

UN Human Rights Council 43: Universal Periodic Review Adoption of Iran

Madam President,

The United Kingdom welcomes Iran's engagement with the UPR. However, we are deeply concerned by the human rights situation in Iran and Iran's continued refusal to allow the Special Rapporteur access to the country. In November last year, we saw the most deadly crackdown against its citizens for decades, while persecution and discrimination towards religious minorities continues unabated.

We welcome the temporary release of several thousand detainees following the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak, and together with France and Germany, we have pledged support to UN agencies to assist Iran in combating the outbreak. However, we share the Special Rapporteur's concern about detainees, especially dual nationals – we urge Iran to release them on humanitarian grounds and ensure they are afforded suitable healthcare.

The UK encourages Iran to engage fully with the UN and the international community on their accepted recommendations, and implement them fully.

We regret Iran did not support any of the UK's three recommendations, which were to: demonstrate detainees are not tortured or subject to cruel or inhumane treatment or punishment; allow an impartial trial process, so defendants and lawyers have access to charges and evidence; and investigate sexual exploitation of children and develop a protection plan.

Nevertheless, we remain open to discussing these recommendations with Iran.

Thank you.

UK aid to tackle global spread of coronavirus 'fake news'

Dangerous myths about coronavirus which are hampering the global fight against the disease will be challenged thanks to a new initiative backed by UK aid.

The support from the Department for International Development will challenge misinformation in South East Asia and Africa, which is then spreading worldwide, and direct people to the right advice to help stop the spread of the virus.

False claims and conspiracy theories have spread rapidly on social media, touting 'cures' like drinking bleach or rubbing mustard and garlic into your skin. These pose a serious risk to health and can speed up the spread of the virus, by stopping people taking simple practical, preventative steps like washing their hands.

DFID's £500,000 support will go to the Humanitarian-to-Humanitarian (H2H) Network, which has extensive experience addressing the spread of misinformation during epidemics, for example following the 2015 Ebola outbreak.

The work of the H2H Network will complement UK initiatives by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the NHS to tackle misinformation online.

International Development Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan said:

"Misinformation harms us all. By tackling it at source we will help stop the spread of fake news – and coronavirus – worldwide, including within the UK."

H2H will work with partners BBC Media Action and Internews to create verified information in various languages to tackle specific mistruths spreading in South East Asia and Africa. Their work will also support journalists in these regions to write more accurately about the virus using information from the World Health Organization.

Support will also go to Translators without Borders, which monitors false information in various languages and translates validated content from WHO and other health agencies, and Evidence Aid which updates a database of research on diseases each day.

The initiative will analyse social media and online content to identify where the misinformation is coming from and how it is spreading – so victims of fake news can be sent the correct information and directed to official health advice.

H2H will also work with social media influencers – vloggers and bloggers – to help spread accurate health information and reach younger online audiences that are more susceptible to fake news.

Some of the social media influencers being engaged include:

- Bianca Gonzalez, a health expert and YouTube vlogger from the Philippines with over 7 million followers on Twitter @iamsuperbianca
- Dr Jahangir Kabir, a Bangladeshi health expert and popular TV presenter with over 1 million Facebook followers @DrJahangirkabircmc
- @KlikDokter – An Indonesian health blog with over 4 million Facebook followers

Some of the more damaging mistruths being targeted include:

