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Corporate report

Human Rights and Democracy: the 2018 Foreign and Commonwealth Office report

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Preface by Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt

Three decades ago, the world stood on the brink of the fastest advance of human rights and democracy in modern times. During the annus mirabilis of 1989, the Iron Curtain crumbled before our eyes and six European countries seized their liberty.

At that moment, it seemed possible that democracy and liberal values would sweep the world. Sure enough, another eleven countries would escape from dictatorship by 1999.

But from the vantage point of today, we know the optimism of that era was misplaced. Since the turn of the millennium, the worldwide advance of human rights and democracy has slowed and, in some respects, gone into reverse. Freedom House reported that 2018 was the 13th consecutive year of “global declines in political rights and civil liberties”.

All this makes it even more important for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to strive to uphold the values that define our country. Since becoming Foreign Secretary, I have launched a campaign to defend media freedom and a review of the FCO’s support for Christians who suffer persecution because of their faith.

If there is one essential quality of an open society, it is the freedom of journalists to hold the powerful to account without fear of retribution. Yet the overall picture is bleak. In 2018, no less than 99 journalists were murdered around the world, according to the United Nations. Another 348 were jailed by governments and 60 taken hostage by non-state groups.

In summer 2019, I will join my Canadian counterpart to host an international conference in London on media freedom. We have decided that democratic countries need to stand together to make it a taboo to murder, arrest or detain journalists just for doing their jobs.

Our aim is to shine a spotlight on abuses and raise the price for those who would act to silence the media. We can only achieve this if countries with shared values work together.

I was deeply disturbed to learn that 215 million Christians faced persecution in 2018, according to a study by the campaign group Open Doors. Christians faced harassment in 144 countries in 2016, according to the Pew Research Centre, compared with 128 in 2015.

I am not convinced that our efforts have always been commensurate with the scale of the problem or the empirical evidence that Christians often endure the greatest burden of persecution. We must never allow a misguided sense of political correctness to inhibit our response.

So I have asked Rt Rev’d Philip Mounstephen, the Anglican Bishop of Truro, to conduct an independent review of the FCO’s efforts to help persecuted Christians and report back to me in 2019.

In this report, you will learn about the FCO’s efforts to promote human rights and democracy in 2018. You will read of the countries where we have particular concerns.

In an imperfect world, we will not always be able to respond identically to the same abuses in different settings. But protecting human rights and safeguarding Britain’s national values are not optional extras for the FCO. They are part of who we are.

I am determined that British diplomacy will continue to uphold the principles of humanity and fairness that our country has always stood for.

Foreword by Minister for Human Rights Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, the Prime Minister’s Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief, and Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict

Human rights matter because it is only when our rights are respected that each of us has the freedom to make the most of our talents and our industry.

I work with a committed team of ministers, officials and diplomats across the globe, all determined to extend that freedom and champion the rights of people, no matter where they live or who they are, or what their belief.

We take a 3-pronged approach: we challenge states, which violate or fail to protect human rights; we work constructively with those that are open to change; and we

collaborate with governments, international organisations and civil society groups that share our aims.

2018 was the 20th anniversary of the UN Declaration on human rights defenders. This report rightly recognises their contributions towards strengthening human rights protections, and details the strength of our partnerships with them. Over the last 12 months, my role and our prioritisation of human rights has brought me into contact with many inspiring people who have dedicated themselves to fighting for the rights of others, showing incredible courage, often at great personal risk or in the face of overwhelming adversity and opposition.

On International Human Rights Day, I met Wanjeri Nderu, the inspiring human rights defender from Kenya, who has created a network of civil society volunteers, including lawyers and professionals, who use social media to stand up for the rights of those who are less able to defend themselves. We are proud to support many brave human rights defenders like her around the world, from Sri Lanka to Colombia and beyond.

In my role as the Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, I was humbled to discuss the next steps in our global campaign with the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize winners – human rights activist and sexual violence survivor, Nadia Murad, and the dedicated humanitarian and phenomenal surgeon, Dr Denis Mukwege.

In 2018, the UK increased our funding of initiatives¹ to support survivors of sexual violence and to hold perpetrators to account. We also shone a spotlight on the need to tackle the stigma associated with innocent victims of sexual violence. The greatest obstacle to success is silence; film is a great medium for breaking the silence. That is why we hosted 'Fighting Stigma through Film', the first ever film festival dedicated to raising awareness of the issue in November last year.

As part of our efforts to protect the rights of people of all faiths or beliefs and none, I was honoured to be granted an audience with His Holiness the Pope, and in my new role as the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief I met with leaders of many different faith communities to discuss what more we can do together to tackle the discrimination faced by religious minorities across the world. It is important to recognise that faith in all its different reflections is part of finding solutions to the many global challenges we face.

In the autumn I launched the government's new £12 million development programme through DFID to support Freedom of Religion or Belief. The independent review of Christian persecution announced by the Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, in December is a further important new strand of our work.

The Foreign Secretary has also launched an ambitious global campaign in support of media freedom, and over the course of last year I met a number of courageous journalists and activists working to strengthen free expression. People like Dina Meza, whose work defending freedom of expression and information as a journalist in Honduras led Fortune magazine to name her one of the world's 50 greatest leaders of 2018.

