

Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director of UN Women: UK response

Thank you Madam Chair

And thank you Ms Regnér for your excellent presentation today.

The UK highly values the work of UN Women, and its response to the COVID-19 crisis. Your policy briefs, data collection, analysis and evidence provide international organisations and national governments valuable information on where we need to do better and that can help us to implement and strengthen effective, gender responsive approaches to COVID-19 recovery plans.

Your presentation today is a stark reminder of the gendered impacts of COVID-19 – and how the pandemic has exacerbated many of the challenges that women and girls already faced. It highlights why it is essential that we not only step up our efforts to address gender inequalities and their root causes, but that we put gender equality at the centre of all that we do.

Empowering women and girls, and preventing violence against them, is a UK priority. We are committed to ensuring every girl receives at least 12 years of quality education, and to ending the preventable deaths of mothers, newborn babies and children by 2030. Supporting comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights is fundamental for gender equality: it ensures that all women and girls have control over their own lives and their bodies.

The UK has provided additional support to the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) to scale up reporting, protection and support services for women and girls affected by gender-based violence and to address reproductive health supply shortages caused by the pandemic. As a co-leader of the Action Coalition on Gender-Based Violence at the Generation Equality Forum, we will help to tackle the root causes of violence, including using education to stop violence before it starts. And at COP26, the UK Presidency will champion a green, inclusive and resilient recovery.

We know that women and girls not only experience inequality and discrimination because of their gender. This can be compounded by intersecting factors – such as age, disability, ethnicity, sexuality, religion or belief. So it is essential to build intersectional approaches into our processes, programmes, and policies to tackle the multiple and compounding layers of discrimination and oppression faced by women and girls.

Gender is, and must remain, a priority for the entire UN system, as well as for other multilateral organisations and for national governments.

At the OSCE, achieving gender equality is an integral part of the organisation's concept of comprehensive security. We have a body of political

commitments, agreed, by consensus, by all states – for example Ministerial Council Decision [10/11](#) on women in the economic sphere; [4/18](#) on preventing and combating violence against women, and [14/04](#) on the promotion of gender equality. It is the responsibility of every state to implement these commitments, to review critically our progress and to use the OSCE platform to share our experiences, lessons learned and best practice. As you said Ms Regnér, we need to walk the talk.

Thank you Chair

[Joint statement on the human rights situation in Belarus](#)

Madam Chair,

I would like to deliver this statement on behalf of the following 37 countries: Albania , Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States, and my own country, Denmark.

In the face of massive, systematic and brutal violence following the 2020 presidential election in Belarus, 17 OSCE participating states invoked the OSCE Moscow Mechanism to look into serious violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Belarus.

In his [report under the Moscow Mechanism](#), Rapporteur Professor Wolfgang Benedek concluded there was overwhelming evidence the Belarusian presidential election on 9 August 2020 was fraudulent, and the Belarusian security forces committed massive and systematic violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The report stated the period directly after the elections “has to be qualified as a period of systematic torture and ill-treatment” by the security forces against peaceful protesters.

Seven months after Professor Benedek’s evidence-based account, and more than nine months after the fraudulent presidential election, we note with great concern that the same systemic violations and abuses persist unabated. The number of political prisoners and detainees continues to rise, with members of the free media being particularly targeted.

According to human rights organizations, there are currently almost 400 political prisoners in Belarus. According to the General Prosecutor’s Office

of Belarus, since August 2020, more than 3000 criminal cases have been initiated for violating the procedure for holding mass events and protests. In April 2021 alone, the courts passed sentences against at least 98 people in politically motivated criminal cases.

We note with particular worry that human rights organizations have reported numerous credible allegations of abhorrent treatment of prisoners, including torture. This seems to reflect a deliberate decision by the authorities to create a climate of fear, with the aim of silencing victims and witnesses.

Madam Chair,

Multiple times over the past months, we have called on Belarus to put an end to these violent acts, protect the victims and ensure the safety of all individuals without discrimination. We have repeatedly called on Belarus to conduct prompt, effective and thorough investigations into all reports of human rights violations and abuses in order to ensure anyone responsible or complicit is held accountable.

We have invited Belarus, and we renew this invitation now, to keep this Council informed of the status of any investigations that may have been initiated.

