

38th Universal Periodic Review of human rights: UK statement on Seychelles

World news story

The UK delivered the statement on Seychelles at the 38th Session of Universal Periodic Review (UPR), sharing recommendations to improve their human rights record.



The Universal Periodic Review takes place in Geneva.

Thank you, Madam President.

The United Kingdom welcomes the free and fair elections held in Seychelles in October 2020, and the Government's support for democracy and good governance, including their commitment to tackle corruption.

The UK commends the Government of Seychelles for having been an early signatory to the Media Freedom Coalition.

We are also pleased to see the Government of Seychelles' efforts to tackle Modern Slavery and to protect and promote the human rights of migrant workers, and we encourage Seychelles to ensure systematic and recurring training for all first responders to incidents of Modern Slavery.

We recommend that Seychelles:

1. Ratify the 2014 ILO Protocol to the Forced Labour Convention
2. Adopt an open, merit-based process when selecting national candidates for UN Treaty Body elections;
3. Take steps to ensure the National Human Rights Commission is adequately

financed and resourced.

Thank you.

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[New Environment Bill provisions to tackle storm overflows](#)

The Environment Bill will include new legal duties to tackle sewage discharges into rivers and help protect our waterways.

Three new measures on storm overflows, [announced last month by Defra](#), will be added by government amendment to the Environment Bill later this year. The Bill will return to Parliament shortly after the Queen's Speech, with the new legal duties due to be on the statute book by the Autumn.

During wet weather storm overflows release diluted wastewater into rivers, preventing a combination of sewage and rain from overloading the sewers. However, their use has increased in recent years as climate change has led to greater rainfall and water infrastructure has not kept pace with population growth.

The legal duties added to the Environment Bill will drive the changes needed to improve our water environment. The three duties are:

- a duty on government to publish a plan by September 2022 to reduce sewage discharges from storm overflows;
- a duty on government to report to Parliament on progress on implementing the plan; and
- a duty on water companies to publish data on storm overflow operation on an annual basis.

Environment Minister Rebecca Pow said:

The concerning issue of untreated sewage in our rivers demands urgent action. The inclusion of these measures in the Environment Bill will ensure steps are taken to tackle unacceptable levels of pollution.

While we cannot get rid of storm overflows overnight, we are working hard to accelerate progress in this area to protect our precious water environment and wildlife.

In addition to new legislation, the recently established Storm Overflows Taskforce has agreed to set a long term goal to eliminate harm from storm overflows and has already taken steps to improve monitoring and transparency, which is crucial.

The Storm Overflows Taskforce was set up in August 2020 to bring the government, water industry, regulators and environmental groups together to drive improvements in this area.

Through the Taskforce, water companies have committed to increase the number of overflows they will improve over the next five years and earlier this year the Taskforce committed to a new long-term goal to eliminate harm from storm overflows.

Over 800 overflows will be investigated and nearly 800 improved between 2020 and 2025.

The government expects to consult on potential options for ways to eliminate harm from storm overflows to take forward later this year.

WTO General Council: UK statements

Item 4 – TRIPS Council Matters

Mr Chair.

Thank you, and my thanks too to my Norwegian colleague, the TRIPS Council Chair, for his report, and my thanks to the Director General for her leadership on this issue. And thanks also for the words of welcome to me and to the other WTO newbies, on our first appearance at the General Council.

This is a really important issue. All the more so when, as others have said already this morning, so many countries around the world find themselves still in the full front of this pandemic. Our thoughts and prayers are particularly with our Indian friends and allies at this moment.

It is clearly essential that we work together as an international community to find effective ways to ensure equitable, affordable and timely access to COVID-related technologies and supplies. As we say, all too often, no one is safe until we are all safe.

Since the last time we met here at the General Council we have, however, broken new ground in the fight against this pandemic, especially in approving and distributing vaccines to those most in need. We are proud as the UK, to be at the forefront of those efforts to protect people across the globe from the virus. We are a founding donor to the ACT Accelerator, and we have made one of the largest commitments to the COVAX Advance Market Commitment for low

and middle-income countries, with commitments to those ACT-A partners of over \$1 billion [US dollars].

We have seen an unprecedented global response to this threat, which should allow COVAX to supply over 2 billion COVID-19 vaccine doses to all participants in the course of this year. And of course we are proud that a UK vaccine, developed by my own alma mater of Oxford University and produced by AstraZeneca, is at the heart of this response. Right now AstraZeneca has entered into more than a dozen collaborations in countries around the globe – for example in China, Mexico, Brazil, Russia, South Korea and India – to deliver billions of doses to people around the world.