The UK also continues to show global leadership in the fight against modern slavery in all its forms, a priority for our Prime Minister, Theresa May. I heard harrowing accounts from victims of slavery when I visited a safe house here in the UK last year. They made me all the more determined to work with like-minded states, businesses and civil society groups around the world, to eradicate this hideous crime. I am very encouraged that more than 80 governments have signed the Prime Minister's Call to Action, but there is so much more to do.

As I write, our plans are already well advanced for our major human rights initiatives of 2019 – our review into the persecution of Christians; the prioritisation of Freedom of Religion or Belief; our 'Defend Media Freedom' campaign and our 'Year of Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict', which will culminate in a major international conference in November. One of the specific outcomes of that conference will be the launch of the Murad Code on documenting and investigating crimes of sexual violence. Named after the courageous Nadia Murad, it will encourage greater adherence to international standards and best practice, with the aim of achieving greater accountability, and justice for survivors. There will also be a declaration of humanity against stigma by faith and belief heads from across the world.

I look forward to continuing to develop these plans, delivering our key programmes and to working with partners across the globe within a strong rules-based international system to promote, defend, and strengthen human rights and freedoms for everyone, everywhere.

Chapter 1: human rights and democracy priority themes

Democracy and democratic freedoms

The promotion of democracy and democratic freedoms is at the heart of the UK's foreign policy. We believe that democratic institutions and accountable government are the foundations on which open, stable, and prosperous societies thrive. The Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, set out his vision for the UK's role in supporting the values of democracy. In a speech in October he said the UK's relationships with international partners were underpinned by the values of democracy; rule of law; separation of powers; respect for individual civil and political rights; a belief in free trade. His vision is to see strong relationships to help "build that invisible chain between those who share our values. And make it as strong and resilient as it needs to be as new nations rise and the world order is challenged anew."

Together with other government departments, the FCO participated in the inaugural National Democracy Week in July. The week celebrated progress but also championed future participation in the democratic process, particularly by members of under-registered groups. Our Embassies and High Commissions used the week to demonstrate the UK's commitment to strengthening our own democracy, while at the same time working with other countries to strengthen theirs.

We saw a number of challenges to democracy in the world in 2018. Figures released by the non-governmental organisation Freedom House, which tracks democratic trends, showed that 2018 saw the 13th consecutive year of democratic decline. While some countries took steps to strengthen democratic freedoms, many more moved backwards². The number of countries designated as 'free' stood at 85 out of 195, representing 39% of the world's population. The remaining 61% lived in a country designated as partly free or not free.

It is the right of all people to be able to choose, freely and fairly, those whom they want to govern them; and it is the right of all people to be able to put themselves forward to contest elections peacefully. The UK government continued to support free and fair elections around the world by providing technical and financial assistance to international organisations which carry out election observation missions. These included the Commonwealth, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and the EU. But the political environment around elections continued to pose challenges. Freedom House calculated in their report entitled 'Freedom on the Net 2018' that elections were the catalyst for almost half of the countries where internet freedom declined. During elections, there was often a sharp increase in the number of cases of censorship, technical attacks, or arrests of government critics³. We followed closely the presidential election in Egypt (26 to 28 March). The election was marked by international concerns about restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly. In Zimbabwe, the UK worked with international partners through the multi-donor Transparency, Responsiveness, Accountability and Citizen Engagement (TRACE) programme. The TRACE programme set up an election situation room, which was the main civil society vehicle for observation and analysis of the 2018 elections. TRACE funded civil society organisations for the deployment of 6,600 local observers through the Zimbabwe Election Support

Network, together with an additional 8,000 human rights monitors. In Nepal, following the December 2017 elections, the FCO and DFID worked with the government to fulfil the promises of the new federal system. Nepal's 2015 Constitution promised the devolution of powers, funding and decision making to local leaders, to increase accountability and the quality of service provision. The FCO and DFID worked to support this change by lobbying on constitutional issues, and by providing capacity-building programmes for officials in local government.

Through our Embassies and High Commissions, the UK continued to promote good governance and support democratic political institutions to create the foundations where democracy might take root and grow. For example, in Burma, the Departmental Policy Programme supported civil society projects tackling hate speech, and worked with former political prisoners on mental health issues. The UK funded the NGO Mon Youth Progressive Organization to create a forum for young people to engage in civil society and politics. In India, our network worked closely with the media, including by funding an annual South Asia Journalism Fellowship Programme under our flagship Chevening brand. Last year we funded 17 fellows, including seven from India. We have also provided project funding to Thomson Reuters in Karnataka to run workshops for journalists to report violence against women and girls. In September, in support of social cohesion and diversity in Macedonia, the UK initiated a new project through UNICEF entitled 'Foundations for the Future'. The project aims to strengthen the delivery of quality pre-school education, embedding values, social and emotional competencies, awareness, and cross-cultural skills in children. The project also supports institutions in modelling community-based services for disabled children, to enable their improved inclusion in society.

