

UN Human Rights Council 49: UK statement for the Item 3 General Debate

The UK has condemned Russia's unprovoked and barbaric invasion of Ukraine in the strongest terms.

Abuses and violations of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law are escalating dramatically. Russian air strikes and artillery have been used indiscriminately, damaging civilian infrastructure, and leaving hundreds dead. As my Prime Minister has said, "There are few things more depraved than targeting the vulnerable and defenceless". The UK is one of 41 countries that have referred Russian atrocities in Ukraine to the International Criminal Court. Those committing war crimes will be held to account.

Russia is matching its aggression abroad by drastically escalating repression at home. Since the invasion began, Russian authorities have arrested nearly 15,000 anti-war protestors. New legislation criminalises the dissemination of information about the Russian armed forces that the authorities deem to be 'fake'. Those found guilty could face 15 years in prison. Furthermore, the independent radio station Echo Moskvy has been shut down.

This new wave of repression is only the latest chapter in a long-standing campaign designed to silence dissenting voices, to curtail freedom of expression and to erode other rights and freedoms in Russia.

Russian civil society organisations have been threatened and harassed. Two of Russia's oldest NGOs, International Memorial and Memorial Human Rights Centre have been closed. The absence of these organisations will be sorely felt by people throughout Russian society whose rights and freedoms are increasingly under attack.

Political opponents face equally grave threats. Opposition figure Alexey Navalny remains arbitrarily detained on the basis of politically motivated charges, and in contravention of a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights. He must be released immediately.

Religious minorities and LGBT+ persons face repression across the country. In Chechnya, there are ongoing reports of arrest, torture and extrajudicial killing of LGBT individuals.

We call on Russia, a member of this Council, to live up to its responsibilities and to fulfil its international human rights obligations. If Russia continues to disregard the rights of those in and those beyond its border, this Council must respond.

Thank you.