

Human rights must remain the guiding light for our work at the UN: UK national statement at Third Committee

Thank you, Chair, and just to start let me say what a pleasure it is to be back in the Third Committee where I started my UN career.

Mr Chair, seventy-seven years ago the first UN Member States signed the UN Charter, “determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war” while “promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”.

Those principles have stood the test of time, and must remain the guiding light for our work at the UN and in the Third Committee. But regrettably, today, the world remains ridden with conflict. While suffering is most acute at the front lines, millions more are impacted by the secondary effects.

Since February, Russia has waged a war of aggression against Ukraine, displaying heinous butchery and wanton destruction. The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine concluded that war crimes have been committed. Russia has deployed explosive weapons in populated areas, tortured those in unlawful confinement and some Russian soldiers have committed sexual and gender-based crimes, including against children.

In April, horrific images from Bucha and Irpin demonstrated the lengths Russia will go to to suppress dissent: merciless and deliberate killing of civilians. Russia’s barbarism cannot be ignored by this Committee. Those responsible must be held to account.

Russia’s gross and systematic violations of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law are well documented; and it was right that the General Assembly suspended Russia’s membership of the Human Rights Council.

As Russia’s human rights record further degrades, we also welcome the HRC’s decision to examine Russia’s repression of its own citizens. We must support ordinary Russians who face brutal restrictions on fundamental freedoms. And we must recognise how this repression enables Russia’s aggression abroad.

Mr Chair, we also remain deeply concerned by the situation of the Uyghurs and other minorities in Xinjiang. The former High Commissioner for Human Rights found evidence of arbitrary detention, torture, sexual and gender-based violence, forced sterilisations and abortions, and destruction of religious sites. The wealth of evidence led her to conclude that China’s actions may constitute crimes against humanity. Rather than stifle debate and deny the findings, we urge China to implement the report’s recommendations, including by allowing independent UN experts to conduct unrestricted visits to Xinjiang.

Such systemic discrimination only reaffirms the need for our collective commitment to freedom of religion or belief. Building mutual understanding and respect between communities is essential to fighting intolerance. In July, the UK hosted a Ministerial Conference on FoRB and will never stand by while individuals live in fear of discrimination, hostility or acts of violence because of their religion, belief, or ethnicity.

This pursuit of equality is central to the UK's human rights approach. Nowhere more so than in our efforts to advance gender equality through the protection and promotion of women's and girls' rights. We remain steadfast in respecting the bodily autonomy of women and girls as they exercise their sexual and reproductive rights. We must also increase efforts to prevent gender-based violence, and to eliminate harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriage.

We also remain deeply alarmed by the continued proliferation of conflict related sexual violence. Next month, the UK will host a Ministerial conference to highlight the best means to prevent CRSV, improve justice and accountability, and understand ways to better support survivors.

Mr Chair, we recognise the vital role of civil society in the promotion of human rights. The UK looks forward to joining the NGO Committee in January. Through our membership, we will continue to champion civil society participation, both in the field and in discussions at the UN.

Mr Chair, we can all do better to uphold our human rights obligations. We must act now and fight impunity wherever it may occur.

We condemn all acts of intimidation or reprisal against those who cooperate with the UN

Thank you Chair,

I have the honour to deliver this cross-regional statement on behalf of Ireland and 79 other countries, as well as the European Union.

The world owes a debt to civil society actors and human rights defenders. Without their cooperation and meaningful engagement, we cannot make informed decisions here at the United Nations, and UN entities, agencies, missions and human rights mechanisms cannot effectively carry out their mandates.

When individuals or organisations face threats, retaliation or harm when engaging with international bodies, not only do the individuals involved suffer, but our collective efforts towards peace and security, towards

upholding human rights and towards sustainable development suffer.

We therefore unequivocally condemn all acts of intimidation or reprisal committed against those who have cooperated or who seek to cooperate with the UN.

We welcome the Secretary General's most recent annual report on reprisals, as well as the presentation last week to the General Assembly by Assistant Secretary General Ilze Brands Kehris of this report. The cases documented in the report show the breadth of this issue, with reprisals perpetrated by State and non-State actors, online and offline, and across many countries throughout regions. It is essential that this issue is addressed in a coordinated manner, and therefore we welcome the opportunity to discuss it in New York during the Third Committee, as well as in Geneva.

We share the Secretary-General's concerns about a number of trends identified in the report, in particular:

- That women, minorities, members of indigenous communities, peacebuilders and human rights defenders continue to be disproportionately targeted;
- That there is evidence of an increase of online surveillance, privacy intrusion and cyberattacks used against victims and civil society;
- That the application of laws and other instruments regulating NGOs and their access to funding have placed additional obstacles for civil society's engagement and advocacy efforts at the UN;
- That counter-terrorism laws have been misused against organizations and individuals for their cooperation with the UN;
- And that these restrictive measures, as well as stigmatizing public discourse, have had the effect of deterring victims and civil society from cooperating with the United Nations.

