

Press release: Maldives continues to be named a Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) 'Human Rights Priority Country'

On [20th July] the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's (FCO) made public its annual Human Rights Report for 2016. Maldives is one of 30 'Human Rights Priority Countries' (HRPCs), countries with which the UK looks for positive engagement that contributes to addressing human rights concerns.

The Report notes that democratic space, political and civil freedoms continued to deteriorate in Maldives during 2016. It sets out concerns at anti-democratic legislation that was passed during 2016, particularly the Defamation and Freedom of Speech Act which seeks to clamp down on freedom of expression, and the Freedom of Assembly Act which restricts the right of assembly.

The Report raises concern at the intimidation of and threats to journalists, noting that during the year journalists were arrested and news organisations raided, threatened or closed down. It draws attention to several long prison sentences handed out to high-profile political figures, including opposition leaders, at the end of trials that lacked transparency and judicial independence, and that failed to follow due process.

The report mentions the UK's disappointment at Maldives' decision to leave the Commonwealth in 2016.

British Ambassador to Maldives, James Dauris, said:

"The purpose of our Annual Report is to draw attention to human rights issues of concern in countries around the world, to encourage progress and recognize achievements made. As a friend of Maldives the UK is concerned by the lack of an effective separation of powers and the continued use of anti-terrorism, defamation and other legislation to silence and discourage opposition voices and journalists. We will continue to engage with Maldives and raise concerns alongside our international partners."

The Report underlines the UK's desire to work positively with countries facing human rights challenges to help them improve their human rights performance.

The 30 HRPCs are: Afghanistan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Burma, Burundi, Central African Republic, China, Colombia, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Libya, Maldives, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Yemen and Zimbabwe.

Promoting human rights is a central foreign policy objective of the British

Government. The FCO began publishing the Annual Human Rights Report in 1998 and it is now [published online](#). As well as the Annual Report, twice-yearly updates on the 30 HRPCs are also published.

Press release: UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office Releases Annual Human Rights Report 2016

On [20th July] the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's (FCO) made public its annual Human Rights Report for 2016. The report recognises and welcomes improvements in the human rights situation in Sri Lanka, while also emphasising the need for further progress. Sri Lanka is one of 30 'Human Rights Priority Countries' (HRPCs), countries with which the UK looks for positive engagement that contributes to addressing human rights concerns. It commends progress by the Government of Sri Lanka against commitments reflected in UN Human Rights Council (HRC) Resolution 30/1, while pointing out that greater progress is needed.

The report welcomes the encouraging step towards reconciliation by the passing of legislation establishing an Office of Missing Persons (OMP), while urging the government to operationalise the OMP. The Report also calls on the Government to repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and draft new counter-terrorism legislation in line with international human rights standards.

It recognises the need for further development of the police force in order to reduce the risk of human rights violations, including torture, and improving public confidence in the rule of law. The UK is continuing support for projects that build capabilities and will help the Sri Lankan Police meet international standards.

The report notes that intercommunal tensions remain an area of concern. The High Commission notes that these tensions have subsequently escalated in 2017 and hopes that calls to address hate speech as seriously as the problem merits will be heeded.

The UK Government has pledged £6.6m in the period 2016 – 2019 to continue support for reconciliation and human rights. Work with the Government of Sri Lanka will aim to continue to strengthen democracy and the rule of law, and to share UK experience and expertise.

British High Commissioner to Sri Lanka James Dauris, said:

“The purpose of our Annual Report is to draw attention to human rights issues of concern in countries around the world, to encourage progress and recognize achievements made. In the past year we have engaged closely with the Sri

Lankan Government and many others to support delivery on human rights commitments.”

The Report reflects the UK’s desire to work positively with countries facing human rights challenges to help them improve their human rights performance.

The 30 HRPCs are: Afghanistan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Burma, Burundi, Central African Republic, China, Colombia, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Libya, Maldives, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Yemen and Zimbabwe.

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[News story: Government sets out vision for future of UK aviation](#)

Shaping aviation to help boost economic growth, connectivity and skills will be at the centre of a new strategy to prepare the industry for the next 3 decades and beyond, the [government announced today](#) (21 July 2017).

The public are being asked to [have their say](#) on how this vital sector should respond to a range of technological, security, environmental and customer service challenges.

It also looks at how the government can support future growth in an industry which directly supports 240,000 jobs and contributes at least £22 billion to the UK economy each year.

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling will today launch a public discussion to help shape and promote the future of the aviation industry both up to 2050 and beyond.

Airport bag check-ins in town centres and a ‘luggage portering’ service are among a series of innovative ideas the public is being asked for views on.

Other issues include possible new forms of compensation for noise or designing targets for noise reduction.

