

Statement on the Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab:

Mr Speaker, with permission, I would like to make a statement on the Global Human Rights Sanctions Regulations.

As we forge a dynamic new vision for a truly Global Britain, this government is absolutely committed to the United Kingdom being an even stronger force for good in the world: on climate change, as we host COP26, as we champion 12 years of education for every girl in the world, no matter how poor her background.

And on human rights, we will defend media freedoms, protect freedom of religion and, with the measures we are announcing and enacting today, hold to account the perpetrators of the worst human rights abuses.

Mr Speaker, I first raised this issue in 2012 in a Backbench Business Debate and it was a cross-party issue then and I hope it will be now and I recall co-sponsoring it with the Former Foreign Secretary, David Miliband.

And I'd also like to pay tribute to honourable members across the House, in particular, my Rt. Hon Member for Haltemprice and Howden who sponsored the debate back then and of course the Hon Member for Rhondda, who joined me in that initial debate and has been chivvyng me along ever since normally from a sedentary position.

Mr Speaker, the idea of taking targeted action against human rights violators has received further cross-party backing then including honourable members from all sides of the House, including five former Foreign Secretaries, including the current chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee

And in 2019, it was in the Conservative Party manifesto as a clear commitment. So, today, I am proud that under this Prime Minister and this Government we make good on that pledge bringing into force the UK's first autonomous human rights sanctions regime, which gives us the power to impose sanctions on those involved in the very worst of human rights abuses around the world.

Mr Speaker, these sanctions are a forensic tool, they allow us to target perpetrators without punishing the wider people of a country that may be affected.

The Regulations will enable us to impose travel bans and asset freezes against those involved in serious human rights violations.

They include:

First, the right to life, threatened by assassinations and extra-judicial

killing.

Second, the right not to be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

And third, the right to be free from slavery, servitude or forced or compulsory labour.

The powers also enable us to target the wider network of perpetrators, including those who facilitate, incite, promote, or support these crimes.

And this extends beyond state officials to non-state actors as well so if you're a kleptocrat, or an organised criminal, you won't be able to launder your blood money in this country.

Mr Speaker, today this Government and this House sends a very clear message on behalf of the British people: that those with blood on their hands, the thugs of despots, or the henchmen of dictators, won't be free to waltz into this country to buy up property on the Kings Road, or do their Christmas shopping in Knightsbridge, or frankly to siphon dirty money through British banks or financial institutions.

Mr Speaker, the Regulations are the latest next step forward in the long struggle against impunity for the very worst human rights violations.

We've deliberately focused on the worst crimes, so we have the clearest basis, to make sure we can operate the new system as effectively as we possibly can.

That said, we'll continue to explore expanding this regime to include other human rights.

And I can tell the House that we are already considering how a corruption regime could be added to the armoury of legal weapons that we have. In particular Mr Speaker, I'm looking at the UN Convention Against Corruption and practice under the frameworks in jurisdictions like the US and Canada.

Mr. Speaker, today we have also published a policy note, which sets out how we will consider designations under these Regulations for maximum transparency.

And, as the House would expect, the legislation will ensure that due process will be followed in relation to those designations, reflecting the rigorous process rights contained in the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018.

In practice, those people designated will be able to request that a Minister review the decision.

They will be able to challenge the decision in court.

And as a matter of due diligence, the Government will review all designations at least once every three years.

Mr Speaker, in addition to introducing this new legal regime, today we are also proceeding proceeded to make its first designations under those Regulations.

And we are imposing sanctions on those individuals involved in some of the most notorious human rights violations in recent years.

The first designations will cover those individuals involved in the torture and murder of Sergei Magnitsky, the lawyer who disclosed the biggest known tax fraud in Russian history.

The designations will also include those responsible for the brutal murder of the writer and journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

They will include those who perpetrated the systematic and brutal violence against the Rohingya population in Myanmar, and they also include two organisations bearing responsibility for the enslavement, torture and murder that takes place in North

Korea's wretched gulags, in which it is estimated that hundreds of thousands of prisoners have perished over the last 50 years.

And so, with these first designations Mr Speaker, this government, and I hope this House, and this country makes it crystal clear those who abuse their power to inflict unimaginable suffering that we won't look the other way, that you cannot set foot in this country, and that we will seize your blood-drenched ill-gotten gains if you try.

Mr Speaker, in practise targeted sanctions are most effective when they are backed by coordinated, collective, action.

So we will work closely with our Five Eyes partners, in particular the US and Canada,

which already have 'Magnitsky-style' sanctions legislation, and Australia, which is considering similar legislation.

But we also strongly support efforts to bring an EU human rights sanctions regime into effect, and stand ready to coordinate with our European partners on future measures and in fact I discussed it with our E3 partners in Berlin recently.

Mr. Speaker, with your permission I want to end by paying tribute to the man who inspired these sanctions, Sergei Magnitsky, a young Russian tax lawyer.

Between 2007 and 2008, Magnitsky exposed the theft of \$230 million, committed by tax officials in Russia's own Interior Ministry.

Whilst others left Russia, understandably fearing for their lives, Magnitsky stayed on to take a stand for the rule of law, and to strike a blow against the breath-taking corruption that plagues Russia.

That bravery cost him his life.

He was arrested in 2008 on trumped-up charges of tax evasion.

The very tax investigators that Magnitsky had exposed turned up to arrest him.

The Public Oversight Commission, a Moscow-based NGO, found that while in detention Magnitsky was subjected to physical and psychological abuse amounting to torture.

Over the course of his time in prison, he developed abdominal pain and acute bladder inflammation.

But prison officers cruelly withheld the medical treatment he needed.

Eventually, he was transferred to a facility, ostensibly to receive medical care.

Instead, in fact he was handcuffed and beaten to death by riot police with truncheons.

He died on 16 November 2009, aged 37.

Mr Speaker, the House will recall the European Court of Human Rights found Russia to be in violation of its most basic human rights obligations, from the treatment of Magnitsky in prison to the lack of an effective investigation.

None of those involved have been brought to justice.

Perversely, some have even been promoted or decorated with medals. In fact the only person in fact prosecuted was Sergei Magnitsky himself, after his death Russia's first ever posthumous trial.

I pay tribute to Bill Browder, who employed Sergei Magnitsky, and has campaigned for justice ever since his death, and I hope that we in the House show our solidarity with the family Sergei Magnitsky left behind, his wife Natalia and his son Nikita, and I can tell the House they will be watching from the Foreign Office in my office as we speak.

Amidst their enduring loss they should be proud of Sergei's courage, which, today, inspires us to hold up a torch on behalf of all of those who perished at the hands of those we designate today and keep the flame of freedom alive for those brave souls still suffering in the very darkest corners of the world.

I commend this statement to the House.

ENDS