These persistent patterns indicate a concerted effort by both State and non-State actors to silence those who are speaking out and sharing information with the UN. They are compelled to exercise self-censorship out of fear of retribution and harm. This has a profound effect on the impact of the UN operations on the ground and reflects a wider trend of closing civic space globally.

We therefore call on all States to take proactive steps to address reprisals. This involves conducting robust investigations, fully complying with international law obligations, and ensuring accountability. It also involves supporting and protecting victims from threats and violence.

We also encourage all States to promote a safe and enabling environment for civil society in their own countries, including online. Human rights defenders should be able to operate in a safe and open environment, free from coercion, threats of violence and intimidation. They should not be silenced.

We also urge all member states to promote cooperation with the UN, and to support the work of the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights. We call on all to report any cases of reprisals, whether perpetrated by State or non-State actors, that occur within their countries.

We also call on States to provide emergency grants to those facing intimidation or reprisal in conflict settings following engagement in multilateral spaces.

Finally, the United Nations itself has a heightened responsibility when those who cooperate with the organisation are targeted. We therefore call on the UN to ensure that it is doing all it can to facilitate a safe environment. This involves a coordinated response across all agencies and bodies of the system in ensuring robust measures are in place to mitigate risks of reprisals. We welcome initiatives to reinforce UN coordination and readiness on this issue, including the 2020 Guidance note on the protection and promotion of civic space, and the guidance on mitigating reprisals for the Security Council, and we call on the UN to ensure these are effectively implemented.

We also encourage the UN to continue its efforts to improve data collection, analysis and documentation of cases, and to use this information to actively improve policies and practices so that the gaps existing in our collective efforts are closed.

Chair, those who cooperate or seek to cooperate with the UN are performing a public service on a global level. They should never face intimidation, threats or harm as a result.

Thank you.

Signatories:

Afghanistan, Antigua and Barbuda, Albania, Andorra, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bahamas, Belgium, Belize, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cabo Verde, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Estonia, Finland, Fiji, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Latvia, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Maldives, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mexico, Moldova, Monaco, Mongolia, Montenegro, Nauru, Netherlands, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Norway, Panama, Palau, Paraguay, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Romania, Samoa, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Timor-Leste, Tunisia, Tuvalu, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Uruguay, Vanuatu, The European Union.

Supporting MINUSCA's crucial efforts to help the CAR Government build lasting peace

Thank you President. I thank SRSG Rugwabiza for her briefing and I also welcome the participation of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of CAR and the representative of Rwanda.

I will make three points in response to what we have heard today.

First, the United Kingdom welcomes the progress on the political track including steps to implement the Peace Agreement and preparations to hold local elections in January 2023. We strongly encourage the CAR authorities, with MINUSCA's support, to build on political progress and ensure meaningful engagement with civil society, including women.

Second, freedom of movement is fundamental to MINUSCA's work. We welcome the recent reductions in status-of-forces agreement violations and more widely the positive relationship that the SRSG has established with the CAR authorities. We very much hope this trend will continue.

We also encourage the CAR government to work in partnership with the UN Mine Action Service to tackle landmines and IEDs with more urgency. Explosive devices are a grave threat to civilian populations and their access to humanitarian assistance, as well as to the safety and security of peacekeepers. I join others in expressing deep concern at the attack of 3 October in which three Bangladeshi peacekeepers were killed and one injured, and offer sincere condolences to their families and to Bangladesh.

Third, the UK is alarmed by the dramatic increase in the number of human rights violations and abuses reflected in the Secretary-General's report. The violence in the Central African Republic, including conflict-related sexual violence, continues to take a distressing toll on the population. It compounds an already acute humanitarian situation and risks undermining progress on reconciliation. The targeting of civilians not only by armed groups, but also by national forces and the Russian mercenary group Wagner, continue to play a destabilising role in the country and will not help long-term peace as others have also emphasised today. We call on the CAR Government to conduct full and timely investigations into allegations of human rights violations and abuses, to ensure that all perpetrators are held accountable.

Finally, President, we welcome the Secretary-General's recommendation to extend MINUSCA's mandate. It is vital that the Security Council supports MINUSCA's crucial efforts to help the CAR Government build lasting peace. The SRSG and her team has our full support.

Thank you.

