

United Nations Human Rights Council, 46th session: Foreign Secretary's statement

Madam President, Excellencies.

The UK places the promotion and protection of human rights at the very top of our list of international priorities. So we are very pleased to return to the Human Rights Council. And we will continue to uphold and defend the international rule of law, and the rights and freedoms of people right around the world.

We place a particular focus on: championing freedom of religion and belief; defending media freedom; and also championing the values of liberal democracy. We will use all of the diplomatic and development levers available to us to pursue these ends, support states to meet their human rights obligations, and uphold the values on which the United Nations was founded.

The Human Rights Council has a key role to play. And at this moment, when we see the democratic dominoes falling across the world, when we see appalling human rights violations, and when we see some governments using Covid as a pretext to row back on personal freedoms, the Council's role is even more important than ever.

But, like any institution, we know the Council is not perfect. Some members do not meet the human rights standards we vow to uphold. And the Council's agenda does not consistently reflect where the most pressing human rights issues are. We need to address that, as well as other institutional concerns. For our part, the UK will continue to engage with all sides to find ways to do so. For example, we must find ways to reduce the practical barriers to small island developing states engaging fully.

This Council lives up to the best traditions of the United Nations when it shines a spotlight on the very worst violations of human rights, and demands accountability for those responsible. So let me highlight some of the most pressing human rights situations that we see today.

The position in Myanmar gets worse. The violations and abuses are well-documented, including arbitrary detention and draconian restrictions on freedom of expression. That crisis presents an increased risk to the Rohingya and other ethnic minorities. That's why the UK and the EU led a special session of the Council on this issue earlier in the month. It resulted in a consensus resolution demonstrating the strength of feeling in the Council about the actions of the military.

The UK has also led strong statements from the G7 and the UN Security Council condemning the situation. The UK is sanctioning individuals for serious human rights violations that took place during the coup. The military must step

aside. Civilian leaders must be released. And the democratic wishes of the people of Myanmar must be respected. That's why at this session we will again cosponsor the resolution renewing the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Myanmar, so he can continue his essential work.

Let me now turn to Belarus. Last year's rigged Presidential elections and Mr Lukashenko's brutal crackdown against those calling for change has resulted in a human rights crisis. There is no other way to describe it.

The UK has been at the vanguard of the international response. This includes an OSCE investigation, an urgent debate at the Council in September, and greater support for civil society and the independent media. With Canada, we acted decisively in implementing sanctions against Lukashenko and his inner circle.

Now, this Council must continue with a comprehensive investigation of human rights violations, including accusations of torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. The Belarusian authorities must stop their campaign of repression, agree to meaningful dialogue and now hold new elections. The UK will support initiatives to keep Belarus on the Council's agenda for as long as it is necessary, and until the Belarusian people are able to enjoy their democratic rights and their fundamental freedoms.

Now turning to Russia, where we face a truly dire and shocking situation from a Permanent Member of the UN Security Council. The authorities there must respect citizens' human rights, including the right to freedom of expression, the right to a fair trial, and the freedom from torture.

We are deeply concerned by the legislative amendments and constitutional changes which amount to a wholesale attack on individual rights and freedoms. That includes allowing ordinary individuals to be treated as foreign agents. It is disgraceful that Alexey Navalny, himself the victim of a despicable crime, has now been sentenced on arbitrary charges.

The UK has sanctioned six individuals and an entity responsible for Mr Navalny's poisoning. His treatment and the violence inflicted on peaceful protesters can only further reinforce the world's concerns that Russia is failing to meet its international obligations. We've made our concerns clear here in this Council as well as at the G7, at the OSCE and in the Council of Europe. And we call on other members of the Council to consider whether Russia's actions are in line with its international human rights obligations and the values that we seek and that we have pledged to uphold.

Now, I must address China. We stand with the growing number of international partners, UN experts and NGOs concerned about the deteriorating human rights situation that we see in China. No one can ignore the evidence anymore.

In Hong Kong, the rights of the people are being systematically violated. The National Security Law is a clear breach of the Sino-British Joint Declaration and is having a chilling effect on personal freedoms. Free and fair legislative elections must take place, with a range of opposition voices allowed to take part.