The community of democracies

The UK took up a 6-month term as chair of the Executive Committee of the Community of Democracies (CoD) on 15 September. As chair, the UK worked to implement the CoD's 5-year strategic plan, adopted in June. In November, the CoD launched the UK-funded publication, 'Best Practice in Community of Democracies' member states engagement with, and protection of, civil society'.⁴ The publication reported on the work of CoD member states to engage with civil society, and to encourage others to do so also. The CoD Working Group for Protecting and Enabling Civil Society issued its first Call for Recognition (to Uzbekistan), to highlight the positive steps taken to advance civil society and democratic freedoms. The working group recognised improvements in Uzbekistan's regulatory environment for civil society organisations. The British Embassy is strengthening democracy in Uzbekistan through projects which support engagement on a range of issues between civil society, media and the government. We are also building capacity through training, for example on anti-corruption, the delivery of services to the vulnerable, and with the media on developing objective, impartial content.

Westminster Foundation for Democracy

The Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) is the UK public body dedicated to supporting democracy around the world. Established in 1992, WFD is mainly funded by the FCO (which is the sponsoring department) and by DFID. WFD is a key delivery partner for the UK government, through which the UK shares its democratic experience and expertise.

WFD's work is an important and distinctive part of our diplomatic and development effort to strengthen respect for democracy. Strengthening democratic systems in developing and transition countries around the world also supports the UK's security and prosperity objectives.

WFD partners with UK political parties, parliaments and assemblies, and electoral and financial audit institutions to increase the effectiveness and accountability of their counterparts in over 30 developing countries. It also provides assistance to help ensure credible and inclusive elections.

In May, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights published a report entitled 'Contribution of parliaments to the work of the Human Rights Council and its universal periodic review'. The report included guidance, based on the work of WFD and others, for parliaments to help them enhance their protection and promotion of human rights.

Promoting and protecting women's rights was central to WFD's work in 2018. In March, UK political parties convened an international summit to address the issue of violence against women in politics. While the testimonies from women politicians about the abuse they had suffered was shocking, their courage and determination were inspiring. A report from the summit was submitted to the UN's Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women. In November, WFD supported a conference of women MPs from over 100 countries held in the House of Commons calling for more inclusive politics to overcome the serious obstacles, including violence, which women face when they seek and attain public office. WFD continued to work with the Coalition of Women MPs from Arab Countries to combat violence against women and to advance the Arab League's Convention to End Violence Against Women in the region. WFD supported the Arab Women Parliamentarians' Network for Equality's adoption of a regional policy paper calling for changes to political party structures in its 14 member countries, which would make it easier for women to be elected.

WFD became the lead partner of a £4 million programme, as part of the Commonwealth Partnership for Democracy, to help include more members of minorities and vulnerable groups in policy-making in 18 Commonwealth countries.

At the Global Disability Summit in July, WFD committed to help create more inclusive political environments for persons with disabilities. In Mozambique, WFD partnered with the University of Pretoria's Centre for Human Rights and the National Association of People with Disability to improve the social, political, and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities in policy-making, ahead of the general election in October 2019. In Kenya, WFD supported local disabled persons' organisations in developing ways to ensure that persons with disabilities were included in policy-making. Following the March elections in Sierra Leone, where WFD promoted the inclusion of persons with disability, WFD worked to ensure that parliament, local councils, and political parties continued to mainstream disability inclusion policies throughout their work.

In sub-Saharan Africa, young people make up half the population but are often excluded from political decision-making. In Uganda, WFD worked with the Parliamentary Youth Forum to ensure that young people's interests were represented in parliament. In Nigeria, WFD worked with local partners such as the Nigerian Women's Trust Fund to educate underrepresented groups, including young women, about their right to participate freely in the upcoming general elections.

In Sri Lanka, WFD presented an introductory briefing on business and human rights to a cross-party parliamentary oversight committee and to the heads of the business and commerce ministries.

New counter-terror legislation was passed in May in the Indonesian House of Representatives, following extensive support from WFD in 2017 to 2018 to bring the legislation in line with international human rights principles. The laws incorporate many of the suggestions from civil society organisations which WFD connected with the parliament, to ensure an evidence-based approach to law-making.

Civil society

Freedom of expression

The UK believes that freedom of expression is both a fundamental right and an essential element of any functioning democracy. Freedom of expression enables media practitioners, civil society representatives, and ordinary citizens to challenge and ultimately improve the work of their governments through open discussion and debate.

In 2018, press freedom came under unprecedented attack around the world. According to the NGO Reporters without Borders, 63 journalists, 13 bloggers and other citizen journalists, and 5 media assistants were killed, and 332 journalists were imprisoned.⁵ The high-profile case of 2 Reuters journalists arrested under Burma's official secrets act for investigating a massacre in Rakhine State drew attention to the deep deficiencies of Burma's legal system, specifically with regard to press freedom. Embassy officials lobbied the Burmese government, and on World Press Freedom Day held a joint roundtable with Dutch Embassy colleagues, to highlight the work of local journalists. Freedom of expression was tightly constrained in South Sudan. Many reporters exercised self-censorship in order to protect themselves and their families from persecution. Human rights defenders, civil society activists, and political opponents of the government suffered violence and intimidation, and a number disappeared or were killed. In Cuba, a number of journalists and dissidents were arbitrarily detained for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, assembly, and political association. A number of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience were held in longer-term detention. In Tajikistan, through social media, open letters, and lobbying, we actively campaigned for and secured the release of an activist imprisoned for reporting on local corruption. We also lobbied for family members to leave the country to join exiled Tajik activists, which the government then permitted.

