

# [UN Human Rights Council 46: Interactive Dialogue with the High Commissioner for Human Rights on Sri Lanka](#)

Thank you, Madam President.

The United Kingdom welcomes the High Commissioner's detailed and most comprehensive report on Sri Lanka.

We share the concerns regarding the reversal of progress on issues of accountability, and also the current human rights situation, and the risk and recurrence of past violations.

We are also concerned at the increase in surveillance and indeed harassment of civil society actors, the militarisation of these civilian governmental functions, and the impact of the government's forced cremation policy on different communities in Sri Lanka, particularly the Muslim community, who continue to face persecution.

We also regret the Government of Sri Lanka's decision to withdraw support for resolution 30/1, and note that previous domestic initiatives have all failed regrettably to deliver meaningful accountability. The appointment of senior military officials allegedly implicated in war crimes and crimes against humanity also calls into question Sri Lanka's commitment to accountability and justice.

Therefore the Human Rights Council must continue to consider the situation in Sri Lanka and press for progress on justice, reconciliation and accountability, and improved respect for human rights. Enhanced monitoring by the Office of the High Commissioner is critical to support this. Together with our Core Group partners, we will present a new resolution to continue the Council's engagement on these important issues, and have indicated our desire to work with the Government of Sri Lanka in support of accountability and lasting reconciliation for all communities.

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## [Charity regulator returns Oxfam GB to standard regulatory oversight after](#)

# significant improvements on safeguarding

The Charity Commission has lifted its statutory supervision of Oxfam GB, after concluding that the charity has significantly strengthened its approach to keeping people safe.

[A report published today](#) confirms that Oxfam GB has responded positively to the Commission's scrutiny. The charity has implemented wide-ranging changes to its organisational culture, and strengthened its approach, resources and processes, such that people served or employed by the charity are now better protected against abuse, exploitation, and other forms of harm.

But the Commission stresses that effective safeguarding is "never complete" and that systems and processes, however good, must be underpinned by leaders and senior managers remaining vigilant and continuing to place the highest priority on keeping people safe.

The Commission's statutory inquiry into the charity, which concluded in June 2019, found the charity's governance and culture with regard to safeguarding had repeatedly fallen below standards expected, and that it tolerated poor behaviour and failed to meet promises made on safeguarding. At the time, the Commission said that "significant cultural and systemic change" was required to ensure people who came into contact with the charity were safe from harm.

In total, the charity committed to deliver against 100 actions or recommendations to improve the charity's governance and approach to safeguarding – some of which were implemented while the original inquiry was ongoing. The regulator issued Oxfam with a legal direction under section 84 of the Charities Act to implement those actions and recommendations that were outstanding at the conclusion of the inquiry in June 2019.

The charity has since been subject to a period of statutory supervision. The regulator has monitored and engaged with Oxfam on the implementation of the actions, which has included overseeing an independent assessment of the charity's progress in implementing the actions and recommendations.

The regulator has worked closely with Oxfam on the findings from this independent review, ensuring that the large majority of the 100 actions are now complete with only limited areas in which the charity needs to undertake further work.

The Commission is therefore satisfied that its period of statutory supervision can end, and the charity has now reverted to the Commission's standard regulatory oversight. As is routine for charities of Oxfam's size and reach, the Commission will remain in regular contact and will follow up on any new concerns as a matter of urgency.

Helen Stephenson, chief executive of the Charity Commission, said the

Commission's inquiry had been the catalyst for significant progress at Oxfam GB, but warned against complacency:

Oxfam GB's leadership has done much work since 2019 to respond to our inquiry, and learn lessons from the charity's past mistakes and failings. That effort, overseen and scrutinised by the Commission, means that Oxfam GB is now providing a safer environment for all who come into contact with it. But safeguarding is never 'done'. As our report makes clear, while Oxfam has made significant progress, its leaders must ensure that the charity's living culture – the spoken and unspoken expectations placed on all staff and all volunteers – continues to promote an environment that keeps people safe into the future.

