

[Press release: Universal Periodic Review 29th session: Lord Ahmad's statement](#)

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a unique mechanism of the Human Rights Council (HRC) aimed at improving the human rights situation of all 193 UN member states. The UK strongly supports the UPR process, and we have spoken at every session and about every country since it began. This session saw reviews of 14 countries, namely Barbados, the Bahamas, Botswana, Burundi, France, Israel, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Mali, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Tonga and the United Arab Emirates.

Modern slavery

During the session we ensured that modern slavery was raised at every review, alongside specific issues relevant to each country. Forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking are horrific crimes, and the UK Government is fully committed to eradicating them by 2030 as set out in the UN's Sustainable Development Goal Article 8.7. The Prime Minister has made this a personal priority, and launched the Call to Action at the UN General Assembly in September 2017. I encourage all countries to endorse this Call to Action, to demonstrate leadership and drive change on an international scale. These are global crimes, and require a global response. The UPR process provides a valuable opportunity for us all to commit ourselves to make concrete changes and move the agenda forward, making a real difference to the lives of so many people.

UN Treaty Body membership

We also raised the issue of UN Treaty Body membership at every review this session. These expert bodies are a central part of the UN human rights system, charged with monitoring the implementation of human rights conventions in states which have signed up to them. The membership of Treaty Bodies is central to their success and the UK encourages states to adopt an open, merit-based selection process when selecting national candidates in order to improve membership quality.

Country reviews

Every country's UPR is important, and as I noted above the UK makes a point of engaging with each and every one of them. At the 29th session of the UPR, Israel and Burundi were among the highest profile of the countries under review.

Israel

I welcome Israel's engagement with the UPR and am pleased to see the positive steps taken since its last review, including its commitment to eradicate

forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking; and the progress Israel has made on gender equality. However, the lack of reference in Israel's national submission to substantive progress on human rights issues in the Occupied Palestinian Territories is disappointing. Areas of concern include the need to address Israeli policies on settlement expansion and demolitions.

The advancement by the Israeli authorities of plans, tenders and permits for thousands of settlement units across the West Bank is deeply concerning. Settlements are illegal under international law and undermine both the physical viability of the two-state solution and perceptions of Israel's commitment to it.

I am also seriously concerned by the Israeli authorities' continuous demolition of Palestinian properties in Area C of the West Bank and in East Jerusalem. As the UK has made clear in the past, these demolitions cause unnecessary suffering and are harmful to the objective of achieving peace.

Finally, the matter of children in detention in Israel remains highly concerning. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Israel is a State Party, clearly sets out the need to grant special care and protection to children. I hope Israel recognises these responsibilities and takes the necessary action to ensure that child detainees are protected, including to engage with partners, like the UK, on best practice.

Burundi

While I welcome Burundi's participation in the UPR process, I remain deeply concerned that the Government of Burundi has shown no willingness to acknowledge and make efforts to improve the deteriorating human rights situation. It is also distressing that the Government of Burundi continues to facilitate a culture of impunity for the perpetrators. Specific areas which need to be addressed and investigated are arbitrary detentions, violence and executions by security forces, and attacks against human rights defenders. I urge the Government of Burundi to review, in good faith, all of the recommendations made in the UPR; and encourage them to co-operate with the OHCHR and the Commission of Inquiry. The UK and the international community stand ready to work with the Government of Burundi to improve the situation.

Conclusion

I encourage all countries reviewed during this session to give serious consideration to accepting the UK's recommendations. I trust that those recommendations which are accepted will be fully implemented in a timely manner. I look forward to the formal adoption of these UPRs at the 38th session of the UN Human Rights Council, in June 2018.