

UN Human Rights Council 45: Interactive Dialogue with the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi

World news story

UK statement delivered during the Interactive Dialogue with the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi



The Human Rights Council takes place in Geneva.

Thank you, Mr Vice President

The United Kingdom thanks the Commissioners for their work and welcomes the report.

The developments in Burundi since the last Interactive Dialogue call for a review of how this Council and the UN Human Rights mechanisms engage with the Government of Burundi.

We recall President Ndayishimiye's commitment to promoting the freedom and the rights of all Burundians. The UK would like to see the relationship between the Government of Burundi and the international community develop to one based on mutual support, cooperation, and respect for human rights.

We therefore call on the Government of Burundi to cooperate fully with the Council, via its mechanisms and Special Procedures, and with the OHCHR, as appropriate, as a necessary first step to realising this new relationship.

It is not yet time for the Council to turn its attention away from Burundi. The Commission's report demonstrates that Burundi still has significant progress to make to restore the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Mr Vice-President,

We would welcome the Commissioners' assessment of any actions taken by the Government over the past three months to improve human rights in Burundi, in response to the commitment expressed by President Ndayishimiye.

Thank you.

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[Troops and veterans one step closer to stronger legal protection](#)

Stronger legal protections for service personnel and veterans facing the threat of repeated investigations and potential prosecution will be one step closer as the Overseas Operations Bill is debated in Parliament today (Wednesday 23 September).

The Bill delivers on the Government's manifesto commitment to tackle vexatious claims and end the cycle of reinvestigations against our brave Armed Forces. The legislation will introduce a range of measures to reduce uncertainty arising from historical allegations and create a better legal framework to deal with claims from future overseas conflicts.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

This Government made a promise to the nation to protect service personnel and veterans from vexatious claims and endless investigations. We have not shied away from the challenge and today are one step closer to fulfilling that commitment.

We all remember Phil Shiner, and the scores of allegations that have amounted to nothing over the years.

Our Armed Forces risk their lives to protect us and it is vital we continue to progress this legislation, providing certainty for the troops who find themselves on the front line in the future.

The Overseas Operations Bill was introduced in March after operations in Iraq and Afghanistan gave rise to an unprecedented number of legal claims. The Iraq war in particular saw a claims industry spring up where unscrupulous lawyers promised individuals they would be financially rewarded if they made

allegations of wrongdoing against service personnel.

This contributed to nearly 1000 compensation claims against the MoD for unlawful detention, injury and death, as well as 1400 judicial review claims seeking investigations and compensation for human rights violations. While legitimate claims were rightly investigated, and always will be, this series of drawn-out investigations and litigation has cast a shadow over the lives of innocent personnel and veterans living with such uncertainty.

Around 70% of allegations received by the independent Iraq Historic Allegations Team were dismissed as there was no case to answer.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Johnny Mercer said:

This legislation is not about providing an amnesty or putting troops above the law but protecting them from lawyers intent on rewriting history to line their own pockets.

It will put an end to lawfare and make sure personnel and veterans are not repeatedly and indefinitely called upon to give evidence about events that happened years ago.

Today we are one step closer to making the UK the best place in the world to be a veteran.

The Bill reduces the uncertainty faced by service personnel and veterans in relation to allegations arising from historical overseas operations by introducing a statutory presumption against prosecution. This means it will be exceptional for them to be prosecuted five years or more after an incident. When coming to a prosecution decision, the independent prosecutor must weigh up the adverse impact of overseas operations on service personnel and – where there has been a previous investigation and no compelling new evidence – the public interest in cases coming to a timely conclusion. If their decision is to go forward to prosecution, they will have to seek the consent of the Attorney General to do so.

The Bill also delivers a significant amendment to the Human Rights Act (HRA) in law, by helping to put an end to the industrial scale of litigation by limiting the time in which claims for human rights violations can be brought.

Legislation will restrict the court's discretion to allow claims to be brought after the normal time limits and make sure civil claims for personal injury and death and claims for HRA violations are brought within six years. Approximately half of the claims by Iraqi nationals were brought more than six years after the alleged incident and would have been caught by these longstops.

Crucially, these changes will not prevent personnel and veterans bringing claims against the MoD. The vast majority of these claims are already brought within six years and the time limit for certain conditions, such as PTSD, will start from the date of knowledge of the condition.

Finally, the Bill will ensure that all future governments are compelled to consider derogating from the European Convention on Human Rights in relation to significant overseas military operations. All overseas operations will continue to be governed by international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions.

The Government will introduce separate legislation to address the legacy of the past in Northern Ireland in a way that focuses on reconciliation, delivers for victims, and ends the cycle of reinvestigations into the Troubles in NI that has failed victims and veterans alike. We remain committed to moving this forward as quickly as possible.