She added that these issues go beyond Oxfam and that all charities should prioritise effective safeguarding:

The public expect the way charities go about their work to be consistent with the spirit of charity – charitable aims don't justify uncharitable means. No charity can afford to lose sight of its core purpose in the way it operates on the ground, no matter how large or complex its operations become. And when a person comes to harm because of their contact with a charity, it betrays everything charity stands for.

All charities working with vulnerable people overseas or at home should ensure their approach to safeguarding is robust and effective. The right systems, processes and recourses are vital, but even more important are the intangible factors – leadership, organisational culture, and the commitment and integrity of everybody involved in a charity.

The international aid sector has made progress on safeguarding. But as the recent House of Commons International Development Committee report made clear, more work needs to be done by charities and other organisations delivering aid, including to ensure those in receipt of aid are empowered to report any concerns about exploitation or abuse.

## **Ends**

### **Notes to editors**

1. The Charity Commission is the independent, non-ministerial government department that registers and regulates charities in England and Wales. Its purpose is to ensure charity can thrive and inspire trust so that people can improve lives and strengthen society.
2. The Commission's full follow-up report, as well as a summary of the independent report by GCPS Consulting, are [available GOV.UK](#).

3. The inquiry into Oxfam GB opened in February 2018, to examine the charity's governance, including leadership and culture around safeguarding matters, and its management, policies and practices. It consisted of two parts; the first examined the charity's handling in 2011 of the complaints about its staff in Haiti; the second part examined Oxfam GB's wider approach to safeguarding, historically, and currently, which included supervising an independent review around safeguarding in the charity. The inquiry concluded in June 2019, with the publication of an inquiry report.
4. The 100 actions and recommendations Oxfam were required to complete arose from the Commission's original inquiry, an independent review which worked alongside that inquiry (the Ineqe Review), as well as issues identified by the Independent Commission on Sexual Misconduct, Accountability and Culture.

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## **Ban lifted to allow UK blood plasma to be used for life-saving treatments**

- Thousands of NHS patients to benefit from innovative medicines made from plasma
- Decision follows recommendation from expert scientists that the treatments are safe

Thousands more critically-ill patients will soon be able to benefit from life-saving treatments made from UK-sourced blood plasma, as the government lifts a decades-old ban on donations of plasma in the UK being used to manufacture some medicines.

The medicines, known as immunoglobulins, are manufactured from blood plasma donated by the public and are used to treat several serious diseases and conditions, such as for those with severely reduced immune systems due to long-term cancer treatment or people with antibody deficiencies.

By lifting the ban in England, the government can start to use plasma donations from UK blood donors to manufacture these life-saving medicines for NHS patients.

The ban was introduced in 1998 in response to concerns over the spread of a human variant of BSE, known as 'mad cow's disease', called Creutzfeldt Jakob Disease. Experts in medicine safety at the independent Commission on Human Medicines (CHM) have now advised the use of UK-sourced plasma to manufacture these treatments is safe and can recommence supported by a set of robust safety measures.

Health Minister Lord Bethell said:

Following expert advice, I am pleased we are now able to lift this ban to help thousands of NHS patients access these potentially life-saving treatments as quickly as possible.

The move will also help England become self-sufficient and we will not have to rely only on imports from other countries, ensuring every NHS patient can always access the treatments they need.

The safety of NHS patients remains our absolute priority and we have put in place robust precautionary measures to ensure every batch is safe.

Convalescent plasma is currently being trialled in the UK for the treatment of COVID-19 and, if the results are positive, this would mean immunoglobulins from plasma donated in the UK could in future be used as immunoglobulins to treat coronavirus patients.

Up until now, the UK has depended on imports of blood plasma from other countries – mainly the US – to manufacture these treatments. Due to a large rise in global demand for immunoglobulins, both plasma and these treatments have experienced ongoing pressures on supply in the UK and around the world in recent years. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has also meant a significant drop in plasma donations from the US, further increasing pressures on supply.