In 2018, we continued to work with Access Now, a key partner in our work to support freedom of expression. Through its #KeepItOn campaign, Access Now fought internet shutdowns – which were on numerous occasions ordered during elections or public protests, and which undermined human rights, disrupted democratic processes, and risked the safety of everyone affected.

Media freedom

To mark the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists on 2 November, the Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, gave an interview to Thomas Hughes, Chief Executive of freedom of speech campaign group Article 19. Reflecting concern about the deteriorating situation for journalists across the world, the Foreign Secretary went on to announce in November that Media Freedom would be his priority campaign for 2019. The aim of the campaign would be to shine a spotlight on the issue, and to raise the cost for those targeting journalists for their work, with the aim of restoring the international taboo on attacks against journalists.

Throughout 2018, UK Embassies continued to raise media freedom with host governments as part of ongoing discussion on human rights and democracy. We have shown our support in individual cases where media professionals have been threatened or intimidated, as well as raising concerns with those governments who have introduced laws and policies that restrict media freedom further. We continued to work with media organisations and civil society around the world to deliver projects to protect and enable journalists, including through the FCO's Magna Carta Fund for Democracy and Human Rights, the cross-Whitehall Conflict, Security and Stability Fund and other funding streams. For example, in Ethiopia we have provided training to journalists through the Departmental Policy Programme. We also assisted the Mexican government in the development of Policy Prevention Plans that eliminate territorial and social risks that create violence against journalists, and we hosted workshops for journalists across Iraq to promote media freedoms and to contribute to tackling issues such as hate speech.

We have championed freedom of expression and the safety of journalists in multilateral fora throughout the year. We made statements on media freedom at the UN Human Rights Councils in March and September. We have sought to protect international commitments by co-sponsoring a resolution on the safety of journalists at the Human Rights Council, building on the Third Committee resolution we had already co-sponsored at the UN General Assembly in 2017. We have continued to raise media freedom in the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and used our membership of like-minded groupings such as the Freedom Online Coalition and the Community of Democracies to promote media freedom and safety of journalists.

Looking ahead, we will be putting the resources of the FCO behind a major campaign on media freedom throughout 2019, including holding an international conference on 10 to 11 July.

Human Rights Defenders

2018 was the 20th anniversary year of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (HRDs). HRD Memorial⁶, a partnership of international organisations, estimated that more than 3,500 human rights defenders had been killed since the declaration was adopted. According to Frontline Defenders, 321 human rights defenders were killed in 2018 alone⁷. Many other HRDs were threatened, harassed, arbitrarily detained, placed under surveillance, or simply disappeared. At the FCO's Human Rights Day on 10 December, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister of State for Human Rights, said "that we commit to continue strengthening our support for human rights defenders as we collectively strive to build a better world". This included a commitment to make UK support for human rights defenders more transparent in 2019.

The UK's network of Embassies, High Commissions and other diplomatic missions supported HRDs in a variety of ways, including: regular contact to learn about their work; trial observation; and both public and private diplomacy. In the Philippines, we were concerned by the vulnerability of HRDs, including journalists, land rights campaigners, and members of the clergy. Members of these groups in particular were subject to harassment, and in some cases were murdered. The UK repeatedly called on the Government of the Philippines to ensure adequate protections for members of these groups. In Colombia, we supported over 200 at-risk HRDs, through training on how to protect themselves individually and collectively. We provided legal support in 14 emblematic court cases relating to attacks on HRDs, following up on every step of the procedure, representing the victims in hearings, and helping them with any further legal action. In India, we supported a project with Sheffield Hallam University to improve access to justice for female victims of violence, which trained 164 officers in four states. 2,000 Dalit women have also been trained on legal rights, creating the first ever network of women Dalit human rights defenders, and 8 Indian police officers also visited the UK for training on the protection of women and girls against violence.

Through multilateral fora, the UK continued to champion HRDs and to push for strong language in statements and resolutions. We co-sponsored a new UN resolution on freedom of assembly and association. This urged states to take concrete action to put an end to the arbitrary arrest and detention of peaceful protestors and human rights defenders for exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly, and association. Additionally, we provided funding to the International Service for Human Rights to train HRDs from Colombia and Tunisia, enabling them to gain a deeper understanding of UN processes and how to mobilise support for UN resolutions and their implementation.

We funded the UN Focal Point for Reprisals as a way of building a UN system-wide response to reprisals faced by HRDs for cooperating with the UN. We invited six civil society representatives, five of whom were women, to brief the UN Security Council during the UK's Presidency in August. The UK's Mission to the UN in New York continued to take a proactive approach to protecting the space in which civil society can exist and thrive. We regularly opposed increasing attempts by states such as Russia and China to restrict the participation of NGOs in UN meetings and events.

