lanka.

The government announced further land releases in 2016. While the military maintained a significant presence in the north, the lower profile it took was generally welcomed. The UK has consistently called for the acceleration of land releases and the demilitarisation of the north. Some prisoners held under the existing PTA were released, though many remain in detention without charge. Reports of surveillance, intimidation and harassment by the security forces continued in the north and east, although at much lower levels than under the previous government. Intercommunal tensions remained an area of concern. Tensions were fuelled by hate speech by members of extremist nationalist groups. Sri Lanka continued to engage with the UN and invited a number of UN experts to visit the country, including the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture. He reported full cooperation by the government, but raised concerns about the standard of detention centres and continued cases of torture.

Discrimination against LGBT&T persons remained a problem, with a report from Human Rights Watch highlighting that transgender people, and others who did not conform to social expectations about gender, faced discrimination, abuse and mistreatment.

The UK continued to support Sri Lankan Government efforts to develop a more capable, professional and accountable police force, with the aim of reducing the risk of human rights violations, including torture, and improving public confidence in the rule of law. The UK also provided support for the UN's work on reconciliation and peace building, and demining in the north. The then FCO Minister for Human Rights and the Commonwealth, Baroness Anelay, visited Sri Lanka in November and underlined the UK's commitment to support reconciliation and accountability. The minister also highlighted UK work to help tackle sexual and gender-based violence in Sri Lanka and the importance of accountability and tackling the stigma suffered by victims. She welcomed the Sri Lankan Government's endorsement of the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict earlier in the year.

In 2017, the UK will continue to support and encourage Sri Lanka to make further and faster progress on human rights. We will continue to work with the Sri Lankan Government, international partners and civil society to support delivery of the commitments that Sri Lanka has made to promote accountability, reconciliation and human rights and look forward to the report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on Sri Lanka's progress before the HRC in March 2017.

Sudan

There was no improvement in the human rights situation in Sudan during 2016. Fighting decreased in the conflict areas over the second half of 2016, thanks to unilateral ceasefires from the Government of Sudan and armed movements. However, there was intense fighting in early 2016 in Jebel Marra. This included aerial bombardments by the Sudanese Armed Forces which left almost 98,000 civilians displaced, adding to the 2.5 million long-term displaced. The

humanitarian situation remains dire, with 5.8 million people in need of assistance. The African Union/United Nations peacekeeping mission in Darfur continued to face access restrictions. We welcome the government's issuing of new directives on humanitarian assistance and will work with partners to support full implementation.

We have seen further restrictions on freedom of expression. The government continued to confiscate newspaper runs. We remain concerned by arbitrary arrests and reports of torture and ill-treatment by the Sudanese authorities of political figures and human rights defenders, including Mudawi Ibrahim Adam who remains in detention. Restrictions on freedom of religion or belief, and sexual and gender-based violence with impunity by both state and non-state armed forces, remain concerning.

In support of the Prime Minister's global goal to end modern slavery, we will be working with the Government of Sudan to address the issue of forced labour and to help them meet commitments under the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal 8.7. According to the Global Slavery Index, Sudan has the sixth highest prevalence. This includes trafficking in persons, the use of children in armed conflict, and the abusive servitude of minority groups and migrant workers.

At Sudan's Universal Periodic Review, the Government of Sudan rejected our recommendation regarding reform of the National Security Act which provides the National Intelligence and Security Services with immunity from prosecution. We urge full accountability for human rights violations.

Our 2016 human rights objectives were conflict resolution and humanitarian access, greater civil society and political freedoms, and tackling sexual and gender-based violence. We worked alongside international partners with the Government of Sudan and opposition groups to secure a breakthrough in the peace process, with both parties signing the African Union High Level Implementation Panel's Roadmap Agreement.

In December, we condemned the detentions of political figures and called on the Government of Sudan to protect the right to freedom of expression in a joint statement with our Troika partners (the US and Norway), the EU and other international partners. We attended trials of individuals accused of crimes carrying the death penalty, including members of the human rights NGO TRACKS, and three Christian men accused of espionage.

Our project work promoted human rights, including bilateral and regional support for national efforts to end the practice of female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C). We funded a project which provided legal and psychosocial support to victims of sexual violence.