The lifting of the ban will bolster the supply chain and improve the self-sufficiency of the UK in producing its own treatments. The government will also introduce a new condition to ensure UK plasma is used first for UK patients and not exported to meet contracts elsewhere.

### **Case study**

Stacey Garrity's son Xander has XLA, a condition that reduces his immune system's ability to fight infections. She said:

My son's condition means he cannot make the antibodies he needs to protect him against infection and we rely on a lifesaving medicine called immunoglobulin to keep him well and healthy.

Removing the ban on the use of UK plasma means the UK can start to become more self-sufficient in producing immunoglobulin products. This is a good thing for people like my son as it increases the security of supply of the treatment he relies upon to fight infection.

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) undertook a comprehensive review of the evidence on the safety of UK blood plasma for the manufacture of immunoglobulins late last year. The CHM then made the decision that it would be safe to lift the ban in the UK for this specific treatment,

requesting that all collectors and manufacturers abide by a number of robust safety standards and risk mitigation measures, including the ability to trace donations from donor to patient. Every medicine will be individually reviewed and evaluated by the expert teams at the MHRA.

Dr June Raine, MHRA Chief Executive, said:

I am very pleased that after our thorough review of the evidence, there is now the potential to produce life-saving treatments from plasma donated in the UK for the benefit of NHS patients.

Patient safety is at the forefront of all the work we do, and as with any medicine available in the UK, the MHRA ensures that robust safety standards have been met before treatments made from plasma can be given to the public.

Because the ban has been in place since 1998, NHS Blood and Transplant currently collects around 350,000 litres of plasma each year as part of their ongoing whole blood donations for hospitals, of which 100,000 is used for transfusion and the remaining 250,000 is discarded or not used to manufacture medicines, as it is common practice in other countries where a ban is not in place. Following the decision to lift the ban, the whole blood donations from generous donors will be used to save and improve even more lives, by using the plasma from those whole blood donations to also make medicines for patient care.

Betsy Bassis, Chief Executive at NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT), said:

We are so pleased that our donors' gifts will now be able to save and improve even more lives in the years ahead. This is an exciting day for donors and patients alike.

NHSBT will be working closely with DHSC and NHS England to operationalise this ministerial announcement as soon as possible. There is growing global demand for these vital medicines so it's important that the UK develops its own supply for UK patients.

We also look forward to exploring the opportunity of fractionating convalescent plasma for the production of hyper-immunoglobulins to treat COVID-19.

Chris Townsend OBE has been appointed to work as an independent adviser supporting the government on developing plans for use of plasma for treatments for UK patients.

Chris Townsend OBE said: > The Plasma programme is an extremely important project with the potential of treating clinically ill patients suffering from a range of medical conditions. > > I'm honoured to be working with such a talented group of scientists and glad to be able to apply my experience of

successful programme governance and delivery in support of this vital work.

## **Background information**

In April 2020, Chris Townsend was appointed CEO of the government's shielding programme to protect the clinically extremely vulnerable. This role involved bringing together national and local government and the food industry to provide wide-scale support including food, medicine and social care for the most clinically vulnerable in society.

Prior to his role in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Mr Townsend has had over 25 years of senior management, marketing and commercial experience delivering major technology and infrastructure projects including his role as the Commercial Director for the London Organising Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games from 2006 to 2012 for which he was awarded an OBE in 2013.

From 2014 to 2017 Mr Townsend was CEO for BDUK (Broadband Delivery UK), responsible for the rollout of superfast broadband across the United Kingdom achieving 95% coverage.

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## **Free tablets to improve lives of thousands of people with learning disabilities**

- £2.5 million Digital Lifeline fund set up to improve lives of thousands with learning disabilities on low incomes
- 5,000 internet tablets preloaded with data and free tech support available from March
- Devices to help recipients beat loneliness by reconnecting them with friends and family

The government has set up a £2.5 million fund to provide devices, data and digital support to people with learning disabilities who can't afford to get online.

