

# Political repression and death penalty in Belarus: Joint statement

Mr Chair, I am reading this statement on behalf of Canada, Norway and the United Kingdom. We join other participating States in condemning Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, in which Belarus is complicit. We commend the bravery of the Belarusian people in withholding their support for this war, and we deplore the harsh repression of those who speak out against the Lukashenko regime.

We strongly condemn proposed changes to the criminal code in Belarus to include new grounds for the death penalty, and share the assessment of other participating States that this will be used as an enhanced instrument of political repression. We oppose the death penalty in all circumstances, as a matter of principle. While much of the world is moving towards abolition of the death penalty, the Lukashenko regime takes a clear step back. We urge Belarus to reconsider this action.

We commend the tireless work of civil society organisations and human rights defenders in Belarus, despite the very real dangers they face in conducting their vital work. We once again call for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners in Belarus.

In their reply under the [Vienna Mechanism](#), the Delegation of Belarus stated there is no such concept as "a political prisoner" under Belarusian legislation. However, that does not mean an absence of political prisoners in Belarus; we now know that there are close to 1200 people detained for politically motivated reasons such as peacefully exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association. There is further evidence that detainees are faced with torture, cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment. We will defend these fundamental freedoms of the Belarusian people and work with others in a network of liberty to hold those who seek to silence them to account.

We urge the Belarusian authorities to fully implement their international obligations and OSCE commitments, and to make use of the OSCE's tools and mechanisms to help resolve the continuing crisis in Belarus.

Thank you Mr Chair

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## New Bill to set up UK Infrastructure

# Bank announced in Queen's speech

- The UK Infrastructure Bank Bill is the final step in setting up the UK Infrastructure Bank as an operationally independent institution
- The Bill will remove legal obstacles so the Bank can lend directly to local authorities and the Northern Ireland Executive for infrastructure projects
- The Bank, launched in June 2021, is a key part of the Government's National Infrastructure Strategy and is already investing in infrastructure across the UK

The UK Infrastructure Bank was launched in interim form at its headquarters in Leeds in June last year. It was tasked with accelerating investment into ambitious infrastructure projects, cutting emissions and levelling up across the UK.

This Bill will complete the Bank's set up as an operationally independent institution and give it the power to lend directly to local authorities and the Northern Ireland Executive. It will also support the Bank's operational independence by setting out clear accountability for how it is to be run.

Since its launch, the Bank has completed five deals, including financing the UK's largest solar farm in south Wales, investing £100 million to provide high-capacity broadband to around 500,000 properties in hard-to-reach UK premises and a further £50 million to improve digital connectivity for rural homes and businesses across Northern Ireland.

## **John Glen, Economic Secretary to the Treasury, said:**

Since its launch nearly a year ago, the Bank has already invested in important projects that will support people, businesses and communities across the UK.

This Bill sets out the Bank's long-term purpose as an enduring institution to continue to do this, helping tackle climate change and support levelling up.

## **The CEO of the UK Infrastructure Bank, John Flint, said:**

We welcome the introduction of the UK Infrastructure Bank Bill, which underlines the government's commitment to our mission.

As the government moves to place the Bank on a statutory footing,

we will now focus on the recruitment of people who are excited by our purpose, and who will ensure that the Bank delivers on its mandate.

The Bank is an essential part of the Government's National Infrastructure Strategy and will have £22 billion of financial capacity to invest in infrastructure to help tackle climate change and to support regional and local economic growth across the UK.

The UK Infrastructure Bank will have an initial £12 billion of capital to deploy and will be able to issue £10 billion of government guarantees, helping to unlock more than £40 billion of overall investment.

Working in partnership with local government and the private sector, the Bank will harness investment tailored to the needs of specific infrastructure projects, offering a range of financing tools including debt, equity, and guarantees.

Measures in the Bill will:

- Complete the Bank's set up as an operationally independent institution, able to deliver on its objectives effectively and with a clear long-term policy mandate. By enshrining the Bank's objectives and activities in legislation, the Bill will provide clarity for the Bank and the market as to the Bank's long-term purpose as an enduring institution.
- The Bill will also support the Bank's operational independence by setting out clear accountability for how it is to be run, including reporting and board requirements.
- Finally, the Bill will give the Bank the power to lend directly to local authorities and the Northern Ireland Executive which is one of the Bank's key activities.