On modern slavery issues, we developed projects to build the evidence base around onward migration, and to train the Sudanese judiciary on anti-trafficking law. We are funding the International Organisation for Migration's Migrant Resource and Response Centre to support the recovery of victims of trafficking.

Internationally, we secured a mandate renewal for the Independent Expert at the UN Human Rights Council in

September and urged the Government of Sudan to address the recommendations in his report.

In 2017, we will continue to push for conflict resolution and improved humanitarian access. Our human rights priorities will remain freedom of expression and civil society space, freedom of religion or belief, and tackling sexual and gender-based violence. We will also continue to support the Prime Minister's global goal to end modern slavery.

Syria

In 2016 the human rights situation in Syria remained bleak. Violence continued despite efforts to establish a cessation of hostilities. Allegations of serious human rights violations and abuses by parties to the conflict continue. The Asad regime bears the main responsibility for human rights violations and suffering.

According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), there was widespread and systematic use of arbitrary detention and torture by regime forces in Syria. The Syrian Network for Human Rights reported that more than 117,000 people were detained or disappeared since the conflict started in March 2011, the majority by regime forces. Amnesty International (AI) estimated that 17,723 people had died in custody in Syria since 2011; an average of more than 10 deaths a day. AI also estimated that between 5,000-13,000 were extrajudicially executed at Saydnaya prison up to December 2015. They had no reason to believe that executions have stopped.

HRW (2017 World Report) and the UN Commission of Inquiry (COI) cited disproportionate attacks by the regime and its backers on civilian areas, including aerial bombardments, barrel bombs and cluster munitions. The COI reported that medical workers and facilities came under sustained targeted attack. Healthcare infrastructure was weakened, with devastating consequences for civilians.

The Syrian regime used siege and starvation tactics against civilian areas under opposition control. As 2016 progressed, humanitarian access decreased. The regime allowed no humanitarian assistance to the estimated 275,000 civilians in eastern Aleppo between July and December, thus failing to take action to protect the fundamental human right to life.

The UN's Joint Investigative Mechanism confirmed use of chemical weapons by the regime on three occasions and by Daesh on one. The COI reported widespread human rights abuses by Daesh and Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (formerly Jabhat al-Nusra) including kidnappings and executions. The COI's report on Daesh's treatment of the Yezidi community concluded the group had committed the crime of genocide against the Yezidis. Daesh have inflicted sexual slavery, torture and forcible transfer.

NGOs reported human rights abuses by opposition groups, though to a lesser extent than the regime.

The UK is supporting efforts to secure a long-term political settlement in Syria which will end the war, stop the suffering and create conditions for refugees to return. We continue to call for the situation in Syria to be referred to the International

Criminal Court and for accountability. This is the best strategy for the restoration of human rights in the long term.

The UK led on three UN Human Right Council (HRC) Resolutions on Syria in 2016. HRC Resolution 33/32 of 20 September 2016 called for the establishment of a High-Level Panel on arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances. At Syria's Universal Periodic Review, we drew international attention to the regime's appalling human rights record.

In the UN Security Council, we highlighted the human consequences of the regime's offensive against Aleppo and called for an immediate ceasefire and humanitarian access. We supported adoption of Resolution 2328 (19 December 2016), which demanded access for the UN to oversee evacuations and deliver humanitarian aid.

The UK co-sponsored General Assembly Resolution 71/248 adopted on 21 December 2016. This called for a new mechanism to assist in the investigation and prosecution of those in Syria responsible for the most serious crimes under international law.

The UK will continue to help those affected by the Syrian war, including working for the conditions which allow the restoration of the human rights which have been systematically denied - largely through the actions of the Asad regime.

Turkmenistan

In 2016, the human rights environment in Turkmenistan, already of serious concern, deteriorated further. Civil liberties, freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief were further eroded. Journalists known for taking an independent line were harassed and arrested. The authorities did not account for the unexplained death of the relative of an exiled activist, and there was increasing concern about the fate of the "disappeared" (largely political prisoners). International human rights activists again raised allegations of torture in prisons and the difficulties faced by religious groups to practice their faith. With the worsening economy and the pressure to prepare Ashgabat to host the Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games (AIMAG) in 2017, there were reports of homes being demolished with minimal notice, and air conditioners and satellite dishes being forcibly removed. Restrictions on internet access widened. Corruption remained endemic at all levels.