The new Digital Lifeline scheme will fund 5,000 internet tablets preloaded with data and free tech support for those facing a combination of digital exclusion: cost as a barrier to internet access and increased social isolation caused by coronavirus.

It comes as recent [ONS data](#) found three in four people (74.6 per cent) with a learning disability believe their wellbeing has been affected by the impact of coronavirus, compared with 37 per cent of non-disabled people.

[Studies](#) have shown technology can help people with learning disabilities reduce feelings of loneliness and support their mental health and wellbeing. The fund will ensure thousands facing financial hardship can enjoy the many benefits offered by technology and lead as normal a life as possible while restrictions are cautiously eased following the roadmap published by the government on Monday.

Digital Minister Caroline Dinenage said:

The pandemic has been incredibly tough for disabled people who have struggled to get online for basic things like catching up with loved ones.

The Digital Lifeline fund will tackle this divide head on by putting thousands of devices in the hands of those who need them most, with free data and tech support on standby to help people with learning disabilities.

The first devices will be delivered from March and form part of a wide package of measures the government has taken to support disabled people during the pandemic, including making £4.6 billion available to local authorities to ease pressures on local services including adult social care and giving £1.2 million to seven learning disability and autism charities.

The government is working on the project with leading digital inclusion charities Good Things Foundation and AbilityNet, both highly experienced in helping disabled people boost their mental health and achieve their goals through digital technology.

[Isobel](#) has a learning difficulty and lives with her dog but was feeling very isolated due to Covid-19. However, with the help of AbilityNet volunteer, Chris Grant, she has embraced technology to keep in touch with family and friends despite social distancing measures.

Isobel, 31, from Alness, Scotland, said:

Chris linked me in with a local charity to obtain a tablet and AbilityNet's team of volunteers showed me the best way to use it, and how to use it safely.

The best thing about tech is keeping in touch with friends and family via messenger and Facebook. It also keeps me entertained by looking at things such as Instagram.

I'm gaining more confidence and will be supported by Chris from AbilityNet to learn more so I can do more with my tablet. Having my tablet and phone makes such a huge difference and can keep in touch with friends.



AbilityNet will support the Digital Lifeline fund by providing tech advice on assistive technologies and accessibility assessments for individuals with multiple and/or profound disabilities. Good Things Foundation will provide support and guidance for the local organisations to help them distribute the devices safely and securely.

Funding will also be provided for local organisations to provide support to help recipients learn how to use their device safely and confidently.

Gary Moore, CEO of AbilityNet, said:

Covid has shown how access to technology is a vital part of an independent and fulfilling life for everyone in the community.

AbilityNet has been helping disabled people harness the power of tech for over 20 years and the Digital Lifeline project offers a wonderful opportunity to help people with learning disabilities get their hands on tech which will transform their lives.

Helen Milner, CEO of Good Things Foundation, said:

This investment from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, giving digital access and skills to people with learning disabilities, couldn't have come at a more important time.

The Covid-19 pandemic continues to highlight just how essential being online is for day-to-day living. But millions of people are still on the wrong side of the digital divide.

People with learning disabilities face even more challenges. Staying connected is an essential lifeline they depend on and must not do without.

That's why we're exceptionally proud to be working with DCMS on Digital Lifeline and we're excited to be partnering with AbilityNet, and other amazing organisations across the UK, to get devices and data into the hands of people who need help the most. Together we can all help fix the digital divide.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

- The Digital Lifeline Fund is open for applications from self-advocacy groups and other charities and providers who already work closely with people with learning disabilities, whether they live independently in the community, in supported living, or with their parents or family carers. People with learning disabilities will not be excluded if they live in residential care.

