

UN Human Rights Council 45: statement for the Interactive Dialogue on COVID-19

Thank you, Madam President,

We welcome the High Commissioner's update on the impact of the pandemic on human rights. As this Council stressed in its Presidential statement, States must ensure that human rights are respected in their response to the pandemic.

We are concerned by the reports of clampdowns on freedom of expression, by allegations of people being arrested for criticising the government's response, accused of disinformation or even terrorism; of doctors being silenced; of access to information denied; of human rights defenders and journalists arbitrarily detained; of online civic space – more crucial than ever – being unduly restricted; and by some countries using the pandemic as an excuse to roll back women's rights and discriminate against LGBT citizens.

We are concerned too by the disproportionate impact the crisis is having on the most disadvantaged and vulnerable – leaving them even further behind; by its impact on women and girls; and by the increase in domestic violence.

All actors have a role to play so that we can build back better. Global collaboration and resourcing is essential for the necessary vaccines, treatments and tests. The UK, through our newly merged Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, has pledged £774 million to support the global effort. We are proud that, with the UN Secretary-General, the WHO and Republic of South Africa, we will co-host a high level event at UNGA on 30 September to accelerate multilateral activity, particularly the COVAX Vaccines Facility.

High Commissioner, how can we fully involve all actors and stakeholders in the response and recovery, to build back better?