In the face of these credible accusations, the various replies provided by Belarus to the Permanent Council over the past months have been unsatisfactory and not credible. Belarus has denied reports from multiple, independent and reliable sources such as international organizations, journalists and civil society and accused us of interfering in its internal affairs.

At the same time, pressure against civil society, human rights organizations, journalists and national minorities in Belarus continues unabated, and in some cases, has greatly increased. Representatives of these organizations face politically motivated detentions, interrogations and searches of their offices and homes. Journalists and other media actors are being prosecuted and sentenced merely for performing their work.

The authorities are continuing to repress those who have taken part in peaceful protests, increasingly using newly broadened legislation on countering extremism to detain and charge peaceful civil society representatives, journalists and other media actors, and human rights defenders. This, in effect, allows the authorities to criminalize any form of dissent, and we categorically and explicitly reject the supposition that such dissent amounts to "extremism".

These actions serve to silence civil society organizations and make it increasingly difficult for them to continue functioning in Belarus.

At the same time, new amendments of laws for ensuring national security broaden powers of law enforcement officers and de facto legalize future human rights abuses against civil society.

We continue to be deeply concerned that Belarus has not investigated any of

the well-documented crimes by the authorities. To our knowledge, no criminal cases have been opened, no Belarusian officials have been held to account for their actions, and no Belarusian officials have condemned or even acknowledged the massive human rights violations and abuses following the elections.

The lack of action by the authorities exacerbates the climate of impunity in Belarus. These concerns justified a number of international initiatives aimed at examining serious human rights violations in Belarus, such as the OHCHR-led process established by the UN Human Rights Council and the International Accountability Platform for Belarus. We urge Belarus to cooperate fully with these initiatives.

Madame Chair,

Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, which derive from the inherent dignity of the human person, have been at the heart of this organization since the Helsinki Final Act was signed more than 45 years ago. Respect for them is also an obligation under international law. It is high time for Belarus to adhere fully to the commitments and obligations it has freely made.

Against this background, and based on the recommendation of Professor Benedek's report, we once again repeat our questions to Belarus:

- when will the Belarusian authorities investigate the credible reports of massive human rights violations and abuses, including allegations of torture, ill-treatment, sexual violence, disappearance and killing by security forces?
- when will the Belarusian authorities bring criminal charges against those responsible for the human rights violations and abuses, including Belarusian security officials?
- when will the Belarusian authorities provide protection for the victims and witnesses who have bravely come forward and reported their accounts of human rights violations and abuses?

We look forward to engaging with Belarus in a genuine discussion on these and other concerns, as well as on how the OSCE and the wider international community can assist in addressing them. We urge Belarus to cooperate with the OSCE constructively and in good faith in order to resolve the present crisis in a peaceful and sustainable way.

Madame Chair, I would request that this statement be included in the journal of the day.

Thank you.

Recent developments in Belarus: joint statement by Canada and UK

I make this statement also on behalf of Canada and it is intended to complement the statement by those who invoked, or supported, the Moscow Mechanism.

Madam Chair,

Earlier this week the Representative on Freedom of the Media and Chair in Office co-hosted the Stockholm Media Freedom conference. It was an opportunity for participating States to hear from expert voices across the media landscape, and to consider the importance of implementing our OSCE commitments to ensure media freedom across the OSCE region.

It was therefore with dismay that on 18 May, the opening day of the Stockholm conference, we heard of a further crackdown on Belarus' leading independent news portal, Tut.by. This organisation has operated for more than 20 years, providing independent reporting across Belarus. Tut.by has long faced persecution from the Belarusian authorities, for nothing more than reporting the facts on the ground.

An attempt last year to halt their work by removing their official status as a media organisation did not work. The charges brought against the organisation this week, the blocking of its website, and the search of its offices are a blatant attack on independent media in Belarus. The searches at the homes of Tut.by employees, the confiscation of equipment and the detention of employees is unacceptable.

These most recent events come just days after a number of journalists, including other employees of Tut.by, were detained and charged for nothing more than carrying out their jobs.

On 17 May, Tut.by journalist Lyobov Kasperovich, was sentenced to 15 days administrative detention, allegedly for taking part in an unauthorised mass event. Kasperovich was simply doing her job, reporting from the trial of a group of students.