Now is the time, Mr Chair, to ramp up global manufacturing. It is vital we keep trade flowing to ensure that issues such as skills and raw materials shortages don't hold us back. That's why we have been working to ensure that industry and the research institutes have the resources they need to identify and scale-up production of safe vaccines as quickly as possible, while they have taken on significant risks and investment themselves.

A balanced and effective intellectual property regime has proved invaluable in this crisis, as in others, in supporting innovation and supporting collaboration, as well as ensuring the results of that innovation, including safe and effective diagnostics, vaccines and therapeutics can reach those who need them. The UK stands ready to engage in further evidence-based discussions and is committed to finding solutions to these issues. Meanwhile, we are delighted to see the WTO bringing together key stakeholders to look carefully at all the relevant trade, health and intellectual property elements so that we can support the development, production, and equitable access to these vaccines. We salute the role played by the Director General in this regard.

We remain committed as a country to work with our allies around the world in the fight against COVID. Just today, in London, we are hosting a meeting of G7 Foreign and Development Ministers, the first of such in-person meetings for over two years, to put this issue among others, on international agendas.

But governments, Mr Chairman, cannot do this on their own. Industry, manufacturers, and innovators have to look carefully about how they can do more as well. We want to see more partnerships that use voluntary licensing to ensure access to innovations – whether they be in vaccines, therapeutics or diagnostics – for those who need them. We are also committed to working with all parts of the innovation and the production chain, to ensure we have the right tools. This will require industry, developers and manufacturers alike, to collaborate in making available the information needed to engage in effective partnerships. This also requires delivering assistance to partners to allow them to deliver that at real scale, sufficient quality, and to a limited time-frame, for example by model agreements or trade agreements. The international community in turn needs to focus its effort on providing appropriate guidance rather than engaging in polarised discussions.

Chair, we welcome the positive steps that we have made in recent weeks and months towards vaccine equity, including on the collaborations that we need

to deliver unprecedented numbers of innovative health products to those most in need. This vital work is far from over, and as a country the United Kingdom will continue to play its part in driving this work forward towards a successful conclusion.

Thank you very much.

Item 7 – Work Programme on Electronic Commerce and Moratorium on Imposing Customs Duties on Electronic Transmissions – Request from India

Thank you, Mr Chair.

The good news is that there is no prepared UK statement. If you want to look at what our position is, it is adequately contained in the minutes of many previous meetings. All I want to say is that we support the moratorium, we think it should be permanent, and our Australian colleague put it far more eloquently than I can.

End of statement, thank you very much.

Item 8 – Paper Titled “The Legal Status of ‘Joint Statement Initiatives’ and their Negotiated Outcomes” – Request from India and South Africa

Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Thank you very much for giving us the floor again. I have listened very carefully to my colleagues this morning. We have spoken in detail on the issue before and you can find our comments in the official minutes.

We continue to think – as my EU, Australian, Costa Rican and Russian colleagues have pointed out – that there is real value in these JSIs [Joint Statement Initiatives]. Indeed, we see these JSIs as shining examples of how Members of this organisation can come together to free up trade in some of those areas where business, I’m afraid, is getting ahead of what we have agreed here; and they can make real benefits to businesses and people.

And so we continue to believe that these offer real advantages to all of us, as we try and build back better from the current pandemic.

Thank you very much.

Item 9 – Trade and Health: COVID-19 and Beyond

Thank you Mr Chair.

And thank you to my Canadian colleague for the statement he delivered a few moments ago on behalf of the 46 co-sponsors of this initiative, now including the United Kingdom.

Mr Chairman, earlier this week at TNC [WTO Trade Negotiations Committee] I said that I find it pretty unimaginable that our Ministers would wish to come to MC12, in the midst of this awful pandemic, and not make a substantive statement on health issues. We do need to show that – as some of others have

said – that the WTO can deliver results people expect on these sorts of issues.

We have joined this proposal because we believe it seeks to tackle the severe disruption we have seen to global trade, that has arisen from the use of export restrictions and other barriers for COVID critical products. And we believe that at this really critical moment in the fight against the COVID pandemic, Members of this organisation can help to ensure vital supplies, including vaccines, get to those who most need them: by keeping those medical supply chains open.

So, Mr Chair, I would really encourage other Members to join this proposal, to send a powerful political signal that together we are all playing our part in the fight against COVID – by keeping trade flowing. And in line with the principles of this initiative, we have for our own part already taken steps to implement the commitments regarding tariff liberalisation and our approach to export restrictions on COVID critical goods – which is something we did as soon as we could, in January of this year.