Civil society engagement

We worked closely with DFID and with representatives of interested NGOs to strengthen the implementation of the FCO's guidelines on working with Human Rights Defenders, which provide practical advice for Embassies and High Commission to help them assist and support human rights defenders. At the Human Rights Defenders World Summit in Paris in October, the FCO co-sponsored an Amnesty International side event with the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on developing best government practice.

Profile: a human rights defender

To mark Human Rights Day on 10 December, the UK highlighted the work of human rights defenders around the world. Here is the account of one brave HRD who participated in the FCO's Human Rights Day event, Wanjeri Nderu from Kenya:

"It was a pleasure to celebrate the International Human Rights day at the Foreign Office in London, upon the invitation of the UK Minister of State UN and Commonwealth, Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon. The recognition by Lord Ahmad of the challenges faced by human rights defenders, especially women, from all over the world and the need to have a universal conversation about it, was highly appreciated. Being an activist in a country like Kenya is difficult. We risk arrest, physical attacks, threats, trumped-up charges, and enforced disappearances. This environment makes it very hard to fight injustice, especially for volunteer activists who are not attached to organisations, who are not funded, and who do not have international support. The commitment by the UK Foreign Office to focus more on the welfare of activists is a welcome move."

Restrictions of civil society space

Restriction of civil society space continued in a number of countries. In China, civil society continued to be seriously restrained. Russia continued to use its 'Foreign Agents' and 'Undesirable Organisations' law to reduce civil society's work. Restrictions on civil society in Egypt continued in 2018, with a series of laws impinging on freedom of expression. A number of independent media outlets and civil society organisations closed under direct or indirect pressure. In Turkey we followed closely the case of Amnesty International local chair Taner Kılıç, imprisoned on alleged terror charges, and made representations on his behalf at the highest level. Mr Kılıç was released from pre-trial detention in August. We have provided support to organisations monitoring the situation of the press in Turkey and have attended the trials of a number of journalists. We also lobbied at the highest level for the lifting of the State of Emergency imposed at the time of the failed coup attempt in July 2016; this was done in July.

Gender equality

Women and girls' rights

The UK government is committed to pursuing a foreign policy which consciously and consistently delivers for women and girls, and which showcases the UK's leading international reputation in this area. The promotion of gender equality is also at the heart of the UK's work to promote economic growth, peace, and stability. On International Women's Day (8 March), Penny Mordaunt, the then Secretary of State for International Development, launched DFID's Strategic Vision for Gender Equality – a global Call to Action to secure the rights of all girls and women, particularly those living in conflict and crisis. The FCO's Special Envoy for Gender Equality, Joanna Roper, promotes greater international action on gender equality through her travel and engagement with partners.

Sustained commitment is vital. The world today is witnessing a visible drive against gender equality and women's rights. We are working hard to counter this and drive progress. For example, in an increasingly regressive global context, the UK continued to champion the protection of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), including through the launch by DFID of the £200 million Women's Integrated Sexual Health programme, aimed at increasing the availability of contraceptives across 27 countries in Africa and Asia. The programme aims to avert 2.6 million unintended pregnancies, avert 1.7 million unsafe abortions and avert 16,240 maternal deaths. The UK has also been active diplomatically in multilateral forums in defending SRHR.

Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative

Sexual violence as a weapon of war continued to destroy, destabilise, and demoralise individuals, communities and societies across the world in 2018. The Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) was launched in 2012 by former Foreign Secretary, Lord Hague, and UNHCR Special Envoy, Angelina Jolie. The UK continued to drive forward international efforts to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence.

We continued to work towards achieving our three objectives: tackling the stigma faced by survivors; strengthening justice for survivors and holding perpetrators to account; and preventing sexual violence in conflict by tackling its root causes.

Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, the Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, engaged with key partners to spur the international community into further action. He hosted a meeting of Commonwealth member states in the margins of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in April. In September, he co-chaired a meeting on PSVI during the UN General Assembly, together with Pramila Patten, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Sexual Violence in Conflict.

In November, Lord Ahmad gathered heads of mission accredited to the UK in London, to push forward PSVI objectives. He also championed the issue during overseas visits, including in March the first FCO ministerial visit to Mosul, Iraq, in partnership with SRSG Patten, and during a visit to Kosovo with Baroness Helic in July. The FCO Special Envoy for Gender Equality, Joanna Roper, in June accompanied FCO Minister Mark Field to Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, to understand the needs of Rohingya refugees, including survivors of sexual violence, and to highlight UK support.

Lord Ahmad hosted the first ever PSVI film festival, 'Fighting Stigma Through Film', at the British Film Institute in London in November. The festival harnessed the power of film and cinema to help fight the discrimination faced by survivors of sexual violence in conflict. Over 2 days we screened over 30 films and documentaries from around the world, sharing stories of survivors and of the inspiring people working alongside them. We ran workshops on various PSVI topics, led by prominent experts, which offered

members of the public a chance to learn more about important issues relating to PSVI. We also brought a group of over 30 young filmmakers from 18 conflict-affected and Commonwealth countries for a three-day capacity-building programme, led by industry professionals. The filmmakers learned skills and created networks which will ensure that they can take forward the fight against impunity and stigma in their home countries.