## **Further information**

The UK Infrastructure Bank has already completed five deals:

- investing £100 million to provide high-capacity broadband to around 500,000 properties in hard-to-reach UK premises
- Financing the UK's largest operational solar farm at Llanwern in south Wales and catalysing a £500m fund which could double the amount of subsidy-free solar power in the UK with Next Energy
- investing £107 million in the South Bank Quay development at Teesworks

in Teesside (North-East England) supporting around 800 direct jobs

- partnering with the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) to invest £10 million in phase 1 of the new Sprint Bus Route in Birmingham along the heavily congested A45 corridor
- investing £50 million as a co-lender to the broadband provider Fibrus, which is delivering high-capacity broadband to rural homes and businesses across Northern Ireland

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## [M25 junction 10/A3 Wisley interchange improvement development consent decision announced](#)

In December 2014 the Department for Transport (DfT) published the Road Investment Strategy (RIS) for 2015-2020. The RIS sets out the list of schemes that are to be delivered by Highways England over the period covered by the RIS (2015 – 2020). The RIS identifies improvements to M25 J10/A3 Wisley Interchange as one of the key investments in the SRN for the London and South East region.

The proposed improvements being as follows: “...improvement of the Wisley interchange to allow free-flowing movement in all directions, together with improvements to the neighbouring Painshill interchange on the A3 to improve safety and congestion across the two sites.”

The application was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for consideration by Highways England on 19 June 2019 and accepted for Examination on 17 July 2019.

Following Examinations during which the public, Statutory Consultees and Interested Parties were given the opportunity to give evidence to the Examining Authority, recommendations were made to the Secretary of State on 12 October 2020.

This is the 111th Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project and 39th transport application to have been examined by The Planning Inspectorate within the timescales laid down in the Planning Act 2008.

The Planning Inspectorate’s Chief Executive, Sarah Richards said:

” The Planning Inspectorate has now examined more than 100 nationally significant infrastructure projects since the Planning Act 2008 process was

introduced, ensuring local communities have had the opportunity of being involved in the examination of projects that may affect them.

This Examination took place during the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated restrictions and the Examination period was extended by the Secretary of State as a result. The Examining Authority worked hard to ensure that local people, the local authority and other Interested Parties were able to fully participate.

The Examining Authority listened and gave full consideration to local views and the evidence gathered during the examination before making their recommendation. ”

The decision, the recommendation made by the Examining Authority to the Secretary of State and the evidence considered by the Examining Authority in reaching its recommendation are publicly available on the project pages of the [National Infrastructure Planning website](#)

Journalists wanting further information should contact the Planning Inspectorate Press Office, on 0303 444 5004 or 0303 444 5005 or email: [Press.office@planninginspectorate.gov.uk](mailto:Press.office@planninginspectorate.gov.uk)

Notes to editors:

The Planning Inspectorate’s [National Infrastructure Programme of Projects](#) details the proposals which are anticipated to be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate as applications in the coming months.

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## **[Report by the Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia: UK response, May 2022](#)**

Welcome Ambassador Braathu, welcome Jan, and thank you to you and your team for the comprehensive Report. The UK values the work of the Mission and the achievements highlighted.

Your Report clearly sets out the political backdrop to the Mission’s work. This includes the 16 January referendum that paved the way for constitutional amendments to strengthen the Judiciary, the opening of two EU negotiation clusters, as well as Presidential and early Parliamentary elections on 3rd April. We welcome that some previous recommendations by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) were taken into account for these elections, and we encourage a continued focus on responding to any shortcomings identified in the [ODIHR’s final report](#).

