

# Human rights in Russia: UK statement on OSCE's Moscow Mechanism expert report

Thank you, Mr Chair. I wish to make a statement in my national capacity, to supplement the statement delivered by Ambassador Callan on behalf of the 38 States which invoked the Moscow Mechanism on Russia's legal and administrative practices.

I would like to thank the independent expert Professor Nußberger for her expertise and her drafting of a robust and important report.

Mr Chair, the United Kingdom supported the invocation of this Moscow Mechanism because the issue of Russia's repression of human rights is vitally important. It is important to the Russian people who face restrictions on their fundamental freedoms and it is important for peace and security in the OSCE region.

I want to highlight 3 elements of this forensic report. First, President Putin's Russia has waged a systemic and a repressive war against the freedoms of its own people over the last two decades. Repressive legislation is used to restrict the rights of Russian people, most notably through the "foreign agents" and "undesirable organisations" laws.

Since the invasion, the Kremlin has implemented a wave of legislation targeting the dissemination of "knowingly false information" and "discrediting" of Russian armed forces. The real purpose is to criminalise the dissemination of the truth and for calling Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine what it is. Over 4,000 people have been prosecuted because of these laws, including dual British Russian national Vladimir Kara-Murza. As the report says, "this is military censorship".

Secondly, Russia has created a climate of fear and intimidation to silence independent voices further. President Putin and the authorities employ propaganda to de-humanise Russian civil society. Murders and physical attacks are either carried out on the direct orders of the Kremlin, or are tacitly welcomed with no follow-up investigations. Between 1992 and 2021, at least 58 journalists were killed in Russia in connection with their work.

Police use violence and intimidation to suppress anti-war protestors. Over 16,000 people have been arrested. And overnight over 1,000 more were arrested for peacefully protesting mobilisation. The report highlights many cases of violence towards those detained. Grigory Yudin, a political scientist, was arrested at an anti-war protest and beaten in a police van until he lost consciousness. Female protestors were arrested, forced to undress, and physically attacked.

Thirdly, Russia's domestic repression is a key enabler of its aggression

abroad. Professor Nußberger writes that “repression on the inside and war on the outside are connected to each other as if in a communicating tube.” A tightening of freedoms at home allows the State to pursue conflict abroad with limited domestic accountability. This state of perpetual war provides a justification for further restrictive measures domestically. And we are seeing the grim outcome of this interrelation play out in Ukraine.

Mr Chair, this report reveals the horrifying scale of restrictive policies implemented by Russia over the last decade. Putin pursues these policies because he fears that a free society would hold him accountable for the abuses his regime have committed at home, and restrain his ability to commit abuses abroad. The tragedy is that both Russian and Ukrainian people, particularly vulnerable groups, are enduring the worst effects of this repression.

The UK, with partners from across the OSCE and the world, will defend human rights and the fundamental freedoms of citizens everywhere. We call on Russia to heed the warnings and recommendations of this Moscow Mechanism report. In particular, to comply with its OSCE Human Dimension obligations, and to critically assess the short- and long-term consequences of the “foreign agents” law, amongst other repressive legislation, on civil society.

I want to express the United Kingdom’s solidarity with all those who suffer repression at the hands of the Russian authorities. And to reiterate once again our resolute support for Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders.