

UN Human Rights Council 48: UK statement on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons

World news story

The UK delivered this statement during the Interactive Dialogue with the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons.



UK Government

Thank you Madam President,

The United Kingdom thanks the Independent Expert for her report.

We remain committed to protecting the rights of all persons, including older persons. We are deeply concerned about the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 crisis on older persons and persons with disabilities, as well as the deeply entrenched ageism and age-discrimination the pandemic has exposed and encouraged.

Older persons have been stigmatised, blamed, and perceived by many as a burden during this pandemic. Measures intended to protect older persons have often led to isolation, reduced status in families and communities, and reduced participation in the collective responses to the pandemic which

directly affect them.

The UK is working to ensure that our COVID-19 responses include older persons, persons with disabilities and other marginalised groups in order to leave no one behind. We urge those shaping policy and practice to recognise the critical role that older persons and their representative organisations must play in COVID-19 response and recovery.

We are grateful to the Independent Expert for highlighting the critical nexus of ageism and ableism, and that older persons with disabilities still face significant barriers to the prevention and treatment of COVID-19.

Ms Mahler, How can state agencies best work with older persons and their representative organisations to ensure their work is consultative?

Thank you.

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[UK gas market and prices](#)

With permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement on the UK Gas Market.

As Honourable and Right Honourable members will be aware, over the weekend I held meetings with Ofgem and energy companies, and this morning I held a further roundtable discussion.

Today I will set out the government's approach to manage the impact of high global gas prices affecting the UK – and countries across Europe.

To begin, I want to make two points extremely clear.

Firstly, Mr Speaker, I must stress that protecting consumers is our no.1, our primary focus – and will shape our entire approach to this important issue.

Secondly, I also want to reassure the House that while the UK – like other countries in Europe – has been affected by global prices, Britain benefits from having a diverse range of gas supply sources.

We have sufficient capacity **and more than sufficient capacity** to meet demand, and we do not expect supply emergencies to occur this winter.

There is absolutely no question, Mr. Speaker, of the lights going out, or people being unable to heat their homes.

There'll be no three-day working weeks, or a throw-back to the 1970s. Such thinking is alarmist, unhelpful and completely misguided.

To begin I'd like to set out some context for the global situation we are now witnessing.

As the world comes out of COVID-19 and economies begin to reopen, we are seeing a dramatic uptake in global gas demand, much faster than many people had anticipated.

High demand in Asia for Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), transported globally by freight, means that far less LNG has reached Europe. Weather events in the US have also affected LNG exports to Europe.

So therefore, increased demand, coupled with reduced variety of supply globally, has put upward pressure on the price of gas traded globally.

High wholesale gas prices have subsequently driven an increase in wholesale power prices, with a number of short-term markets trading at, or near, record levels.

While we are not complacent, we do not expect supply emergencies this winter. This is a very important point. This is not a question of security of supply.

The GB, the Great British, UK gas system has delivered securely to date and is expected to continue to function effectively, with a diverse range of supply sources and sufficient delivery capacity to more than meet demand.

The National Grid Electricity System Operator has the tools within itself to operate the electricity system reliably, to balance that system and we remain confident that electricity security can be maintained under a very wide range of scenarios.

We aren't reliant on any one particular source for our gas, like many of our friends in Europe.

Domestic production, and member and right honourable members should know, is still our largest single gas supply source, and accounted for about 50% of total supply last year.

However, the UK also benefits from an excellent relationship with Norway, one of our most important and reliable energy partners, and that delivers nearly 30% of our total gas supply. Just in the past half hour, I was privileged enough to speak to the Norwegian Energy Minister to welcome the announcement from Equinor today that gas production will significantly increase from 1 October to support the UK and European demand.

Our remaining supply, Mr Speaker, is sourced from global markets via two interconnectors to the Continent, and also through our LNG infrastructures, which is as many of you know, the largest in Europe.

Obviously, the global gas situation has had an impact on some energy suppliers. We have already seen four suppliers exit the market in recent weeks, and we may well expect to see further companies exiting the market over the coming weeks.

I have to say, Mr. Speaker, at this point that having been energy minister for nearly 2 years before I became Secretary of State, we saw in those two years, at around this time, companies exiting the market. It may well be more this year, but this is something that, as this time of year, and ahead of the renewable obligation, is often seen in the market.

I want to make clear today, however, that it is not unusual for smaller energy suppliers to exit the market – particularly, I may add, when wholesale global prices are rising.

The sector has seen regular entry and exit over the last five to 10 years, that is the feature of a highly competitive market.

The current global situation may see more suppliers than usual exiting the market, but this is not something that should be cause for alarm or panic.

We have clear processes in place to make sure all customers are supplied with energy. When an energy supplier typically fails, Ofgem appoints another supplier to take on serving the customers and there is no interruption to supply. I reiterate, our first and primary concern is for the customer.

I'd like to stress three further principles, which are guiding my and the government's approach in this matter.

Firstly, the government will not be bailing out failed companies. There will be no rewards for failure or mismanagement. The taxpayer should not be expected to prop-up companies who have poor business models and are not resilient to fluctuations in price.

Secondly, customers, especially and most particularly vulnerable customers, must be protected from price spikes.

And thirdly, Mr. Speaker, we must ensure that the energy market does not pay the price for the poor practices of a minority of companies, and that the market still maintains the competition that is a feature of today's current system. We must not see a return to, I quote, the "cosy oligopoly" of years past, where a few large suppliers simply dictated to customers conditions and pricing.

I'd like to reassure all members, and honourable members and their constituents that the Energy Price Cap – which still saves 15 million households up to £100 a year is staying – isn't going anywhere.

As I said earlier, our priority in this situation has to be the consumer, the Great British public, and the cap has done that effectively. It protects, and has protected, millions of customers from sudden increases in global gas prices this winter. We are committed to the Price Cap and it will remain in place.

Meanwhile, our Warm Home Discount, Winter Fuel Payments and Cold Weather Payments will continue supporting millions of vulnerable and low-income households with their energy bills.

It is absolutely vital that the energy supply sector remains a liberalised competitive market in order to deliver value and good service to consumers.

As a result of high global gas prices, members and right honourable members will have read, two fertiliser plants shut down in Teesside and Cheshire last week. They suspended the production of CO₂ and ammonia. A decision which has affected in the short-term our domestic supply of CO₂, which is used in the food and drink, as well as the nuclear and health sectors.

Yesterday, I met Tony Will, the global chief executive of CF Industries. We discussed the pressures the business is facing and explored, quite thoroughly, possible ways to secure vital supplies.

Work is ongoing across departments in Whitehall, across government to ensure that those sectors impacted and affected by this announcement have appropriate contingency plans in place to ensure that there is indeed minimal disruption. To maintain our domestic supplies of CO₂, we are in constant contact with relevant companies who produce and supply CO₂ and we are monitoring the situation minute by minute.

Over the past few days, as has been widely reported, I have held several discussions with chief executives of the UK's largest energy suppliers and operators, and also with Ofgem to discuss this vital issue.

Just this morning, I chaired a roundtable with UK energy companies & the representatives of consumer groups, in which I reiterated as I have on the floor of this house, the need for us all of us in government and industry to prioritise customers, in short to protect the consumer.

Meetings continue across government today and throughout the course of this week.

In terms of further actions and statements, this afternoon, shortly after the statement presented here, I will be making a joint statement with Ofgem setting out the government's next steps following healthy and illuminating discussions with them and suppliers.

Mr Speaker, our security of gas supply is robust. But it is the case that the UK is still too reliant on fossil fuels. Our exposure to volatile global gas prices underscores the importance of our plan to build a strong, home-grown renewable energy sector to strengthen our energy security into the future.

Thanks to the steps that we have made as a government, renewable energy has quadrupled in terms of gigawatts capacity since 2010, far more than quadrupled in fact – but there is clearly a lot more we can do in this area.

That is why we committed to approve at least one large-scale new nuclear project in the next few years, and are backing the next generation of advanced nuclear technology with £385 million, helping to attract billions of pounds in private capital and create tens of thousands of jobs.

Consumers come first. We must protect our constituents.

[Global Britain is planting its flag on the world stage: article by Liz Truss](#)

This week, world leaders are gathering at the United Nations in New York. As Britain's new Foreign Secretary, I will be there making the case for building deeper economic, diplomatic and security partnerships in order to help us seize the opportunities – and tackle the challenges – of the modern age.

We are proud of the United Kingdom and our role in the world. We are [delivering vaccines in record time](#) as a strong science and tech superpower. We are a global leader in development, delivering support for those in need, and raising huge sums to support girls' education. We are a fierce champion of freedom and free enterprise, promoting democracy and equality around the world, including empowering women and advancing LGBT rights.

But freedoms need to be defended, so we are also building strong security ties around the world. That is why last week the Prime Minister announced, alongside our friends President Biden and Prime Minister Morrison, the creation of a [new security partnership called AUKUS](#).

We will be working closer together to use a wide range of cutting-edge technologies, from nuclear-powered submarines at first and then looking at artificial intelligence and quantum computing. It shows our readiness to be hard-headed in defending our interests and challenging unfair practices and malign acts. It also shows our commitment to security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region. The Prime Minister highlighted the vital strategic importance of that region when he set out his vision for Global Britain in the [Integrated Review of foreign, security and development policy](#) earlier this year.

This is about more than foreign policy in the abstract, but delivering for people across the UK and beyond by partnering with like-minded countries to build coalitions based on shared values and shared interests. For example, our new security pact will not just make us safer at home, it could also create hundreds of new and high-skilled jobs, from the shipyards of Govan to the factories of Tyneside.

That is why we are deepening our connections with the world's largest and fastest-growing economies, including in the Indo-Pacific. We are already the first country to launch negotiations to [join the £9 trillion Trans-Pacific Partnership \(CPTPP\)](#) since it was established in 2018, and others have indicated that they could follow us. We are also working with the US, as our closest ally, to finance developing countries to build new, clean infrastructure to boost their economies.

Britain has always been at its best as an outward-looking, positive nation, confident in its ability to innovate, compete and lead. That is why we are

working to open ourselves to the opportunities of the future with radical regulatory reform in areas from financial services to digital and data – and championing the cause of reform and openness on the world stage.

I will ensure that our [embassies and high commissions](#) are banging the drum for Britain as a global force for good on vital issues such as tackling climate change and beating COVID-19, while also helping to secure the investment we need to stimulate enterprise and level-up the country.

My visit to the UN is the start of an autumn where Global Britain plants its flag on the world stage. In the coming weeks, we will be hosting the first Global Investment Summit, including a reception with Her Majesty the Queen. We will also be [hosting the UN Climate Change Conference \(COP26\)](#) in Glasgow, and a meeting of G7 Foreign and Development Ministers in Liverpool – that great historic port city which shows the prosperity and thriving cultural life that comes with being an international hub.

This is Global Britain in action: going out into the world in a positive and confident spirit to tackle the major challenges of our age alongside our friends and allies. I want us to project this vision to the world and ensure that everyone in Britain knows that our best days lie ahead.

By positioning the UK at the heart of a network of economic, diplomatic and security partnerships, and helping other countries grow through enterprise and trade, we are making our country safer and more competitive, standing up for our values, and confirming our status as the best place to live, work and do business. This is how, as Foreign Secretary, I will ensure our foreign policy delivers for people across our great country.

[Smokers encouraged to take part in Stoptober, as they report smoking more during pandemic](#)

[Stoptober](#) is back to launch its 10th mass quit attempt on 1 October, calling on smokers in England to join the 2.3 million others who have made a quit attempt with the campaign since it launched a decade ago in 2012, according to Public Health England's [monitoring evaluation data](#).

[Over 6 million adults in England still smoke](#), and it remains the [leading cause of premature death](#), with [almost 75,000 preventable deaths a year](#). A new nationwide survey of 2,000 current smokers, released today, has found that nearly half (45%) have been smoking more since the first lockdown began. Key reasons reported are due to being bored in the lockdowns (43%) or the COVID-19 pandemic making them more anxious (42%).

More than two-fifths (43%) of smokers surveyed believe that the strength of addiction and/or craving is the biggest obstacle to quitting, followed by the stress of everyday life (42%). More than half of smokers want to quit, and three-quarters (75%) would never have started smoking if they could go back in time. Of those who want to quit, more than half (55%) would like to do so to improve their physical health or to save money (52%).

Data from the monthly [UCL Smoking Toolkit Study](#) indicates a large increase in smoking among the under-35s since the pandemic – [up from 18% in 2019 to 24% now](#).

Multiple benefits to health

The disruptive impact of the pandemic on smoking patterns make this year's Stoptober mass quit attempt more important than ever. Stopping smoking brings multiple benefits to health, some immediate and others that build over time. These include being able to start moving better, being able to breathe more easily and saving money. [The average smoker can save £1,875.60](#) a year by quitting smoking (based on July 2021 price (£11.46), minus July 2011 price (£6.59), which equals £4.86, or 73.6%).

Stoptober is based on research that if a smoker can make it to 28 days smoke-free, they are 5-times more likely to quit for good. The campaign first launched in 2012 when 1 in 5 adults smoked (19.3%) – this has since [fallen to 1 in 7 in England \(13.9%\)](#).

Stoptober offers a range of free quitting tools including:

Scott Crosby, Tobacco Control Programme Manager at Public Health England, said:

Since the pandemic hit we've seen an increase in 18 to 34 year olds taking up smoking, which is why Stoptober is as vital as ever. Now in its 10th year it's supported over 2 million smokers to give quitting a go.

Quitting smoking will not only immediately improve your physical health but also your bank balance. Research shows that if you can make it to 28 days smoke-free then you are 5-times more likely to quit for good.

It's been a tough time over the pandemic for smokers. But the numbers trying to quit is up and the success rate is up. Now is the time to do it! Sign up to Stoptober and make it a success.

Dr Sarah Jarvis, GP and media medic, said:

Smoking is still the leading preventable cause of premature death. Every cigarette smoked damages the lungs and airways, making it harder to breathe. Smoking fills the lungs with toxins which harm

the immune system and leave the smoker more vulnerable to infections – something which has been at the forefront of all our minds over the past 18 months.

As a doctor, I urge every smoker to give quitting a go this October – it's never too late to quit – stopping smoking brings immediate benefits to health, including for people with an existing smoking-related disease. There's loads of support available including expert help from local stop smoking services, quit smoking aids and digital tools. You don't need to do this alone.

Leading UK health organisations, including The Asthma UK and the British Lung Foundation, are joining in the call to get smokers in England to give quitting a go this October by joining Stoptober.

Eluned Hughes, Head of Health Advice at Asthma UK and British Lung Foundation, said:

Quitting smoking is one of the best things anyone can do to improve their overall health. Smoking seriously damages the lungs, putting people at greater risk of developing conditions such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

It is vital, now more than ever, that people protect their lungs by giving up this deadly habit. No matter how long you have been a smoker, it is never too late to give up, and if you do already have a lung condition, then quitting is one of the best things you can do to help yourself. As Stoptober marks its tenth anniversary, why not take the first step to quitting for good?

Smokers are being urged to join the thousands of people who are stopping smoking this October. For free support to quit search 'Stoptober'.

A new infographic, released as part of the campaign to highlight the changing smoking landscape in the last decade, is available below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FBM-Es7wy3A>

Taskforce tackles pension scheme governance

The Taskforce on Pension Scheme Voting Implementation (TPSVI) has set out its recommendations on how to strengthen the role of those who manage people's savings in a move which will see significant strides towards safer, better

and greener pension schemes.

Chaired by Simon Howard, the former CEO of the UK Sustainable Investment and Finance Association, the TPSVI was set up by Minister for Pensions Guy Opperman to assist with voting system issues. It will also encourage the people who invest pension savings – such as asset managers – to engage with their clients' preferences about where their money goes.

Currently, when pension schemes invest in pooled funds, they surrender their rights to vote at the Annual General Meetings of the companies they invest in.

And until now, the vast majority of asset managers, who are in charge of these pooled funds, have not always been prepared to engage with their clients' voting preferences.

These votes could be on issues such as climate risk management, diversity, or pay.

Minister for Pensions and Financial Inclusion Guy Opperman said:

This is about giving pension savers a voice in how their hard-earned savings are being looked after.

I see no reason why trustees shouldn't be able to determine their own high level policies – on areas such as climate risk management, diversity, or pay – and find an asset manager to implement it.

I congratulate the Taskforce for delivering a compelling and well-argued report. I will study the findings closely and respond at the earliest possible opportunity.

Chair of the Taskforce, Simon Howard, said:

Our recommendations will give asset owners – such as pension schemes – a louder say in voting in pensions.

There are two principal goals. First; by boosting the owner's voice and influence over their agents we can ensure that the whole system works to better guide investee companies.

Second; we will let the people paying into pensions know that their views are being considered, boosting the support pensions saving will receive. Both are necessary for better pension outcomes.

Taskforce member and Head of Pension Investments at Scottish Widows, Maria Nazarova-Doyle, said:

It is incredibly important for asset owners like us to have a voice when it comes to voting in pooled funds. A lot of our customers invest in these and our stewardship responsibilities cover all types of investments we make for them.

Having voting guidelines or an expression of wish in place with managers allows asset owners to have an impact and ensure that their sustainability preferences are taken into account when asset managers undertake voting and engagement activities.

Taskforce member and Association of Member Nominated Trustees, Janice Turner, said:

We are grateful to the Minister for Pensions for setting up this taskforce, which has worked hard over the past few months to assist pension scheme trustees to attain power over the stewardship of their assets.

We welcome the call on asset managers to offer an expression of wish to investors and we will be urging pension trustees to take advantage of this.

We know that one taskforce cannot solve all the issues at a stroke, and so we welcome the recommendation that if the financial services industry does not respond adequately to trustees attempting to fulfil their stewardship responsibilities that action will be taken to change the law.

There are three main recommendations that have been put forward by the Taskforce which look to align greater stewardship and voting policies and help set a path towards more transparency, and investment in line with savers' interests.

Further information:

The three main recommendations that have been put forward by the Taskforce are:

1. that pension scheme trustees should either set a voting policy of their own, or explicitly accept responsibility for those policies exercised on

their behalf by their asset managers

2. all asset managers are to offer asset owners the opportunity to set an “expression of wish” as to how votes are exercised on their behalf, regardless of how they invest

3. The Financial Conduct Authority should:

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