During 2016, the UK's objective was to encourage progress across the range of human rights issues and to assist the Turkmen Government to implement the National Human Rights Action Plan. UK representatives raised human rights issues at every level and at every opportunity both bilaterally and with international partners, including the then FCO Minister for the Middle East and Africa, Tobias Ellwood with Mr Hajiyeve, the Turkmen Deputy Foreign Minister, during the latter's visit to the UK in May. The Embassy funded projects to help train the judiciary in international human rights obligations and to raise awareness of applicable human rights among the disabled community, a marginalised section of the population.

There were some positive developments. The Turkmen Government launched the National Human Rights Action Plan (NHRAP). The President approved a National Action

Plan to fight human trafficking. Parliament agreed a new constitution with some human rights provisions including an independent human rights Ombudsman. For the second year running, a Turkmen Government delegation participated in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Human Dimension meeting. The government also acceded to a request by EU and other Ambassadors to visit a youth prison. Overall, however, concrete progress on human rights issues was slow: there was limited activity to implement the NHRAP and it is unlikely that the long awaited Ombudsman will be appointed and active before mid 2017.

The gap between human rights legislation and implementation remains wide and the lack of government transparency makes monitoring difficult.

2017 will see further challenges. The presidential election in February offers an opportunity for the Turkmen Government to demonstrate its democratic credentials after the OSCE raised concerns about the conduct of the previous election in 2012. The pressure of exposure to an international audience with AIMAG could also present a chance to demonstrate real change and progress in human rights. The UK will continue to support human rights projects through the UN and OSCE and to encourage progress in implementing the reforms in the NHRAP, in particular in the fields of justice and freedom of expression; and to encourage the Turkmen Government to take action on trafficking.

Uzbekistan

In 2016 we continued to have concerns about the overall human rights situation in Uzbekistan, but there were signs of potential positive developments. Following his appointment in the autumn, President Mirziyoev introduced measures aimed at greater transparency and accountability in government, as well as reforms in criminal justice and some anti-corruption measures. The authorities also released two prisoners of concern and there were encouraging signals on freedom of expression and political association. Overall, however, by the end of 2016 these measures had yet to translate into evidence of fundamental change.

Credible reports suggested that freedom of religion or belief continued to be denied by the Uzbek state. Online media and NGOs continue to report actions by law enforcement against individuals engaged in religious activities outside state-sanctioned structures. The highly restrictive Ministry of Justice Order regulating NGO activity remained in force, limiting the operating space for non-governmental human rights organisations. Very few international NGOs were permitted to operate, and the limited number of local activists continued to report harassment. There were some positive developments towards the end of the year with authorisation granted for small public demonstrations and further prison visits by a local NGO.

During 2016, the UK raised human rights issues with the authorities in Uzbekistan during two ministerial visits and through regular contact at official level. This included during

the visit by Sir Alan Duncan, the FCO Minister for Europe, to Tashkent in December, where he encouraged the government to promote freedom of the press and agree to the BBC's return to Uzbekistan. We also supported programmes on media diversity and government transparency, and a visit to Uzbekistan by a leading penal reform expert. In December, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe sent a first full election observation mission (EOM), with a significant UK contribution, to monitor the presidential elections. They found that the election campaign lacked genuine competition and that proxy or family voting remained a problem, despite a widespread government campaign to discourage the practice. However, the EOM noted significantly increased transparency in the conduct of the elections and a commitment by the Uzbek Government to address outstanding issues.

In October, the Uzbek National Human Rights Centre (a governmental body) signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the UN on Uzbekistan's National Human Rights Action Plan, to implement the UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR) recommendations. The same month, a decree "on judicial reforms and strengthening human rights" contained a number of provisions long encouraged by the UN and international experts. President Mirziyoev also criticised the 100% conviction rate of recent years and called on the courts to issue more acquittals. Some progress has been made on child and forced labour. A report^[14] by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) on the 2016 cotton harvest concluded that the Uzbek authorities had taken measures towards eliminating child labour, making it socially unacceptable and rare. The report also concluded that, whilst the risk of forced labour remained, those in the high risk group were a minority of the workforce. The Uzbek Government has agreed to address this as part of its ongoing co-operation with the World Bank and ILO.