On 15 May, two journalists in Mogilev, Alexander Burakov and Vladimir Laptsevich, were sentenced to 20 days administrative detention, again charged with participation in unauthorised mass events. These two journalists were detained while carrying out their legitimate work, reporting on the trial of opposition activists. On 14 May, photojournalist Tatyana Kapitonova was sentenced to 10 days administrative detention for laying flowers at a memorial.

These actions are a clear attempt by the Belarusian authorities to silence

independent voices and stop media from reporting on these repressive measures. As noted by the OSCE's Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM), in her statements of 17 and 18 May, these actions 'seriously jeopardise the fundamental human right to freedom of expression'. In expressing her alarm about the developments around Tut.by, the RFoM also called the blocking of their website "an extreme measure" which disproportionately interferes with media actors' activities. Madam Chair

Criminalising opposition voices and independent media in Belarus will not remove people's desire for greater democracy and freedom. We urge the Belarusian authorities to halt this campaign of oppression, release all those held on political grounds, and engage in meaningful and constructive dialogue.

We continue to support the offer of the current and previous OSCE Chairpersons-in-Office to facilitate a genuine national dialogue and urge the Belarusian authorities to take up this offer. Engaging in meaningful dialogue, which takes into account the views of the Belarusian people, is the only way to resolve the political crisis.

['Green' claims: CMA sets out the dos and don'ts for businesses](#)

Last year, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) announced that it was [investigating the impact of green marketing on consumers](#), in line with its annual plan commitment. As part of this, the CMA recently led on an analysis of websites – alongside other global authorities – which found that [40% of green claims made online could be misleading](#).

The CMA is now seeking views on draft guidance for businesses about 'green' claims. This is based on a careful review of how these claims are being made and how people respond to them. It explains the best way for businesses to communicate their green credentials, while reducing the risk of misleading customers.

This direction comes at a time when more than half of UK consumers take environmental considerations into account when buying products.

Example:

A loaf of bread is labelled as "Organic Sourdough". Sector-specific rules mean food products must be made from at least 95% organic ingredients to be labelled as organic. A claim would be misleading if that threshold is not met.

In particular, the proposed guidance sets out 6 principles that environmental claims should follow.

They:

- must be truthful and accurate: Businesses must live up to the claims they make about their products, services, brands and activities
- must be clear and unambiguous: The meaning that a consumer is likely to take from a product's messaging and the credentials of that product should match
- must not omit or hide important information: Claims must not prevent someone from making an informed choice because of the information they leave out
- must only make fair and meaningful comparisons: Any products compared should meet the same needs or be intended for the same purpose
- must consider the full life cycle of the product: When making claims, businesses must consider the total impact of a product or service. Claims can be misleading where they don't reflect the overall impact or where they focus on one aspect of it but not another
- must be substantiated: Businesses should be able to back up their claims with robust, credible and up to date evidence

Example:

A company selling toiletries online presents a range of products with a green banner across the corner of the image stating, "save our seas – these are micro bead free". This is likely to be misleading as it suggests a benefit in comparison to other products, when in fact micro beads are banned in the UK and should not be in any products.

Andrea Coscelli, Chief Executive of the CMA, said:

Whether it's buying clothes, cosmetics or cleaning products, more people than ever are trying to make choices which are better for the environment.

Many businesses are already doing the right thing by being clear and upfront about how green a product really is, but that's not always the case. We're concerned that people are paying extra for so-called 'eco-friendly' products and those businesses which are

genuinely investing in going green aren't getting the recognition they deserve.

We're seeking views on our draft guidance, which clearly sets out what we propose businesses should do, to reduce the risk of misleading their customers. People must be able to trust the claims they see and businesses must be able to back them up.

Example:

A comparative claim that a clothing range is now "greener" is unlikely to be fair and meaningful on its own. It risks misleading consumers as the claim does not make clear the basis for the comparison.

The CMA is inviting views on its guidance and is particularly keen to hear from anyone who buys or sells products which claim to be eco-friendly, including whether any further information is needed to help companies comply with the law.

The consultation will run until 16 July 2021, with the aim of publishing the final guidance by the end of September 2021. More information can be found on the CMA's [Misleading environmental claims web page](#).

Notes to editors.