So, Mr Chairman, we really look forward to working with colleagues – both co-sponsors and others – on this proposal in the run-up to MC12 [WTO Ministerial Conference], so as to seek more resilient supply chains. Not just – I should say – as a defence against this current COVID pandemic, but also as an insurance policy; an insurance policy against future pandemics, and to show that by working together, we can and will build back better and stronger.

Thank you very much indeed.

Item 10 – Procedural Guidelines for WTO Councils and Committees Addressing Trade Concerns

Thank you, Chair, and many thanks to the co-sponsors.

The United Kingdom supports efforts to improve the functioning of this organisation's regular committees and councils. We continue to broadly support these proposals, which we think do provide a good balance between creating quality minimum standards, while offering scope for individual committees to take tailored approaches to the way they operate.

Mr Chair, of course it is also true that these proposed procedural improvements will not alone solve the problems that we see in WTO councils and committees. And Members themselves, in our view, need to continue to engage as constructively as possible in resolving the substantive concerns that are raised, and that means more listening, and more working to find convergence, as we discussed earlier this week at the TNC.

Thank you very much indeed.

Item 11 – Statement by Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Panama and Paraguay on Trade Restrictions that Block Equal Access to COVID-19 Vaccines

Thank you, Chair.

And thanks to Panama's Deputy Minister Cano, and other colleagues, who have spoken. This is a very interesting debate and, as many have said, nobody will be safe until we are all safe.

As my Australian colleague has said, this is a global crisis and really needs a global solution. Free and fair trade has never been more important than in our fight against COVID-19. Open supply chains help ensure people get the critical goods they need, such as vaccines.

The United Kingdom is proud to be fully engaged in the global response to the pandemic, whether it is through the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator or COVAX which, together, help to ensure developing countries can access COVID-19 vaccines.

Together, we can and we must meet the global demand by joining forces to ramp up our vaccine production. That is why we believe barriers to trade in vaccines are in nobody's interest.

The UK encourages Members to review and roll-back those measures still in place as soon as possible. And we should also step up and work collectively towards removing trade restrictive measures on medical goods, including COVID-19 vaccines. And Chair, as well as continuing cooperation with fellow governments on measures to tackle the pandemic like those referred to in my comments on the Trade and Health Initiative – we also call upon industry to engage here, as the DG has been doing in her meetings. Governments cannot do this on their own. We remain interested in hearing their reflections on what can be done to help overcome these bottlenecks so that together we can get supply lines moving.

And Chair, like others, we have also noted the announcement made by the US Trade Representative on the TRIPS Waiver. So let me just briefly take the opportunity to say that we are committed to continuing our discussions with both the US, and other WTO Members, to find the swiftest and most effective way to facilitate the increased production and supply of COVID-19 vaccines.

To conclude, Chair, the UK recognises the importance of vaccines to building back better and stronger. That is why we look forward to continuing to work closely with all WTO Members to keep our trade in vaccines flowing.

Thank you.

Future Fens flood risk management

Phase 1 of the flood risk management work started 3 years ago, to develop a shared understanding of the flood risk challenges in the Great Ouse Fens of Cambridgeshire and Norfolk.

Future activity will build on this baselining work to develop flood management options that can deliver flood and drainage infrastructure needed for future generations.

This work is delivering on key commitments to the Fens as featured in the [National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy](#) (FCERM) published in 2020.

With a third of the Fens currently below sea level, the area has a network of flood protection assets that are owned and managed by different organisations. Much of this infrastructure is nearing the end of its design life and will soon need significant investment. With the increasing effects of climate change, flood infrastructure is key in providing water resources, environmental, navigation and wider amenity services.

Fens flood infrastructure is also important within the Oxford Cambridge arc in enabling some of the fastest growing places in the UK to maximise their economic potential.

The organisations involved in phase 1 either own or are responsible for the area's flood risk assets. These assets include:

- 138 pumping stations
- 4 sets of sluice gates
- 95 kilometres of coastal defences
- 405 kilometres of river embankments

The baseline report is part of the first of the programme's 3 main phases. Scenarios have been developed to describe the 'do nothing' and 'do minimum' approaches for the next 100 years across a huge geography of approximately 300 flood assets. These are owned and operated by more than 40 risk management authorities. In this area, a third of land is currently below sea level and this will double by 2100 with rising sea levels.

Paul Burrows, Environment Agency spokesperson for Future Fens, said:

The Fens is a complex environment that has been heavily engineered over hundreds of years. Understanding how the large systems of assets work together to provide protection from flooding is difficult and being able to articulate this to inform future flood infrastructure choices is even more challenging.