In 2017, we will continue to encourage progress on labour issues, freedom of media including the return of the BBC to Uzbekistan, and frame our human rights advocacy around Uzbekistan's preparation for its 2018 UPR. The Embassy will expand support for project and programme work on human rights and good governance, including a major programme supporting anti-corruption, human rights and regional government accountability.

Venezuela

The human rights situation in Venezuela remained a concern for the UK in 2016, in particular around continuing socioeconomic problems and high levels of violence. Inflation and shortages of food and medicines continued throughout 2016, as did high levels of protests and looting. In 2016, there were reports of deterioration of media freedom and access to information, as well as intimidation and harassment of human rights defenders. The Venezuelan Opposition and several civil society organisations accuse the Government of Venezuela of holding over 100 political prisoners including leading opposition figures. A local NGO estimated that the number of violent deaths nationwide in 2016 was around 28,000 (91.8 per 100,000 population).

[14] http://www.ilo.org/lpec/Informationresources/WCMS_543130/lang--en/index.htm

On 13 September, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed concern at the decline of Venezuelans' economic and social rights, and at allegations of repression of opposition and civil society groups. In late October, 12 people disappeared and were subsequently discovered in mass graves by a government investigation, leading to the arrest of 11 army personnel accused of being involved.

Venezuela's ability to tackle human rights issues in 2016 was affected by the escalating political confrontation between the government and the Opposition-led National Assembly (NA). On 2 September, the Supreme Court ruled that all NA decisions taken since 28 July were unconstitutional. In addition, the Opposition attempted to secure a recall referendum against President Maduro, which would have brought forward Presidential elections. On 20 October, the National Electoral Council suspended the recall referendum process and announced the postponement of governorship elections; a decision that the Opposition contended was illegal. This polarisation continued despite political dialogue efforts supported by the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and the Holy See.

The UK carried out human rights activity in Venezuela in 2016 across Venezuelan society and with international partners. In addition to leading the local EU Working Group on Human Rights and Democracy from January to June, UK priorities in 2016 were focused on strengthening democratic institutions, opening space for civil society and human rights defenders, and work on tackling violence against women and girls. In September, the UK supported a statement at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), expressing concern at developments in Venezuela ahead of Venezuela's Universal Periodic Review (UPR). The UK's statement and recommendations during the UPR included calling on the Venezuelan Government and Opposition to engage in an outcome-focused dialogue, and requesting that Venezuela invite a representative from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to visit.

In 2017, the UK will continue to promote human rights and democracy in Venezuela, including gender equality and assessing the risks of modern slavery, against a background of political confrontation, security concerns and economic challenges. A major UK human rights focus in 2017 will be to support meaningful and results-oriented dialogue between political and social actors, aiming to help resolve Venezuela's challenges and improve the situation for ordinary Venezuelans.

Yemen

The human rights situation in Yemen remained deeply concerning throughout 2016. The internationally recognised Government of Yemen (GoY) does not control the entirety of Yemeni territory. This severely limited its ability to protect human rights and tackle abuses by non-state actors in areas outside its control. In addition, GoY and non-state actors, particularly the de facto authorities in northern Yemen, were responsible for a vast number of human rights abuses.

The ongoing conflict has hindered efforts to protect human rights. It has led to over 12,000 civilian casualties, the internal displacement of over two million people and a wide range

of protection concerns for conflict-affected populations. The rights of women and children have been particularly affected, including a significant deterioration in gender relations. There is a lack of basic services, livelihood opportunities and effective rule of law. Attacks on hospitals and schools have also limited the right of access to healthcare and education.

In areas under government control, there were reports of human rights violations by state actors or actors affiliated to the government. These included arbitrary detention; forced displacement; and discrimination against minorities. There were a few reports of torture in correctional facilities. There were also allegations of breaches of international humanitarian law by GoY or GoY-affiliated actors, notably the indiscriminate use of weaponry in residential and commercial areas, resulting in civilian casualties.