- ‘Miracle cures’ for the virus, such as drinking chlorine dioxide, an industrial bleach, or urine, eating garlic, gargling saltwater or spreading cow dung and mustard paste. In Myanmar, news websites have reported false claims supposedly from health officials, advising people to sleep next to chopped onions claiming this will “absorb the virus” or to drink ginger juice. It is also falsely claimed you cannot catch coronavirus if you have a mosquito bite. Scammers pretending to be health officials in Myanmar have been selling black pepper seeds as a cure.
- Undermining health officials: In Tanzania, people have received a WhatsApp message claiming to be from the health ministry and telling them drinking warm water every few minutes will prevent infection. The exact same message has also appeared in French throughout West Africa, claiming to be from the Canadian Health Ministry. Messages like this are undermining the efforts of real health officials to contain the virus, damaging trust in official advice and confusing people.
- Promoting violence: Rumours that the virus was created or spread deliberately have already led to reported attacks on Chinese nationals across South East Asia as well as in the UK. A video claiming to show Chinese officials shooting coronavirus victims and alleging tens of thousands were executed went viral on social media sites worldwide, after the celebrity sister of a prominent Bollywood actor in India shared them. The video was in fact edited from four completely unrelated clips, including one of Chinese police shooting a rabid dog.

Public Health England is regularly updating its advice on coronavirus, including how people can help stop the spread of infection. Individuals are also being advised to call NHS 111 or contact the NHS dedicated 111 online coronavirus service if they are concerned about any symptoms or any contact they may have had with someone who might be infected.

- The H2H Network consists of approximately 50 organisations, which provide specialist services to the humanitarian aid sector, including tackling fake news in the wake of disasters and epidemics. The H2H Network is supported by UK aid and hosted by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). This support is a new allocation of UK aid support from the UK’s aid commitment.
- The World Health Organization warned in February about an ‘infodemic’ of false information which risked worsening the spread of the virus
- The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport earlier this week

announced the creation of a new cross-Government counter disinformation unit bringing together expert teams to help provide a comprehensive picture on the potential extent, scope and impact of disinformation on coronavirus in the UK.

- The DCMS-led unit will have regular and robust engagement with social media companies to monitor interference and limit the spread of disinformation.
- NHS England has also partnered with social media sites and search engines to ensure that official health advice is shown in online searches about the virus, as well as to verify or remove accounts claiming to be from local health authorities
- The new UK aid-backed initiative announced today will complement these efforts, by challenging misinformation beyond the UK, targeting the source of fake news spreading in and from Africa and South East Asia

Budget brings £640 million boost for Scottish Government

11th March 2020

Delivering his first Budget the Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, outlined the additional funding for the Scottish Government, allowing it to deliver on the priorities of the Scottish people.

The Chancellor also announced a package of measures to tackle the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak on the UK economy, with the Scottish Government to receive additional funding support public services, vulnerable people and reduce the costs for businesses.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak, said:

Our central mission is to level up and unite people in our shared aims of a more prosperous country, in which opportunity is spread fairly across Scotland and the breadth of our United Kingdom.

This is a Budget that will deliver for the Scottish people, with £640 million in extra funding for the Scottish Government, a significant boost to broadband infrastructure and a package of support for the Scotch whisky industry, among other economic

measures.

Our United Kingdom is the most successful political and economic union in history, and through this Budget we will further strengthen the ties that bind us and kickstart a decade of investment in all our communities.

Today's announcements for Scotland also include:

- £640 million in additional funding for the Scottish Government
- A significant package of support for the Scotch whisky industry. Alongside this, a £1 million GREAT campaign to promote the Scottish food and drink sector, including Scotch
- Plans to rollout gigabit capable broadband to the hardest to reach areas of Scotland and increasing 4G coverage in Scotland from 42% to 74%
- Tay Cities has also successfully bid for £6.7 million to fund full fibre broadband
- £10 million over 3 years for research and development to decarbonise UK distilleries, which includes Scotch whisky
- £5 million for trials of 5G in Scotland

With Scotch whisky one of the UK's key exports and an industry that employs more than 10,000 people in Scotland alone, the UK Government is supporting this vital sector with a package of measures including a freeze on spirits duty, and £10 million research and development funding to decarbonise the distilling process. Alongside this a £1 million marketing campaign to promote exports of Scottish food and drink, including Scotch.

The Budget also confirmed £25 million for an Argyll & Bute Growth Deal.