Notes to editors:

1) The measures in the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Bill will help to reduce the uncertainty faced by service personnel and veterans, in relation to overseas operations, by introducing the following measures:

- We are introducing a statutory presumption against prosecution of current or former service personnel for alleged offences committed on operations outside the UK more than five years ago. The statutory presumption raises the threshold to be applied by prosecutors when deciding whether a service person or veteran should be prosecuted in such cases, so that it will be “exceptional” to prosecute. When making a decision, the prosecutor must give particular weight to the public interest in finality where there has been a previous investigation and no compelling new evidence has become available. There is also a requirement for the prosecutor to obtain the consent of the Attorney General before a prosecution can proceed.
- We are restricting the court’s discretion to extend the normal time limit (of three years) for bringing civil claims for personal injury and/or death in relation to military operations outside the UK. We are introducing a limitation longstop of six years. We are also setting out further factors for consideration by the court (which reflect the unique context of overseas operations) when deciding whether to extend the primary limitation period of three years.
- We are also restricting the court’s discretion to extend the normal time limit (of one year) for bringing HRA claims in relation to military operations outside the UK. We are introducing a limitation longstop of six years. We are also setting out factors for consideration by the court (which reflect the unique context of overseas operations) when deciding whether to extend the primary limitation period of one year.

- We are placing a duty for future governments to consider derogating from the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) in relation to significant overseas operations. This provision will introduce a requirement for the Secretary of State for Defence to consider, and to keep under review, whether it is appropriate to derogate in light of the situation at the time.

2) Of the 1,130 compensation claims brought by Iraqi nationals (under both tort law and the Human Rights Act), at least 583 were brought more than six years after the alleged incident and would have been caught by the longstops. The limitation longstops will provide a clear time period during which claims can be brought and should ensure claims are brought promptly. This will enable them to be assessed in a fair and proportionate manner, and make sure lessons are learned and applied.

3) An analysis of available figures indicates around 94% of claims brought by current and former service personnel in relation to incidents in Iraq and Afghanistan were brought within six years.

4) While the legislation will provide further protections for UK forces, the military will continue to operate to strict high standards, complying with both UK and international law, including the Geneva Conventions. Any allegations of wrongdoing will continue to be investigated and, where appropriate prosecuted. Armed Forces personnel who break the law can still be held to account.

[Liam Fox makes SMEs his priority as WTO contest continues](#)

Dr Liam Fox today warns that the World Trade Organization must seek new solutions to help businesses in developing countries to overcome barriers to international trade.

He believes domestic reform and integration into the global trading system are more effective at increasing global prosperity than development finance.

Speaking shortly after going through to the second round of the selection process to be the next Director General of the World Trade Organization, he said the organization needs to work smarter.

Most developing countries' growing businesses are small and medium sized. Globally, they make up 95 per cent of all businesses and account for 60 per cent of employment, with many officially classed as microbusinesses.

However, the [latest research](#) from the WTO reveals they comprise of little

over seven per cent of developing countries' exports, less than half of larger companies. [Recent research](#) in over 130 countries by the International Trade Centre also reveals 55 per cent of small businesses have been badly affected by the global pandemic, compared to 40 per cent of large companies. A fifth of SMEs say they have to close over the next few months. Restrictions caused by limited supply chains, poor cash flow and inadequate access to capital all prevent developing countries' best businesses from growing by tapping into global demand.

Dr Fox said this was a pressing issue for every trade minister he has met. He added:

We must integrate low income countries and ensure the benefits of growth are equitably distributed.

Shared global prosperity means that developing countries, especially the poorest, must be fully integrated into the rules-based international system. When the WTO has delivered, and where trade has flourished, it has created prosperity far beyond what any amount of overseas aid could accomplish.

Integration must be backed up by more intelligent help for developing countries, including better access to research and insight, and a smarter way of analysing the relative strength of countries' economies.

Dr Fox explained:

I believe that there is more that we can do to help small and vulnerable economies by using our data better. For example, if you are a small island state you may well be a middle income economy, measuring income as GDP per capita, the day before a hurricane or a cyclone yet be a very low-income economy the day after.

Surely it makes sense to use data on a rolling basis, such as a five-year cycle, to diminish the unpredictability and disruption that these events can bring to such Members?

We need to continuously seek pragmatic solutions to deliver pragmatic analysis and information for the benefit of all Members, societies and businesses. Not only would this provide a more stable basis for planning for the governments concerned, with predictability on issues like trade preferences, but it would also create a much more stable environment for investment.

The UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson nominated Dr Fox to be a candidate to replace current Director General, Roberto Azevedo, who stepped down after seven years in charge.

Dr Fox is campaigning to restore the credibility of the WTO at the heart of the rules-based trading system, reform its Appellate Body, deliver genuine gender equality by ensuring that at least half of his top team are women and work more closely with other international organizations.

Dr Fox has published an updated version of his campaign pamphlet, outlining his plans to reform and re-invigorate the World Trade Organization, which can be found on his [campaign hub](#).

[Applications for the UK Government's Chevening Scholarships open 3 September 2020](#)

Chevening Scholarships are awarded to individuals who can demonstrate that they have the commitment and skills required to create positive change, and can show how a UK master's degree will help them do that. The scholarship offers full financial support for future leaders to study for any eligible master's degree at any UK university whilst also gaining access to a wide range of exclusive academic, professional, and cultural experiences.