In Tibet the situation remains deeply concerning, with access still heavily restricted. Meanwhile, we see almost daily reports now that shine a new light on China's systematic human rights violations perpetrated against Uyghur Muslims and other minorities in Xinjiang. The situation in Xinjiang is beyond the pale. The reported abuses – which include torture, forced labour and forced sterilisation of women – are extreme and they are extensive. They are taking place on an industrial scale. It must be our collective duty to ensure this does not go unanswered.

UN mechanisms must respond. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, or another independent fact-finding expert, must – and I repeat must – be given urgent and unfettered access to Xinjiang. If members of this Human Rights Council are to live up to our responsibilities, there must be a resolution which secures this access.

The UK will live up to our responsibilities. So last month, I announced measures aimed at ensuring that no company profiting from forced labour in Xinjiang can do business in the UK, and that no UK businesses are involved in their supply chains. We will continue to raise our voice for the people of Hong Kong and for minorities in China suffering this appalling treatment. And we urge others who share our commitment to open societies and universal human rights to speak up.

Finally, we will continue to lead action in this Council: on Syria, as we do at each session; on South Sudan; and on Sri Lanka, where we will present a new resolution to maintain the focus on reconciliation and on accountability.

Madam President, we want to see an effective international human rights system that holds to account those who systematically violate human rights. The Human Rights Council must be ready to play its role in full, or I fear we will see its reputation sorely damaged.

The UK wants the Council to succeed. And we will work with our international partners. We will continue to speak up in this Council for what is right. And we will continue to back up our words with actions.

Thank you.

Foreign Secretary calls on Human Rights Council to address human rights violations in Myanmar, China, Belarus and Russia

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- the UK returns to the UN Human Rights Council as a voting member
- Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab will call for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to be given urgent and unfettered access to Xinjiang
- the UK will lead resolutions on Sri Lanka, Syria and South Sudan

The Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab will today call on the UN Human Rights Council to address systematic human rights violations in Myanmar, China, Belarus and Russia.

When he addresses the 46th Session of the UN Human Rights Council (11:30am), the Foreign Secretary is expected to say:

On China:

- the situation in Xinjiang is beyond the pale. The reported abuses – which include torture, forced labour and forced sterilisation of women – are extreme and they are extensive. They are taking place on an industrial scale
- UN mechanisms must respond. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, or another independent fact-finding expert, must – and I repeat must – be given urgent and unfettered access to Xinjiang

On Belarus:

- last year's rigged Presidential elections and Mr Lukashenko's brutal crackdown against those calling for change has resulted in a human rights crisis. There is no other way to describe it
- this Council must continue with a comprehensive investigation of human rights violations, including accusations of torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment
- the UK will support initiatives to keep Belarus on the Council's agenda

for as long as it is necessary, and until the Belarusian people are able to enjoy their democratic rights and their fundamental freedoms

On Myanmar:

- the position in Myanmar gets worse. The violations and abuses are well-documented, including arbitrary detention and draconian restrictions on freedom of expression. That crisis presents an increased risk to the Rohingya and other ethnic minorities
- the military must step aside. Civilian leaders must be released. And the democratic wishes of the people of Myanmar must be respected
- that is why at this session we will again co-sponsor the resolution renewing the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Myanmar, so he can continue his essential work

On Russia:

- we face a truly dire and shocking situation from a Permanent Member of the UN Security Council
- it is disgraceful that Alexey Navalny, himself the victim of a despicable crime, has now been sentenced on arbitrary charges. His treatment and the violence inflicted on peaceful protesters can only further reinforce the world's concerns that Russia is failing to meet its international obligations
- we call on other members of the Council to consider whether Russia's actions are in line with its international human rights obligations and the values that we seek and that we have pledged to uphold

The Foreign Secretary is also expected to update members and observers on the substantive steps the UK has taken to address these issues and urge others to follow suit, including the introduction of [business restrictions against supply chains using forced labour in Xinjiang](#) and implementing [sanctions against Alexander Lukashenko, 3 members of the Myanmar military regime](#), and [those responsible for Alexey Navalny's poisoning](#).