On International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict in June, the UK launched, at UN Headquarters, FCO-funded research by the London School of Economics Centre for Women, Peace and Security on the plight of children born of sexual violence. 'Closing the Protection Gap of Children Born of War' highlighted the vulnerabilities faced by children born of sexual violence and how the international community might improve their response to address the stigmatisation they face, and the inter-generational impact of sexual violence in conflict.

Faith and belief leaders can play a key role in preventing or responding to conflict-related sexual violence by changing attitudes and behaviours. To encourage and support this, Lord Ahmad began consultations with faith and belief leaders, which will continue in 2019, to discuss how they might help tackle the stigma faced by survivors, and amplify messages about preventing sexual violence.

Women, Peace and Security

Since the launch of the fourth UK National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) in January, the UK has continued to demonstrate global leadership of the WPS agenda through its diplomatic, defence, and development efforts. The fourth UK NAP is the UK government's 5-year strategy which captures how we will deliver our WPS commitments under UN Security Council Resolution 1325 to protect the human rights of women and girls, and to promote meaningful participation in conflict prevention and resolution. It is part of wider efforts to ensure that the UK's diplomacy, development, and defence consciously and consistently delivers on gender equality. We pay particular attention to how the NAP is being implemented in the 9 focus countries: Afghanistan, Burma, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Libya, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Syria.

Throughout 2018, the UK's long-standing international leadership on WPS was strengthened by our promotion of women's participation in peace processes. This included the launch of the UK-funded network of Women Mediators across the Commonwealth (WMC), a commitment made at the Commonwealth Summit in April. The FCO has worked closely with other regional women mediator networks, the Nordic Women mediators, the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network, and Fem-Wise, in Oslo in March, and in New York in October. August saw a founding member from the WMC brief the UN Security Council during an Open Debate on Mediation. We have made good progress on work to ensure the leadership and participation of women in developing strategies to prevent and counter violent extremism, with several ministerial roundtable discussions on the issue throughout the year, and a conference at Wilton Park in November on the gender dynamics of violent extremism. We developed the first in a series of guidance notes to support the National Action Plan, which will be issued in 2019.

The UK chaired the WPS Chiefs of Defence Staff Network, encouraging the most senior military leaders to integrate gender perspectives and to promote the role of women in armed forces and in peacekeeping. The FCO funded the attendance of students from Afghanistan, Nigeria, and Somalia at the inaugural Military Gender and Protection Advisors Course, led by the Ministry of Defence. UK mentoring and advisory support, funded by the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF), to the Afghan National Army Officer Academy included a specific focus on gender, with nearly 190 female cadets graduating as of November.

We worked with partners to maximise the impact of our collective efforts. For example, with Canada, we jointly delivered WPS objectives in Iraq and we were pleased to announce our partnership with Nigeria for the G7 WPS Partnership Initiative. Civil society remained a key partner for the UK, given the vital role which it plays in resolving conflict and building peace. We supported grassroots women peacebuilders around the world, through funding for the UN Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (approximately £1 million targeting support in Iraq, matched by financial support from Canada), and for NGOs working in each of our NAP focus countries (through the International Civil Society Action Network and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom). During the UK Presidency of the UN Security Council in August, we welcomed the first female civil society member to brief the council on Iraq.

In Libya, through the CSSF, the UK provided £2.75 million over three years to support 20 civil society organisations on women's empowerment projects, alongside £1 million to train female and male mediators to promote local reconciliation. In Somalia, UK support to civil society groups aimed to encourage active participation by women in political processes as well as public decision-making; and helped to provide vocational and technical conflict resolution training for women, from which 40,000 women benefited directly in 2018. In Syria, DFID partners reached 14,800 people through Sexual and Gender-Based Violence services in the first half of 2018 alone. In 2017 to 2018, UK funding also helped to contribute to the education of over 670,000 children in formal schools, 48% of whom were girls; the doubling of the number of women White Helmets to 147; and much-needed female engagement in Syria's political dialogue.

Women's political empowerment is a cornerstone of DFID's refreshed Strategic Vision for Gender Equality⁸, launched in 2018. The vision calls for a sustained focus on existing commitments for girls and women, especially in conflict and crisis; and a greater focus on ensuring no girl or woman is left behind, including those with disabilities. In November, the UK hosted the Women MPs of the World Conference, as part of the celebrations to mark the centenary of women's (partial) suffrage in the UK. The historic conference brought together over 100 elected women parliamentarians from across the globe to celebrate their achievements and discuss how to strengthen visibility and further empower parliamentarians to drive change nationally and internationally.

Looking ahead, we will continue to support other countries in their efforts to realise the WPS agenda, including through consultations with civil society and academia in London, New York and in our WPS focus countries on the UK's approach to the 20th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2020.