- Supportive partners of the fund include Good Things Foundation, Ability Net, Digital Unite and the Learning Disability England and the Voluntary Organisations Disability Group (VODG).
  - To be eligible for a device and data from Digital Lifeline, applicants must: live in England; be 18 years old or over; have a learning disability or learning disabilities – mild, moderate or severe (also includes disabled people who have additional learning disabilities); be digitally excluded – this means they can't afford internet access and their own appropriate device. An appropriate device is one that is suited to their needs and so can enable them to easily and confidently perform key online tasks, for example joining a group video call or booking a GP appointment.
  - Individuals cannot apply directly to the Digital Lifeline Fund themselves, or on behalf of a person with learning disabilities. The Digital Lifeline fund will be delivered through participating organisations. If any member of the public is interested and wants to find out more, they should contact their nearest self-advocacy group, online centre, or support provider to see if they are participating in the fund.
  - Organisations can find out more and apply at [www.goodthingsfoundation.org/news](http://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/news).
  - More info on Isobel is available [here](#).
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## [Fuelling a greener future: E10 petrol set for September 2021 launch](#)

- E10 petrol to be introduced at pumps up and down the country as the UK accelerates towards a greener transport future
- greener fuel grade could cut transport emissions equivalent to 350,000 fewer cars on the road
- introduction of E10 will boost job opportunities in the north east as biofuel plant reopens – securing up to 100 jobs as we build back better and greener

Motorists across the UK are set to shift to a greener fuel with the introduction of E10 at petrol stations in September 2021.

Following a [consultation with drivers and industry](#), the introduction of [E10 fuel](#), which is a mixture of petrol and ethanol made from materials including low-grade grains, sugars and waste wood, will boost the [government's ambitions to reach net zero by 2050](#).

Its introduction on UK roads could cut transport carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions by 750,000 tonnes a year – the equivalent of taking 350,000 cars off the road, or all the cars in North Yorkshire.

It will also boost job opportunities in the north east, securing up to 100 jobs with the reopening of AB Sugar's Vivergo plant, and increasing production at existing biofuel plants including Ensus. This will [support the UK's wider bioeconomy](#) by ensuring the materials needed for E10 are produced and refined in the UK.

[Video about E10 biofuel](#)

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

We're going further and faster than ever to cut emissions from our roads, cleaning up our air as we accelerate towards a zero-emission transport future.

Although more and more motorists are driving electric vehicles, there are steps we can take to reduce emissions from the millions of vehicles already on our roads – the small switch to E10 petrol will help drivers across the country reduce the environmental impact of every journey, as we build back greener.

The 2 petrol blends that are currently widely available in the UK contain no more than 5% ethanol, known as E5; the fuel being rolled out in September has up to 10%. Using bioethanol in place of traditional petrol can reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and, therefore, increasing the ethanol content of petrol could help us meet our climate change targets.

A small number of older vehicles, including classic cars and some from the early 2000s, will continue to need E5 fuel, which is why supplies of E5 petrol will be maintained in the 'Super' grade. We are advising motorists to use the new [E10 compatibility checker](#) to see if their vehicle is compatible.

Dr Mark Carr, Group Chief Executive of AB Sugar, said:

We are delighted to be reopening the Vivergo Fuels site today, located in the heart of the Northern Powerhouse on the back of the government's decision to move forward with E10.

We've long been calling for this introduction as E10 is one of the quickest, easiest and most cost-effective ways for the UK to reduce its carbon emissions, while providing an economic boost to sustain the British biofuels industry, and the local and national economy.

We will be recruiting around 85 highly skilled green jobs, in addition to the core team that remained in place during its closure in the north east of England, and reopening a new market for wheat farmers in the UK.

Grant Pearson, Director of Ensus UK Ltd, said:

The announcement today of the planned introduction of E10 fuel by the Department for Transport is excellent news – not only for the environment but also for the British bioethanol industry. E10 will mean that the majority of petrol sold in the UK will have lower greenhouse gas emissions than today, when fully introduced.

Lowering emissions immediately for the current petrol car pool is very important – especially until electric vehicles can make a larger contribution to saving emissions in transport.

The benefits for the UK go beyond the environment, particularly in the north east where the Ensus manufacturing facility is based, and supports thousands of jobs both directly and in the supply chain.