This year's Budget delivers on the promises made to the British people and lays the foundations for a decade of growth by giving everyone the same opportunity to thrive wherever they live.

With commitments to increase the National Living Wage, National Insurance thresholds and the Employment Allowances across the UK, today's Budget means someone working full time on the minimum wage in Scotland will be over £5,200 better off compared to ten years ago.

Scottish Secretary Alister Jack said:

This is a great budget for Scotland. Decisions taken by the UK Government over the last year will deliver an almost £2 billion funding boost for the Scottish Government.

People and businesses right across Scotland will see the benefits – more than £5 billion for broadband and 4G connectivity, an increase in the national living wage, £22 billion for research and development across the UK, and a freeze in fuel duty. The Scotch whisky industry gets a welcome boost, with a freeze on spirits and a review of alcohol duty, and £10 million help to develop green

technology. We will also invest £1 million in promoting Scottish produce to overseas markets.

We will continue our extensive investment in growth deals across Scotland, now at almost £1.5 billion, with confirmation of £25 million UK Government funding for Argyll and Bute. Every part of Scotland will be covered by growth deals, with investment to be announced soon for Falkirk and the Scottish islands.

Following decisions taken at this Budget, notably on funding for health business rates relief and roads, the Scottish Government's resource and capital budgets in 2020-2021 will increase by over £220m and £410m respectively with a total increase of more than £640m.

The additional funding, when combined with the £1.3bn funding in 2020-21 provided at the Spending Round 2019, results in the largest year-on-year real-terms funding increase for the Scottish Government in a decade.

[Coal Authority caps 200m deep coal mine shaft to keep residents safe in Wigan](#)

The Coal Authority has completed work to construct a reinforced concrete cap and landscape the land where 2 terrace houses were demolished after they were damaged by an old coal mine shaft.

The project began with a report to our 24/7 hazard line about cracks in a Wigan property near the 200 metre deep, 2.4 metre diameter Wallace Colliery shaft, which once gave access to 5 coal seams that were worked from the 1830s.

The properties when the Coal Authority was first called.

After evacuating residents and securing the area, our investigations revealed that material used in the 1920s to fill the shaft – which lay beneath a passage between two homes in the middle of the terrace on Wallace Lane in Whelley – had slumped, causing both houses to move.

To eliminate any risk we purchased the properties and, because of limited access and to minimise disruption, demolished them by hand.

The damaged properties being demolished by hand.

The 6 metre by 6 metre cap was cast centrally over 16 steel piles, drilled 8 metres into rock, with a built-in inspection chamber to allow the shaft to be monitored in the future.

To support the two exposed gable ends of the neighbouring homes, our engineering team designed underpinnings, which were dug out and filled in 3 sections to create one continuous foundation without destabilising the properties, before the gable ends were rebuilt to modern thermal standards.

The finished work.

Coal Authority project manager Keith Ollivant – who liaised with contractors, the council and neighbours – oversaw the work with support from our safety, engineering, legal and property teams. He said:

These houses date from the 1930s and the builder knew the shaft was there, which is why the terrace was designed as a dog-leg with the alleyway spanning it.

They probably thought the foundations of the properties would support each other which, to be fair, they did for 80 years.

However, over time the fill within the shaft slumped, at which point the houses above weren't supported, so they tilted, causing damage.

In this video, Keith explains what happened after he was called out to 18 Wallace Lane:

[Coal Authority called in after mine shaft slumps under terrace houses in Wigan](#)

To report a coal mine hazard, call 01623 646 333, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

[Coronavirus: what to report and how](#)

During the current uncertainty surrounding the spread of coronavirus, charities are urged to check the [most up to date advice from Public Health England](#).

We've received many enquiries into our call centre about the reporting process on RSI. Unfortunately, our initial response was not as helpful as we would have liked. Therefore, we would like to clarify that charities should continue to report serious incidents using the current guidelines and their own judgement and we will advise if and when this situation changes.