The government is also keen for views on how it should support and regulate emerging technologies around personal travel.

The document also discusses how we can make best use of existing capacity at

all airports around the country.

The Secretary of State announced the strategy at the launch of a £1 billion programme to double the size of Manchester Airport's Terminal 2.

The project will create 1,500 jobs, allow for more international destinations, and grow passenger numbers from 27 million to 45 million a year.

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said:

Aviation is central to our future prosperity as we leave the European Union. As a global, trading nation we want to build on the great industry we have today and create opportunities for people up and down the country

Our new aviation strategy will look beyond the new runway at Heathrow and sets out a comprehensive long-term plan for UK aviation. It will support jobs and economic growth across the whole of the UK.

Our vision puts the passenger at the heart of what we do, but also recognises the need to address the impacts of aviation on communities and the environment.

Charlie Cornish, Chief Executive of Manchester Airports Group, said:

Today, work will begin at Manchester Airport on a £1 billion investment programme that will provide passengers and airlines with world-class airport facilities, and deliver a major boost to the UK's growth prospects and international competitiveness.

We welcome the Secretary of State's recognition of the important role that airports across the UK will play in driving economic growth, and commitment to looking at how airports like Manchester and London Stansted can make best use of their existing capacity.

The government is today setting out 6 important themes that it will consult on over the coming months:

1) Customer service. Which will look at:

- how to ensure the industry is accessible for all and caters for an ageing population and passengers with restricted mobility

- the consumer protection arrangements that should be in place when things go wrong
- how to deal with disruptive passengers

It also highlights new ways of working in other countries such as check-in facilities in town centres or luggage portering services, where bags are picked up from passengers before they reach the airport.

- 2) Safety and security. Which will look at the technology that could be introduced at UK airports to counter the threat from terrorism; what more could be done to raise security standards; and whether current safety standards are acceptable.
- 3) Global connectivity. Which will look at how the UK can improve our global connectivity for passengers and freight as we leave the EU; and how we can remove barriers to trade.
- 4) Competitive markets. Which will look at whether existing regulation produces the best outcome for consumers; how to encourage connectivity across UK nations and regions and how to stimulate competition to ensure the consumers have a wide choice of airports, airlines and destinations.
- 5) Supporting growth while tackling environmental impacts. Which will look at how to achieve the right balance between more flights and ensuring action is taken to tackle carbon emissions, noise and air quality.
- 6) Innovation, technology and skills. Which will look at which emerging technologies could significantly change the aviation market or bring benefits to passengers; and how the industry should address skills shortages and improve its diversity.

Dr Adam Marshall, Director General of the British Chambers of Commerce, said:

It is crucial that the government's future aviation strategy supports the continued growth and development of our airports, and frees them to make the best use of their capacity to link British businesses to markets all across the world.

Stronger airports help our cities and counties attract more investment and visitors, and connect our firms to trading opportunities overseas – so we must enable them to grow and change to meet the demands of the future.

Consultations on each of these areas will run throughout 2017 and 2018 and will be followed by the publication of the final aviation strategy by the end of 2018.

[Press release: Drivers to benefit from free Severn crossings from 2018](#)

Drivers will see an end to tolls on the Severn Crossings in 2018, Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns announced today (21 July 2017).

The announcement comes as families prepare to take to the roads for the great summer getaway.

The Severn Crossings are iconic landmarks which have served commuters, businesses and local communities in Wales and England for over 50 years.

The bridges are used by more than 25 million vehicles each year, saving significant travel time and distance for commuters and drivers using the M4 motorway.

However, the tolls on both Severn Crossings have been seen as an economic and symbolic barrier to Wales' future prosperity.

Today the UK Government is delivering on the promise made to the people of Wales by the Prime Minister in May and has confirmed that it will abolish the tolls to all vehicles at the end of 2018.

It is estimated that this announcement would boost the economy of South Wales by around £100 million a year* and the average motorist could save over £1,400 per year**.

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns said:

The decision to abolish the Severn tolls next year sends a powerful message to businesses, commuters and tourists alike that the UK Government is committed to strengthening the Welsh economy.

By ending tolls for the 25 million annual journeys between two nations we will strengthen the links between communities and help to transform the joint economic prospects of South Wales and the South West of England.

I want to ensure that visitors and investors know what Wales has to offer socially, culturally and economically. Most importantly, I want the world to know how accessible we are to business. The decision we have taken today is right for Wales' future prosperity and I am sure that it will be welcomed by industry and motorists alike.

When the bridges come under public ownership, they will be run by Highways

England. Previously it has been run by Severn River Crossing plc.

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said:

Tens of millions of motorists a year will benefit from the end of tolls on the Severn bridges, saving them money and cutting journey times. People who use the crossing every day will save a minimum of £115 a month.