On your report, Ambassador Braathu, we note the concerns about the polarised media scene and welcome the Mission’s valuable advocacy and support. Media

freedom is essential for the effective functioning of any democracy, and it is vital that journalists can carry out their work free of threats or physical attacks. We also note that during the reporting period over 300 journalists obtained free legal aid through the Mission-supported 24/7 helpline, and that the Mission produced video podcasts on safety of women journalists. It would be good to hear your further assessment on the impact and reach of these resources and any feedback received. I also commend the Mission's support for media literacy in schools, which is essential in today's digital world.

On war crimes, we have long been concerned about the appearance of murals and graffiti depicting convicted war criminal Ratko Mladic. We therefore welcome the Mission's work in supporting Serbia in taking action to secure accountability for war crimes.

Given the ethnic Albanian community concerns about passivization of addresses and the language used by some public officials and tabloids to describe the community, we welcome the Mission's advocacy for inclusive multi-ethnic representation. The Mission is well placed to provide support and expertise. We welcome its intercultural activities for youth from diverse ethnic communities. We also recognise the Mission's educational support – including its training programme to prevent discrimination against Roma children. The Mission's work, including at grassroots level, is commendable. We appreciate that you will offer support and expertise for the 2022 population census and for National Minority Council elections.

Ambassador Braathu, we greatly appreciate the Mission's focus on gender across its activities, including in relation to gender-based violence, gender-sensitive labour policies, and on the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. The value of achieving gender equality, and ensuring gender inclusive and responsive decision-making, is well known. We also highly value your work with youth, including with the civil society organisation, the Centre for Research, Transparency and Accountability, on election observation through the "Democracy Academy".

Finally, as we said at the Permanent Council last week, the UK continues to support strongly the EU-facilitated Dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo, working towards a comprehensive and sustainable normalisation agreement that will be to the benefit of the people of both countries. It is vital that both sides refrain from any rhetoric or activity which may reduce the chances of constructive progress in the Dialogue. We value the continued work of EU Special Representative Miroslav Lajcak. It is incumbent on both Kosovo and Serbia to seize the opportunity for renewed, good-faith engagement in the Dialogue, honouring the Dialogue commitments they have made so far, and holding regular talks at all levels in a spirit of compromise, and openness to positive, imaginative solutions.

In conclusion, I would like to thank you, Ambassador Braathu, dear Jan, and your team for your support, commitment and hard work over the reporting period.

Thank you Chair

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# Inspection Report Published: An inspection of contingency asylum accommodation

News story

This inspection focuses on the use of hotels as contingency asylum accommodation. The Home Office has accepted all 7 of the report's recommendations.



Publishing the report, David Neal said:

I welcome the publication of this report, which explores the use of hotels as contingency asylum accommodation. This inspection examined the delivery and assurance of the Asylum Accommodation and Support Contracts (AASC). It followed ICIBI's inspection (with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons) of the use of Napier Barracks and Penally Camp as contingency asylum accommodation in February 2021.

The use of hotels as contingency asylum accommodation is not new, but the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions on moving people on to dispersed accommodation, combined with an increase in intake, added to the demand for hotels. Thousands of asylum seekers are now accommodated in hotels at significant additional cost to the AASC contracts, which have a combined value of more than £4.5 billion over 10 years. The contracts must be overhauled to account for the current situation, with oversight maintained to ensure delivery and quality.

My inspectors visited 20% of each of the 3 AASC providers' hotels, and my conclusion is that the service providers delivered accommodation broadly in line with the statement of requirements.

I also found that the short notice and lack of consultation provided by the Home Office to local authorities prior to new hotels being established in their areas have damaged relations considerably. The Home Office's failure to consult local stakeholders was also raised by my predecessor in March 2021 in relation to the establishment of Napier Barracks and Penally Camp as contingency asylum accommodation sites. Whilst my inspectors were told that relationships are being repaired, recent reports about the lack of consultation prior to the announcement of the Linton-on-Ouse reception centre in the northeast are concerning and suggest to me that the Home Office has not listened or learned from experience.

The Home Office needs to be realistic in setting targets to end the use of hotels as asylum accommodation and work with providers and stakeholders to agree what is achievable.

I made 7 recommendations in this report. I am pleased that the Home Office has accepted all of them and I am encouraged to hear that work is already under way to tackle the issues raised.

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