

Deteriorating human rights situation in Russia: UK statement

Madam Chair,

The human rights situation in Russia continues to deteriorate and this is of deep concern. I would like to highlight today four cases and areas.

Firstly, it is disgraceful that Alexey Navalny, himself the victim of a despicable crime, has been sentenced on arbitrary charges. We have expressed our concern previously here in this forum and also at the Council of Europe, and the UN Human Rights Council, and continue to call for his immediate and unconditional release.

Secondly, we also reiterate our previous calls for the release of Mr Yuri Dmitriev. We believe Mr Dmitriev's case is a politically-motivated prosecution, triggered by his work as a historian and representative of the human rights organisation Memorial. Given Mr Dmitriev's age, health, and the COVID-19 pandemic, there are also strong humanitarian reasons for his release.

Thirdly, we must also highlight – unfortunately not for the first time – the concerning situation of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Russian Federation. The 2017 ruling of the Russian Supreme Court, which rejected the appeal against the decision to categorise Jehovah's Witnesses as "extremists", criminalised the peaceful worship of 175,000 Russian citizens and contravened the right to religious freedom that is enshrined in the Russian Constitution, and in multiple OSCE commitments.

Since that 2017 ruling, we have witnessed an increasing number of detentions, criminal investigations and prosecutions of Jehovah's Witnesses across Russia, including the arrest and sentencing of Valentina Baranovskaya and Roman Baranovskiy on 24 February, and the sentencing of Aleksandr Ivshin on 10 February. Such cases reinforce the impression of an organised campaign of persecution against Jehovah's Witnesses.

And fourthly, 27 February marks the sixth anniversary of the murder of Boris Nemtsov in Moscow, then a leading figure within the Russian opposition. We extend our sincere condolences to Mr Nemtsov's family and friends, and urge the Russian authorities to bring those responsible to justice, and end the culture of impunity for attacks on political activists, journalists and human rights defenders.

We remind Russia that as an OSCE participating State, they have freely signed up to a series of commitments in the OSCE's human dimension which they must uphold.