1. The key piece of consumer protection legislation relevant to the CMA's guidance is the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008 (CPRs). The CPRs contain a general prohibition against unfair commercial practices and specific prohibitions against misleading actions or misleading omissions.
 2. The statistic that "half of UK consumers take environmental considerations into account when buying products" is taken from a [2014 European Commission Market Study](#).
 3. Related figures and statistics on this topic can be found in the CMA's ['Making environmental claims: a literature review'](#).
 4. The examples used in the press release are drawn from the draft guidance, which the CMA is currently consulting on.
 5. More examples and case studies can be found in the CMA's [Draft Guidance on Environmental Claims](#).
 6. Read more about how the CMA is supporting the transition to a low carbon economy in its [2021/22 Annual Plan](#).
 7. Media enquiries should be directed to press@cma.gov.uk or 020 3738 6460.
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Final round of tampon tax fund launched

- £11.25 million to be made available for charities working with disadvantaged women and girls
- Threshold for applications reduced to £350,000

A pot of £11.25 million has been made available to charitable organisations to bid for, with priority given to those working to end violence against women and girls, as well as organisations that support a network of charities.

For this round of funding, the grant threshold has been reduced from £1 million to £350,000. This means that more organisations will be able to apply, increasing accessibility to organisations that support this vital work.

The Tampon Tax Fund was introduced in response to VAT being imposed on sanitary products by the European Union, and following this round will have provided more than £90 million of funding supporting women and girls charities.

As per the government's manifesto commitment, the Chancellor announced at the Budget in March 2020 that the tax would end on 1 January 2021 following the UK's exit from the EU, as part of a wider government strategy to make sanitary products affordable and available for all women.

Minister for Civil Society and Youth, Baroness Barran, said:

The Tampon Tax Fund was launched in 2015, and since then has reached disadvantaged women and girls across all four nations, tackling an extremely wide and diverse range of issues.

The support provided through this final round will ensure specialist charities who receive grants can support women and girls in need, and help to become more sustainable and plan for the future.

We remain as committed as ever to ending violence against women and girls which is why this category is a priority for this round of funding, and we will continue to tackle the issue as a priority.

The government is particularly encouraging applications from specialist women's networks whose projects include making onward grants to other women's' charitable organisations. This will make use of the expertise in the

charitable sector, ensure this round of funding reaches as many disadvantaged women and girls as possible and help the country to build back better following the pandemic.

Grants may be for 12 or 18-month projects, and all activities must be concluded and funds spent by 31 March 2023.

The deadline for applications is Sunday 4 July 2021.

UK Government Minister for Scotland Iain Stewart said:

The UK Government's Tampon Tax Fund has supported charities right across the UK, including Rape Crisis Scotland, with vital work to help women and girls.

The lower grant threshold for this final round of applications will ensure that even more charities can access funding. I'd strongly urge Scottish charities working to support disadvantaged women and girls to apply.

Notes to Editors:

- Charities and organisations supporting disadvantaged women and children have received funding through the [£750 million package](#) supporting the voluntary sector during the coronavirus outbreak, including £200 million for the Coronavirus Community Support Fund.
- DHSC have their [Call for Evidence](#) open to inform the first ever Women's Health Strategy.
- The Home Office is committed to preventing domestic abuse:
- Last year we launched a new public awareness raising campaign highlighting that if anyone is at risk of, or experiencing domestic abuse, help is still available.
- The Government also gave over £28 million to domestic abuse organisations to help them to deal with the pressures of the pandemic.
- We committed £10 million in last year's budget (2020/21) to continue to support innovative new approaches to preventing domestic abuse. We allocated £7.17 million of this funding to Police and Crime Commissioners across England and Wales to fund implementation of the Drive Programme and other programmes delivered to perpetrators of domestic abuse in the community.

- For the year 2021/22 we have an additional £25 million to fund work on domestic abuse perpetrators and expand perpetrator programmes.
- We have paid more than £27 million to domestic abuse organisations to date to help them to deal with the pandemic, including keeping helplines running and vital support services open.
- In addition to the £40million Victims Fund support for specialist services.
- In 2021-22, we will provide just under £151m for victim and witness support services. This includes an extra £51m to increase support for rape and domestic abuse victims, building on the emergency funding from this financial year to help domestic abuse and sexual violence services meet Covid-driven demand.