Abolishing the crossing fee will also drive economic growth for businesses in Wales and the South West and further strengthen the bond between our two great countries.

The Secretary of State for Wales will announce the news to an audience of business representatives from South West of England and South Wales at an event at Newport based Owens Group.

Ian Gallagher, Head of Policy for South West and Wales Freight Transport Association welcomed the announcement:

This announcement today is excellent news for the growth of the Welsh and South West Economies, a real shot in the arm for those businesses and commuters who use the bridges on a daily basis.

Removal of the tolls altogether has been a long-term policy position for the Freight Transport Association, with members on both side of the bridges incurring some of the highest tolls charges in the UK, money better spent on upskilling, recruitment and purchasing greener vehicles.

Notes to Editors

** Welsh Government: The Impact of the Severn Tolls on the Welsh Economy, 30 May 2012

**Based on a monthly tag charge of £117.92 over 12 months

- The Severn Bridge was built in 1966 and a second crossing was completed 30 years later.
- The first Severn Bridge was opened in September 1966, providing a direct link from the M4 motorway into Wales, with a toll in place for use of the bridge to pay for the cost of construction. It continually operated above capacity and in 1986 the then Government stated that a second bridge would be constructed.

- In 1988 it was announced that tenders would be invited from private consortia to fund, build and operate the second bridge and take over the operation of the first bridge. In 1990 the concession was awarded to Severn River Crossing PLC ("SRC"). Construction work also started in April 1992 and the second bridge was opened in June 1996.
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Speech: "Make no mistake, this is a crisis of human creation; a crisis that South Sudan's leaders have had six years to prevent."

Thank you Mr President, thank you Assistant-Secretary-General Wane, thank you President Mogae for your briefings. And let me take this opportunity to reiterate the United Kingdom's full support for your work, and for the UN Mission in South Sudan.

I wouldn't normally take the floor before consultations but the horrifying and entrenched situation in South Sudan compels me to speak out.

Two weeks ago, the people of South Sudan should have been celebrating their young country's independence day. They should have been celebrating six years of progress; six years of a country learning to stand on its own two feet.

But six years on, South Sudan isn't standing. It's barely even crawling; stifled by its leaders who would rather serve their own ends than help their country. Six years of their rule has left over half the population without enough food, six million people dependent on humanitarian assistance just to survive.

Make no mistake, this is a crisis of human creation; a crisis that South Sudan's leaders have had six years to prevent.

But instead of helping, they have poured fuel on the fire. We need only look at the ongoing fighting across the country by the government and opposition forces. In Pagak, for example, the government offensive there has displaced thousands of civilians into Ethiopia. Aid workers have been evacuated, the already desperate humanitarian situation has been made even worse.

And yet when the government are asked about Pagak, we hear different stories from different people: some say there has been no violence there; others argue that the offensive was for self defence. So let's be clear, the violence is happening there and it is not self defence; it is a blatant infringement of the ceasefire that Kiir declared only a few months ago.

Not content with misleading their people and the international community, the government of South Sudan have systematically clamped down on the media and on access to information. Last Friday, internet service providers in South Sudan were ordered to block media outlets with which the government disagreed. The head of state television was reported to have been arrested for failing to broadcast President Kiir's Independence Day speech. The government say they are committed to media freedom, but their actions speak otherwise.

What the government of South Sudan says bears no relation to what it does. In June we saw humanitarian access being blocked a hundred times; the highest month in 2017 so far. In addition, ceasefire monitors have been blocked on multiple occasions by government troops from investigating incidents of reported violence. This is all in clear violation of the peace agreement and all at the cost of the South Sudanese people.

Until we see the government's actions match their words, this Council has no choice but to take measures to protect peace and security. For the United Kingdom, that means returning to the issue of an arms embargo on South Sudan once again. We must do all we can to stop the uncontrolled flow of weapons that is driving this violence.

In parallel, we should continue to work with IGAD to support their Revitalisation Forum Initiative. The first priority for this must be to bring an end to the fighting. This will require a negotiated ceasefire or cessation of hostilities agreement amongst a broad and meaningful range of armed actors. It will require national and local initiatives. And we must be clear that any actors blocking peace will face consequences.

But in truth, Mr President, we have said all of this before. In this Chamber back in May I said that we were not yet fulfilling our responsibilities as a Council to the people of South Sudan. Two months on that, I'm afraid, is still the case. The parties continue to put violence before peace.

This cannot continue. We have a unique window of opportunity before the end of the rainy season to make meaningful progress in South Sudan. Should we fail in our efforts, South Sudan will enter into a fifth year of conflict. And for a country that is only six years old, that is simply heartbreaking.

Thank you Mr President.