That is why our early focus has been on 'baselining' and I am delighted that our collaborative report is now available and that ADA (The Association of Drainage Authorities) are hosting it on their website.

This work showcases the flood infrastructure within the Great Ouse Fens, explores the economics of a do-nothing and do-minimum scenario and gives a high level overview of how current government flood funding policy would play out. It presents the initial asset management and investment challenge ahead.

The next steps are to bring it to life through visualisation tools and develop the scope for the appraisal of the long-term choices for flood protection and resilience as climate change takes hold and society's wider aspirations for the Fens become clearer.

Rob Wise, the National Farmers Union East Anglia Environment Adviser, said:

The NFU has been pleased to be working with the Environment Agency and other partners on the Future Fens project given the vital national importance of food production in the Fens.

Across the Fens as a whole the food chain is worth over £3 billion and employs 80,000 people. It is crucial that this strategic UK asset and the people who are part of it are protected from future flood risk.

The project has already produced tangible benefits in suggesting new ways to value these assets to maximise government funding, but there are important conversations to be had about filling the remaining funding gaps identified in the report.

Benefits and future funding

To better understand the funding position, the project has looked at the Government's Partnership Funding policy strategically and also worked with the National Farmers Union to create an improved approach to valuing agricultural land against the traditional method.

Key findings in the report are:

- £17.1 billion worth of benefits from the current flood risk management measures
- a further £5.3 billion of benefits to the local economy over the next 10 years
- £1.8 billion investment needed over the next 100 years to sustain the current standard of service from the existing flood risk management assets

To meet this level of investment there is an additional funding requirement from beneficiaries of flood infrastructure of between £611 million and £946 million, with eligibility between £722 million and £1.1 billion of government Flood Risk Management Grant in Aid funding (NB costs are present value.)

Next phases

The final elements of phase 1 will be to work with others to develop the scope for phase 2. Phase 2 will be a long term adaptive plan for flood infrastructure in the Fens. This will build on the approaches outlined in the national FCERM strategy and appraise the flood infrastructure choices

available for decision makers and prospective funders.

What happens in the meantime?

Phase 2 will start to work on a long term plan.

Tactical plans have been developed for the continued management of existing flood assets between now and 2031/32. These plans identify that around £230 million of capital investment is required.

Report availability

A copy of the baseline report and a summary document can be downloaded from the [Association of Drainage Authorities website](#).

Further information

Organisations involved in phase 1 include:

- Anglian Water
- Cambridgeshire County Council
- Downham Market
- Ely Group of Internal Drainage Boards
- Environment Agency
- Middle Level Commissioners
- NFU (National Farmers Union)
- Norfolk County Council
- North Level District IDB (Internal Drainage Board)
- WRC (Water Resources East)
- Water Management Alliance
- WCIDB (Whittlesey Consortium of Internal Drainage Boards)

[Updated IVA protocol to strengthen debt solution](#)

A significant proportion of individual voluntary arrangements (IVAs) in the UK are drafted in accordance with the principles from the IVA protocol.

The IVA standing committee, chaired by the Insolvency Service, is the body responsible for maintaining and strengthening the protocol. It is made up of key stakeholders including the regulatory professional bodies, debt advice sector, creditor representatives and insolvency practitioners.

The IVA protocol was last updated in 2016 and the IVA Standing Committee recognises that the debt landscape has undergone significant changes since

then.

To assist the IVA market and provide further guidance to insolvency practitioners, creditors and debt advisers, the IVA Standing Committee has [published an updated version of the protocol](#).

Insolvency practitioners who administer IVAs are being given advance warning of the updated protocol so that they can update their systems and procedures, as well as train their staff, before IVAs drafted compliant with the 2016 protocol will no longer be proposed to creditors after 1 August 2021.

Meg van Rooyen, Policy Lead at the Money Advice Trust, said:

We are pleased to have contributed to the work of the Insolvency Service and partners to improve the IVA protocol – these changes should make it simpler and more straightforward to follow. The inclusion of the FCA vulnerability guidance as a benchmark and changes to the equity rules to make it easier for people to keep their homes are important additions.

At a time when many households are struggling financially as result of the pandemic, ensuring people have access to the right debt options for their circumstances will be more important than ever.

Angela Crossly, Director for Strategy Policy and Analysis for the Insolvency Service, said:

We are aware that a large number of IVAs are drafted using the protocol and many of our stakeholders have asked for updated guidance. The IVA standing committee has improved on the 2016 protocol and we hope the updated version provides improved guidance, advice and standards to strengthen an important debt solution for people in financial difficulty.

If you have further questions about the IVA protocol, email: IPRegulation.section@insolvency.gov.uk.