

UN Human Rights Council 49: UK statement for the Item 4 General Debate

Thank you, Madam President,

Once again we condemn Russia's illegal, unprovoked and barbaric invasion of Ukraine. The magnitude of the horrific suffering caused by Putin's war of choice has made Russia's actions an inevitable focus of this Session.

However, let me also highlight our concerns about human rights violations in other parts of the world.

We share the serious concerns repeatedly expressed about widespread violations in China. In Xinjiang, harrowing evidence continues to emerge of systematic violations. We welcome the ILO's recent recommendations on labour practices. This issue will now rightly be on the agenda at the International Labour Conference in June. High Commissioner Bachelet must be granted fully unfettered access, and we look forward – like others – to her long-awaited report.

The situation in Tibet remains of deep international concern, including new reports of boarding schools being used to further erode cultural, linguistic and religious identity.

We also call on China to allow journalists to report without fear of arrest, harassment or reprisal.

In Hong Kong, China continues systematically to undermine rights and freedoms, in clear breach of the Sino-British Joint Declaration. The UK remains committed to holding China to its international commitments.

In Afghanistan, over six months since the Taliban take-over, we are deeply concerned about the human rights situation, particularly for women and members of minority groups, including religious minorities. The Taliban have said all girls will be able to return to school this week; this would be an important step forward. We also look forward to the appointment of the Special Rapporteur for Afghanistan during this Session of the Council.

Restrictions on Egyptian human rights defenders, including through the use of terrorism charges, extended pre-trial detention, travel bans and asset freezes, remain concerning. The number of media websites blocked in Egypt is also worrying. The UK calls on Egypt to protect independent civil society under the NGO law, and to improve prison conditions.

Finally, we have raised our concerns about Sudan, South Sudan, Syria, Myanmar, Venezuela and Belarus in other statements to this Council.

Thank you very much Madam President.