Funding boost to LGBT charities supporting veterans

- Businesses and other employers across the UK have joined a new group to support the government on helping veterans get into employment
- First meeting of the Veteran Employers Group was chaired today (20 October) by the Minister for Armed Forces and Veterans.
- Small businesses praise the government's cost saving measures for employers who hire veterans.

LGBT charities who support military veterans are to receive a £45,000 cash boost from the government.

The Office for Veterans' Affairs is providing the money to charities who support individuals providing testimony to an independent review that is looking into the impact the pre-2000 ban on homosexuality in the military has had on veterans.

Funding has been provided to Fighting with Pride, the LGBT Foundation and Forward Assist to ensure veterans are able to comfortably share their experiences serving in the armed forces.

The funds will also provide direct support to veterans and their families who are giving a submission to the LGBT Veterans Independent Review, including signposting to mental health and wellbeing support for those who may struggle before, during and after providing testimony.

Minister for Armed Forces and Veterans James Heappey said:

We want to ensure that those giving evidence to the LGBT Veterans Independent Review are able to do so in a safe space. These grants will ensure that veterans who may require support when providing their testimony will be aided throughout the process.

We want the voices of veterans to be heard so we can adapt our services to help all those who have served. I encourage those who have yet to submit testimony to the review to share their stories.

Veterans providing their testimony will be supported while providing their submissions to the review, for example through transcription of verbal testimony and offering one-to-one emotional support during the process.

Chief Executive of Fighting with Pride Caroline Paige said:

Fighting With Pride is delighted to have been awarded grant funding

from the Office for Veterans Affairs to deliver critical work in connecting LGBT Veterans to the LGBT Veterans Independent Review's Call for Evidence.

This welcome support will enable FWP to further raise awareness of the importance of this once in a lifetime opportunity for LGBT veterans, and those dismissed because they were perceived to be LGBT, helping them to say what happened to them in the past, what the impact has been upon their whole lives and to create a better future for those who live with the consequences of the ban.

Hiren Patel, Operation Equality Project Coordinator for LGBT Foundation, said:

Through Operation Equality, we know LGBTQ+ veterans are still dealing with the fallout of the ban. It forced people to come out to family and friends and resulted in a loss of livelihood.

Thanks to funding from the LGBT Veterans review, we can create a people, LGBTQ+ centric service that helps veterans access in-person story-sharing and support from our team, ensuring the experiences of a diverse range of LGBTQ+ veterans inform the research.

We look forward to supporting the review and understanding the full extent of the distress caused by that ban.

To date, over 500 individuals have submitted their testimony to the independent review.

From these testimonies, the review team will be able to make evidence-based recommendations as to how the government can meet its commitment in the Veterans' Strategy Action Plan and ensure the service and experience of every LGBT veteran is understood and valued.

Notes to editors

Veterans interested in providing testimony to the review can find out more [here](#).

**New professional standards and
stricter regulation to drive up social**

housing standards

- Changes to the Social Housing Regulation Bill will strengthen the powers of the regulator
- All social landlords will be required to ensure that their staff meet competency standards
- Regulator to publish plan for regular inspections of largest landlords

Social housing tenants will benefit from better quality housing and have their complaints dealt with quicker under government measures to increase inspections and drive-up competency amongst staff.

Social housing providers will have to ensure that all their staff – from neighbourhood housing officers to senior management – have the right skills, experience and knowledge to deliver a high-quality service for residents. The new standard will be set out and enforced by the Regulator of Social Housing.

The Regulator will also have a legal duty to publish a plan on its commitment to regularly inspect the largest landlords, including details on how often these will happen.

The move comes as a result of amendments to the Social Housing Regulation Bill which completed Report Stage in the House of Lords yesterday. These changes will improve the regulation of social housing, ensuring landlords deliver better services and higher quality, safer homes for tenants.

Minister for Housing Andrew Stephenson MP said:

Social housing tenants deserve a high-quality service and to be treated with respect. This Bill marks a revolution in the way we regulate social housing, making sure landlords put things right when they go wrong.

For the first time there will be a professional standard that social landlords have to meet, along with increased inspections on the biggest providers. This is a vital step as we deliver on our mission to half the number of poor-quality rented homes by 2030 and level up the nation.

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has also committed to consulting on a minimum energy efficiency standard in the social housing sector within six months of the Bill receiving Royal Assent.

Last month, £1.5 billion was made available for social housing providers and local authorities to [make energy efficiency upgrades](#). This could see bills for around 130,000 low-income households slashed by £400 to £700 a year.

The Social Housing Regulation Bill will strengthen the rights of tenants,

empower them to make their voices heard, as well as giving the Regulator stronger powers to act if things go wrong.

Qualifications such as those offered by the Chartered Institute of Housing will be one way landlords can ensure their staff have the right skills and knowledge to meet new standards.