The Foreign Secretary's speech comes as the UK returns to the Geneva based Human Rights Council as a voting member. As an elected member of the Council, the UK will focus on promoting action for girls' education, championing freedom of religion and belief, defending media freedom, and being a passionate advocate for the values of liberal democracy.

At the upcoming session, which runs from Monday 22 February until Tuesday 23 March, the UK will lead resolutions on Syria, as we mark the tenth anniversary of the conflict; Sri Lanka, as we press for progress on post-conflict accountability, reconciliation and human rights; and South Sudan, as we seek to address the human rights situation and continue to support the revitalised peace agreement.

- the 46th Session of the Geneva based UN Human Rights Council will run from 22 February to 23 March 2021
- meetings are [can be watched live](#). This is the first of 3 sessions this year
- the [UN Human Rights Council](#) is made up of 47 United Nations member states which are elected by the UN General Assembly
- the UK was re-elected to the Council in October 2020. Members of the Council serve for a period of 3 years and are not eligible for immediate re-election after serving 2 consecutive terms

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[NDA innovation competition winners have been announced](#)



The 'Sort and Seg' innovation competition

The 'Sort and Seg' innovation competition, worth £3.9 million in total, was launched in July 2020. The Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) – in partnership with Magnox Ltd, Sellafield Ltd and Innovate UK – set the challenge of coming up with proposals for using autonomous technology to sort and segregate mixed radioactive wastes at the UK's oldest nuclear sites.

The first phase of the competition is now complete and contracts, worth up to £60k each, have been awarded to 14 consortia that will now come up with feasibility studies for their proposals, including robotics, advanced sensors and artificial intelligence.

The NDA's Head of Innovation, Sara Huntingdon, said:

The reaction to 'Sort and Seg' has been incredible – we have received the best response we've ever had for this kind of competition.

It's really exciting that most of the successful organisations are bringing in experience and ideas from other sectors and I'm really looking forward to working together with our partners and with all the winners to see how these ideas develop.

Competitions like this are an important way of engaging our supply chain, encouraging diversity of thinking and finding innovative techniques and technologies from other sectors to help deliver the NDA's decommissioning mission and help meet the aims of the Nuclear Sector Deal.

Derek Allen, Innovation Lead, Energy Clean Growth and Infrastructure Lead at Innovate UK, said:

We are delighted to be working with the NDA again to help drive innovation into the nuclear decommissioning supply chain and deliver things faster, cheaper and safer.

The response to the competition was excellent and some really exciting projects have been funded. There are some great examples of technology transfer and I look forward to seeing these innovative projects progress over the next few months.

The initial feasibility studies will be delivered in May, with the winners competing for a number of contracts – each worth up to £900k – for 15-month 'demonstrator projects'.

- AB5 Consulting Ltd
- Jacobs Clean Energy Ltd
- A.N. Technology Ltd
- Atkins Ltd
- Barrnon Ltd
- Cavendish Nuclear Ltd
- Chilton Computing Ltd
- Create Technologies Ltd
- Delkia Ltd
- EDF Energy R&D Centre Ltd
- Forth Engineering (Cumbria) Ltd
- Nuvia Ltd
- Red Marine Engineering Ltd

- Veolia Nuclear Solutions Ltd

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[Track worker struck by a train near Surbiton](#)

News story

Investigation into a track worker struck by a train near Surbiton station, south-west London, 9 February 2021.



Aerial view of the area.

At around 11:35 hrs on Tuesday 9 February 2021, a track worker was struck and fatally injured by a passenger train near Surbiton station, south-west London. The train, which was travelling from London Waterloo to Salisbury, was travelling at around 76 mph (112 km/h) on the down fast line.

The track worker was part of a group of four staff who were undertaking a planned inspection of switches and crossings (points). The work was planned to take place while the lines were open and with arrangements in place to protect staff from train movements.

Our investigation will aim to identify the sequence of events which led to the accident and will include consideration of the actions of those involved, the planned protection arrangements, the planning of the work relating to the inspection of switches and crossings where lines are open to traffic, and any relevant underlying factors.

Our investigation is independent of any investigation by the railway industry, the British Transport Police or by the industry's regulator, the [Office of Rail and Road](#).

We will publish our findings, including any recommendations to improve safety, at the conclusion of our investigation. This report will be available on our website.

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