Violence against women and girls

1 in 3 women worldwide will experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. This makes Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) one of the most widespread human rights violations of our time. The UK continued to lead global efforts to eradicate VAWG in all its forms – including domestic violence, sexual violence, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), and child, early and forced marriage. DFID supported women's rights organisations through multiple mechanisms, including a £20 million contribution (for 2014 to 2020) to the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women, including funding to support organisations working with disabled women and girls, who evidence shows are at four times greater risk of violence, and an £11 million contribution (for 2015 to 2020) to AmplifyChange to fund 40 grassroots organisations. Over one million women, girls and boys have benefited from the UN Trust Fund's programmes alone. DFID's £25 million flagship programme, 'What Works to Prevent Violence', released new evidence on the most effective interventions to drive down violence against women and girls in some of the world's most challenging contexts. Several interventions achieved significant reductions in violence, of up to 50%, demonstrating that violence is preventable. DFID also announced £50 million of new UK funding to support African-led movements to end FGM by 2030 – the largest investment ever made by an international donor.

The UK continued to work with all partners to ensure that women and girls are protected during humanitarian crises. DFID published a Technical Guidance Note for Humanitarian Advisers, and adapted the UK's humanitarian funding guidelines to ensure that VAWG response and prevention is considered in all of DFID's humanitarian programming.

For example, the protection and safeguarding of women and girls was prioritised in the UK's response to the Rohingya crisis. DFID allocated £70 million in new funding for this crisis in 2018. Up to 18% is devoted to safety and protection of refugees, including prevention and monitoring of exploitation and abuse, support to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, and strong safeguarding by service providers in the camps. Partners funded by DFID, such as the United Nations Population Fund, have reached over 250,000 people affected by sexual and gender-based violence with targeted training, psychosocial support, and sexual and reproductive health treatment. The UK also became the co-chair of the State and Donors working group of the Call to Action on Prevention of Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies.

Sexual exploitation and abuse

The UK is a global leader on tackling Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) in the international community. The FCO is driving up safeguarding standards in our programming and in our engagement with multilateral organisations.

The UK is fully supportive of the UN Secretary-General's victim-centred strategy and zero tolerance approach towards SEA. In June, the Prime Minister, Theresa May, wrote to the UN Secretary-General to set out the action taken by the UK on a national basis to tackle SEA, and to make suggestions about strengthening the UN's response. A joint letter from the Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, and the then International Development Secretary, Penny Mordaunt, to the UN Secretary-General in December, calling for further action to prevent sexual and other forms of exploitation and abuse of power from happening, was signed by twelve other member states. The CSSF Multilateral Championing our Values Programme continues to support efforts to stamp out SEA within the UN system, providing a further \$1 million during financial year 2018 to 2019 bringing our total to \$3 million over the last three years. These funds have been used to support staff posts, to deliver more effective system-wide coordination, and to establish robust vetting and mandatory pre-deployment training and communications projects, focused on providing redress for victims. Additional support has been provided to support the work of the UNSG Victims Rights' Advocate.

In addition, we use our position in the UN Security Council to ensure all mandates for Peacekeeping Missions contain language on protection of women and children from SEA offences, and on accountability measures. It is important we keep up pressure to maintain momentum for reform, internally and externally, including on promoting greater transparency and accountability for investigations into performance failures which links to our Peacekeeping Reform work and ongoing Action for Peacekeeping implementation.

FCO are also working closely with NATO on this issue. In November, the FCO deployed a senior policy advisor to provide technical and policy support to the NATO Secretary General's Special Representative on WPS, Claire Hutchinson, to support the development of NATO SEA policy.

DFID brought together aid beneficiaries including the UN to improve safeguarding across the aid sector. At the DFID-led Safeguarding Summit 'Putting People First: tackling sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in the aid sector' in October, the then International Development Secretary, Penny Mordaunt, brought together partners from across the aid sector – donors, partner governments, multilateral organisations, civil society organisations, representatives of victims, survivors and whistle-blowers, contractors, and research institutions – to commit to a 'root to branch' change in the way the sector operates. Several senior representatives from across the sector spoke, including Lord Ahmad, who chaired the UN panel discussion featuring Sigrid Kaag, Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Netherlands, and senior UN representatives.

In line with DFID, the FCO's commercial team have already updated the FCO's Code of Conduct to incorporate good practice on SEA and have included specific SEA provisions in the CSSF Framework's terms and conditions. The Prosperity Fund Framework now also includes the revised Code of Conduct in its call-off contracts. In addition, the FCO's due diligence guidance has been updated to ensure consistency with the enhanced approach that DFID has developed, and the FCO's Memorandum of Understanding and Grant Agreement templates have been revised to include language on SEA.

Children and armed conflict

The UK recognises that the enjoyment of human rights is substantially affected by instability and armed conflict. We are fully committed to ending the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and to protecting all children in armed conflict, and are closely engaged with UN and other international programmes pursuing these aims.

The UK's objectives for the Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) agenda are primarily pursued through our engagement with the UN. We remain the largest single financial contributor to the office of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) for CAAC, having contributed £800,000 in the last five years. We continue to be an active member of the UN Working Group on CAAC, leading international action on the recruitment and use of child soldiers and on child protection. This includes pressing parties listed in the UN Secretary-General's annual report on CAAC to agree concrete action plans with the UN, and funding projects to help protect and rehabilitate vulnerable children.