In 2016, the number of human rights abuses by non-state actors, particularly the de facto authorities in northern Yemen, remained a cause for significant concern. Abuses recorded by the UN and NGOs included: increasing recruitment and use of child soldiers; restrictions on freedom of movement and expression, including the arbitrary closure of news outlets and civil society organisations, as well as physical attacks on journalists and human rights defenders; discrimination against minorities; and arbitrary detention.

Across Yemen, there were reports of sexual violence, some related to the conflict. Some NGOs also reported incidences of modern slavery – notably forced labour and domestic servitude.

In 2016, the UK remained at the forefront of international efforts to end the conflict and re-establish the authority of the legitimate Government of Yemen, which will provide the conditions necessary for the state to improve its human rights performance. Within the constraints of the current conflict, the UK's main human rights objectives were to encourage the protection of civilians, including the protection of women's and children's rights.

The UK helped to negotiate and agreed a UN Human Rights Council (HRC) resolution adopted in September 2016. The resolution called on the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to provide additional human rights experts to the Yemen Office, in order to support the Yemeni National Independent Commission of Inquiry in investigating alleged human rights abuses.

Through the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, the UK supported a UN Women project that encourages women's equal participation in the peace process, and more widely. The Department for International Development (DFID) has committed over £100 million in humanitarian aid to Yemen for 2016/17, including programmes supporting Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) and the protection of civilians. All programmes address the differing needs of women, men, boys and girls.

The UK's priority for 2017 will remain progress towards a durable ceasefire and an inclusive political solution to the conflict, to prevent further conflict-related abuses and enable the Yemeni authorities to resume work protecting human rights. While the conflict continues, we will continue to urge all parties to protect civilians. The UK will work with the OHCHR

to increase the capacity of Yemeni bodies to investigate and prevent human rights abuses.

Zimbabwe

The human rights situation in Zimbabwe deteriorated further during 2016 with an increase in the quantity and severity of human rights violations by state actors. These included the illegal demolition of homes, continued violations of property rights, abductions and torture, politically motivated sexual violence by state actors, further restrictions on freedom of association and expression and arbitrary arrest. An increase in public protest over the summer in response to the political environment and the deteriorating economic situation saw police respond using dogs, tear gas, water cannon and baton charges. The government denied permission for activists and opposition parties to hold rallies but granted similar requests by the ruling party. Reports of intimidation, rape, assisted voting and vote buying primarily by the ruling party marred two by-elections. Partisan distribution of food by government agencies was also reported in seven provinces in October 2016.

There were reports that approximately 200 women were trafficked to Kuwait in 2014 and 2015. 40 women sought refuge at the Zimbabwean Embassy in Kuwait and were returned home in April 2016. An official at the Kuwait Embassy has been charged with trafficking of three of the victims. Sex between men is illegal and LGB&T persons continue to face discrimination.

The Government of Zimbabwe engaged with the UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR) session in November and committed to step up efforts to improve prison and police cell conditions and to reconsider its approach to the death penalty.

The UK continued to prioritise human rights and the rule of law in Zimbabwe, in keeping with Zimbabwe's status as a human rights priority country. At the UPR, the UK welcomed Zimbabwe's 2013 Constitution but expressed concern at the slow progress of legislative alignment and called for the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission to investigate allegations of political violence. We also reiterated the importance of respect for the right to shelter and property. The Government of Zimbabwe accepted our recommendations to accede to the Convention against Torture, and noted our recommendation to align electoral, public order and media laws with the 2013 Constitution before the end of the current Parliament.

The UK funded training on human rights legislation and the constitution for Zimbabwean prosecutors. We worked through the multi-donor Transparency, Responsiveness, Accountability and Citizen Engagement (TRACE) Programme to improve access to justice, media and information freedom and the electoral environment in advance of the 2018 elections. The Embassy in Harare also facilitated discussions leading to action against gender-based violence, in support of women's empowerment and to promote the rights of young people, and met parliamentarians and political leaders to encourage engagement, dialogue and respect for the rights of the people of Zimbabwe.

