

# Press release: Universal Periodic Review 32nd session: Minister for Human Rights statement

Minister for Human Rights Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon gave the following statement to mark the end of the Universal Periodic Review:

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a unique process involving a peer review of the human rights records of all 193 UN member states. It is an important tool of the Human Rights Council (HRC), aimed at sharing best practice. The UK strongly supports the UPR process, and we have spoken at every session and about every country since the process began. This session saw reviews of 14 countries, namely [Afghanistan](#), [Cambodia](#), [Chile](#), [Comoros](#), [Cyprus](#), [the Dominican Republic](#), [Eritrea](#), [the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia](#), [New Zealand](#), [Slovakia](#), [Uruguay](#), [Vanuatu](#), [Vietnam](#) and [Yemen](#).

## **Forced Labour, Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking**

The eradication of forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking continues to be a high priority for the UK Government. It is a global problem requiring a global response. We continue to advocate better international coordination to fulfil commitments made under the UN Sustainable Development Goal 8.7, to ensure that governments and international agencies prioritise interventions and resources to tackle modern slavery and support victims. The UPR is a valuable opportunity to drive this agenda forward. We commend the efforts of the Dominican Republic and Uruguay, including their endorsement in 2018 of the Call to Action to end modern slavery. We support all efforts to ensure that high-level commitments translate into national action which delivers real change for the most vulnerable in our societies. There is still a great deal of work to be done to eliminate the crime of modern slavery by 2030. We continue to urge states to work domestically and internationally, across governments, business, and civil society, to drive forward change in a holistic way.

## **UN Treaty Body**

Since the 27th session of the UPR, we have made the recommendation to a considerable number of states to 'adopt an open, merit-based selection process when selecting national candidates for UN Treaty Body elections'. 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 UK will continue to advocate strengthening the quality, independence and diversity of Treaty Body membership.

## **Afghanistan**

I recognise the Government of Afghanistan's commitment to making progress on human rights, but I note that significant challenges remain, particularly in

relation to civilian casualties, gender-based violence, the safety of journalists, and torture and ill-treatment of detainees. I am also concerned by the security challenges faced by ethnic and religious minorities. The UK urged Afghanistan to establish an independent mechanism to thoroughly assess how members of religious and ethnic minorities can be better protected against violent attacks.

## **Cambodia**

On Cambodia, I am concerned by: the shrinking of democratic space through the dissolution of the Cambodia National Rescue Party; the imprisonment of Kem Sokha; and the national election in July 2018, which lacked legitimacy. The UK notes that Cambodia has identified steps to address some of these issues, including amending Article 45 of the Law of Political Parties, and removing the required three days notification of NGOs' activities to the local authority. Additionally, while the transfer of Kem Sokha to house arrest was a positive step, we urge the Government to drop all charges against him, and address restrictions on freedom of expression.

## **Dominican Republic**

Turning to the Dominican Republic, I recognise the progress made regarding human rights, including engagement on migration, work to eliminate violence against women, and willingness to improve prisoners' rights. However, the UK urged the Government to resolve human rights issues resulting from the absence of migrant documentation. We also urged the implementation of the prison reform programme as soon as possible, prioritising pre-trial detention issues. The UK also encourages the Dominican Republic to pass and implement legislation to tackle 'femicides', noting with concern that the number of such occurrences in the country has increased.

## **Eritrea**

I am concerned by the human rights situation in Eritrea, noting in particular the human rights issues surrounding national service and places of detention. We urged Eritrea to reform their national service and to ensure due process for all detainees, releasing those arbitrarily detained for political and religious reasons.

## **North Macedonia**

I recognise progress made by the Government of North Macedonia, particularly through the adoption of the new Media Law in December, constructive Government engagement with civil society organisations on judicial reforms, and parliamentary oversight of the intelligence agencies. However, the UK encourages further efforts from the Government to address remaining challenges, in particular developing effective legislation to counter hate crimes, tackling corruption in prisons, and investigating all reported crimes against journalists.

## **Yemen**

On Yemen, while the outcome of the Stockholm peace talks in December 2018 was encouraging, abuses and violations, carried out by all parties to the conflict in Yemen, are deeply concerning – specifically, civilian casualties, persecution on the grounds of religion or belief, and restrictions on freedom of expression and association. Women’s rights have also been particularly affected, as has access to education for girls. Children continue to be recruited to fight, and arbitrary arrest and detention continues to take place, as does the torture and the ill-treatment of detainees. The UK urges the Government of Yemen to fulfil its obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law, ensuring the protection of civilians, and to immediately cease the practices of arbitrary arrest and detention, enforced disappearance, torture, and other ill-treatment. The UK hopes that peace talks will continue and improve the capacity of the Yemeni Government to protect the human rights of all its citizens, including the protection of the right to freedom of religion or belief for all communities.

I urge all countries under review during this session to give full and serious consideration to the UK recommendations. I encourage these States not only to accept them, but also to implement them in a timely and comprehensive manner. I look forward to the formal adoption of these recommendations at the 41st session of the UN Human Rights Council in June 2019.

## **Further information**