Since the programme was created in 1983, over 50,000 professionals have had the opportunity to develop in the UK through Chevening. There are more than 1,500 scholarships on offer globally for the 2021/2022 academic year, demonstrating the UK's ongoing commitment towards developing the leaders of tomorrow.

Head of Scholarships at the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), Naomi Rayner, said:

This year more than ever, we have seen how global challenges demand innovation, strong leadership and international collaboration. Chevening seeks to build an international community of people who are committed to those values, and to driving positive change. We do this by bringing together incredible people from around the world and supporting them, through education, to achieve their goals.

In the UK we are proud of our world class universities and we know that our learning environments are enriched by the wide diversity of cultures, experiences and viewpoints represented on our

campuses. Chevening scholars make a significant contribution to these communities, as well as becoming an important part of our network of over 50,000 alumni.

Chevening represents the very best of the UK, welcoming people from across the world to study, grow, and thrive. Being a part of the Chevening network instils a strong sense of pride and responsibility. I am consistently inspired by the passion and commitment of those in the Chevening community and I look forward to hearing from this year's applicants.

British Ambassador to Thailand, H.E. Brian Davidson said:

If you are someone who is passionate about driving change, whether on a local or global scale, if you want to be the best at what you do and if you have the imagination to inspire others, then a Chevening scholarship could be the perfect opportunity for you.

There is no such thing as a 'typical' scholar. Your age, race, gender, religion and cultural background do not matter to us. We want to see that you have energy, curiosity, a clear vision for your future and the ability to achieve your goals. If this sounds like you, then you are very likely to fit in with our community of over 50,000 alumni worldwide.

Our alumni network is full of dynamic influencers who have shared the same experience that you will. They can offer encouragement, mentorship, advice, and contacts. When you return home after your studies you should feel well-equipped to start making a real difference professionally or socially.

There is a lot to gain from submitting a thoughtful application, so if you have what it takes to be a Chevening Scholar, I would encourage you to apply before the 3 November deadline.

The call for new applicants follows the selection of 15 scholars from Thailand, who won an award to study at a UK university this year. Successful applicants have been sharing their stories through the #ChosenForChevening hashtag on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

More information

Visit www.chevening.org/scholarships for detailed information on the eligibility criteria and scholarship specifications.

Notes to editors

Chevening Scholarships are the UK Government's global scholarship programme, funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and partner organisations. The scholarships support study at UK universities – mostly one

year taught master's degrees – for individuals with demonstrable potential to become future leaders, decision-makers, and opinion formers.

Chevening began in 1983 and has developed into a prestigious international awards scheme. Chevening Scholars come from over 160 countries and territories worldwide, and over the past five years we have awarded almost 9,000 scholarships. There are over 50,000 Chevening Alumni around the world who comprise an influential and highly regarded global network.

The name 'Chevening' comes from Chevening House in Sevenoaks, Kent – currently the joint official residence of the UK's Foreign Secretary.

More information is available at www.chevening.org

Government launches call for evidence on video game loot boxes

Loot boxes are in-game containers purchased with either virtual or real-world currency that awards players with randomized virtual items. They can use these items to improve their playing experience or for cosmetic upgrades to their character's appearance.

Players do not know which item they will get until after they have opened the loot box and this chance element has raised concerns they could encourage gambling-like behaviour, particularly among young people.

With people spending increasing amounts of time online and as the industry, gaming habits, and the technology that supports it continues to evolve, the open call for evidence will help us understand people's positive and negative experiences of loot boxes in video games.

It will seek the experiences of players and their parents or guardians as well as rigorous, high quality data and research from video games companies, academia, civil society as well as any other organisations with an interest in this issue.

The findings will give the government a clearer understanding of the size of the loot box and in-game purchases market in the UK, how it operates, and the impact of current protections such as parental controls and consumer regulations.

The government stands ready to take action should the outcomes of the call for evidence support taking a new approach to ensure users, and particularly young people, are better protected. Loot boxes will be considered alongside a review of the Gambling Act.

Minister for Digital and Culture Caroline Dinenage said:

“Our valued video game industry is making good progress developing safer environments for our children to play in, such as parental controls that can be set to schedule and limit playtime.

“But we’ve listened to parents’ concerns about loot boxes and it’s right that we fully examine and understand any evidence of the harm or links to problem gambling they can cause, so we can decide if action is needed.”

Video games are played by over half of the population and the sector is a key part of the UK’s world-leading creative industries. It contributed £2.6 billion to the economy in 2018, employed 27,000 people in 2019 and has grown more than 16 times faster than the wider UK economy since 2010.

The government will also undertake further research into the wider impact of video games on behaviour. DCMS will set a framework for a programme of research informed by workshops with academia and industry.

The government is taking these steps to address issues highlighted by the DCMS Select Committee’s report on Immersive and Addictive Technologies and to protect audiences across the UK.

The call for evidence will be open until November 22 2020.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

- The call for evidence will be live from 12pm on 23 September and can be found [here](#).
- The full response to the Select Committee report can be read [here](#).