Looking ahead, the UK will continue to work with other donors to support the TRACE programme and with local stakeholders to protect democratic space and enhance state accountability and transparency. We will also press for delivery on the UN UPR commitments, through the tripartite process (Government of Zimbabwe, UN and NGOs). The UK will continue to call publicly for the Government of Zimbabwe to uphold the rule of law and human rights, while encouraging Zimbabweans of all political persuasions to exercise their democratic rights, including through free and fair elections.

ANNEX A: Objectives for 2017

In 2017, Human Rights Democracy Department, FCO, will aim to:

Communications

- > Continue to meet our parliamentary obligations in preparing Ministers for parliamentary debates and replying to correspondence within agreed timelines.
- > Using FCO channels, we will commemorate Human Rights Days to raise awareness of human rights that reflect our priorities.
- > Lead the FCO's growing expertise in human rights issues by sharing knowledge and making available resources that equip officials with the tools needed to protect and promote human rights in their day to day work.

Death Penalty

- > Encourage states to reduce the use of the death penalty, by supporting death penalty reforms (e.g. abolition, moratoria, or restricting the range of crimes that carry the death penalty).
- > Support adherence to UN and EU minimum standards in countries that retain the death penalty.

Democracy and Civil Society

- > Promote the benefits of an active civil society for secure and prosperous societies as well as supporting the participation of citizens in the political life of their country as a right in itself, highlighting the restriction of active civil society space; support the freedom of the media and draw attention to the impunity of crimes against journalists.
- > Continue to work with like-minded partners to promote democratic values and public participation in decision making including through an active contribution to the work of the Community of Democracies and support for the work of the Freedom Online Coalition.
- > Support and promote the work of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy.

Europe

- > Secure maximum UK value from European Institutions – the EU, the Council of Europe (CoE) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) – for our international human rights policy.

Equalities

- > Play an active role in the development of the Equal Rights Coalition and support the work of the UN Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity.

- > Promote gender equality and LGBT&T rights with particular focus on decriminalising consensual same-sex relationships and legislating to protect against discrimination.
- > Play an active role in tackling Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG).

Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB)

- > Champion the promotion and protection of FoRB for all individuals in the Middle East and globally.
- > Promote FoRB in policies on Countering Violent Extremism, including the promotion of tolerant, pluralistic and inclusive societies, and tolerance in education.
- > Engage with and support effective multilateral negotiations devoted to maintaining consensus on FoRB-related resolutions.

Modern Slavery/Business and Human Rights

- > Work throughout our network of posts to raise awareness of the issue of modern slavery and seek to make a tangible contribution to reducing global levels of slavery, with a particular focus on countries with a high incidence.
- > Create political momentum for a concerted international response to the challenge of modern slavery with a view to effective implementation of SDG 8.7 and encourage the signature and ratification of relevant international instruments, including through the UN Universal Periodic Review process.
- > Continue to promote the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights as an effective framework for supporting responsible business behaviour and supply chain due diligence.

Post-Holocaust

- > Support and maintain momentum on the ongoing international commitment to the Stockholm Declaration by promoting collaboration on Holocaust education, research and remembrance to prevent such crimes being repeated.
- > Encourage the continued development of policies, strategies and legislation which address all forms of discrimination, including anti-Semitism.

Torture Prevention

- > Strengthen existing legal frameworks to prevent and prohibit torture e.g. encouraging ratification of the UN CAT and OpCAT.
- > Support states to develop the capacity and means with which to combat torture.

- > Support the development of independent monitoring mechanisms to challenge and support states in prevention of torture.

UN

- > Contribute to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of human rights worldwide and the progressive development and advancement of international human rights law, particularly through engagement at the Human Rights Council, Third Committee and Economic and Social Council, supporting action which furthers our core values.
- > Strengthen the effectiveness of UN human rights institutions, including by promoting open, merit-based selection processes for nominations and appointments to UN positions.
- > Participate in and support multilateral human rights accountability mechanisms, including the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Special Procedures, Treaty Bodies and the Third Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review, in order to hold states accountable for promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- > Promote key UK thematic priorities in UN human rights mechanisms, whilst mainstreaming human rights as a conflict prevention and sustainable development tool.



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ISBN 978-1-4741-4113-0



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