A number of key milestones on the CAAC agenda were reached in 2018. The UK endorsed the Vancouver Principles ensuring that child protection is an operational priority for UN peacekeeping missions. As a member of the Group of Friends on CAAC in Geneva, the UK participated in a joint statement to the 37th session of the Human Rights Council, reiterating our strong support for the mandate of the SRSG for CAAC. The UK also endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD), a political commitment to reduce the impact of conflict on education. Following UK endorsement, a further eight states followed suit, bringing the number of supporting states to 82. International partners, NGOs, and civil society organisations have reacted positively and are keen to work with the UK to ensure effective implementation. The UK has joined the cross-regional SSD core group with other 'champion' states, aiming to raise further the profile of the declaration. A cross-government CAAC Working Group was created to secure greater co-ordination across the wider CAAC agenda, and to oversee UK implementation of the SSD and other key instruments to which the UK is a signatory. The UK worked closely with Sweden and others to secure the adoption in July of Security Council Resolution 2427, strengthening protection mechanisms for children in armed conflict. The UK has shown its support for the SRSG for CAAC's Global Coalition for Reintegration by joining the 'Friends of Reintegration' group.

Girls' education

Access to education is a human right. Education unlocks individual potential, and benefits society as a whole, powering sustainable development. The UK supports 12 years of quality education for boys and girls, starting with the basics of literacy and numeracy. Between 2015 and 2018, the UK helped 11.4 million children in developing countries receive a decent education, of whom at least 5.6 million were girls.

In 2018, the UK government launched the #LeaveNoGirlBehind campaign, a cross-government initiative calling for twelve years of quality education for all girls by 2030. Launched at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in April, by the then Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, the campaign aims to achieve tangible improvements in girls' education by: leading by example; building international political commitment; boosting global investment in education; harnessing UK expertise; and connecting with the British public. At CHOGM, heads of government collectively committed to 12 years of quality education, and the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, spoke passionately about the link between girls' education and women's economic empowerment.

At CHOGM, the then Foreign Secretary also announced the Platform for Girls' Education, a group of twelve influential figures responsible for championing this issue during the UK's 2018 to 2020 term as Commonwealth Chair-in-Office. The platform is co-chaired by the Foreign Secretary and the Kenyan Education Minister, Amina Mohamed. They held their first meeting during the UN General Assembly in September.

Throughout 2018, the UK galvanised international support for girls' education. At the G7 Summit, leaders committed to prioritise girls' education, and the UK, EU, Germany, Japan, the World Bank, and Canada pledged a total of over \$3.8 billion. In addition to the £212 million pledged by the Prime Minister Theresa May at CHOGM, the UK pledged £187 million to the second phase of the UK-funded 'Girls' Education Challenge' (GEC) programme – the largest international fund supporting over 1 million marginalised girls to enrol in school, stay in education, and learn. The GEC also supports up to 500,000 highly marginalised girls who have never attended or have dropped out from school to gain literacy, numeracy, and other skills relevant for life and work. At the UN Human Rights Council in June, the UK secured the support of 152 countries for a UK-led joint statement on girls' education calling on states to "leave no girl behind". At the UN General Assembly in September, the Prime Minister, together with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of Canada and President Emmanuel Macron of France, held a high-profile event on girls' education, which showcased the #LeaveNoGirlBehind campaign. The importance of girls' education was further underlined at the G20 Summit in November.

The FCO funded a number of individual projects aimed at tackling the barriers to girls' education. For instance, we amplified the reach and impact of the DFID-funded Girls' Education in South Sudan initiative. In Afghanistan, the majority of the estimated 3.7 million children out of school are girls. In addition to DFID's Girls' Education Challenge, which has supported 300,000 girls in attending primary school, the FCO focused on strengthening the capacity of the Afghan education system to measure progress and deliver results.

In Colombia and Sudan, the FCO has supported projects to enhance girls' enrolment, access and retention in schools so that they can enjoy a comprehensive and quality education. Meanwhile, other FCO projects have supported research, for instance in Egypt, to inform policy on improving learning outcomes for girls.

More generally, in February, DFID set out a new education policy to help children learn in some of the world's poorest, more fragile and conflict-affected countries, through improvements in teaching which benefit all children in the classroom. This includes supporting ambitious system reform to help teachers success and keep children safe; and providing targeted support to disadvantaged girls, children with disabilities, and those affected by conflict and crisis.

Women's economic empowerment

In 2018, the UK continued to provide strong support to the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment. DFID's Work and Opportunities for Women programme continued to help deliver higher incomes, and improved working conditions for up to 300,000 women in developing countries. A first partnership was formed with Marks and Spencer, which focused on women in leadership positions for their agri-business and garment supply chain, aiming to reach 80,000 women. Negotiations were held with a further two companies with a view to securing similar partnerships in 2019.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender rights

The UK is committed to the principle of non-discrimination on all recognised grounds, including on the basis of sexual orientation and/or gender identity. LGBT people are not asking for special treatment or additional rights; merely the same dignity, respect and rights which international human rights law offers all other individuals citizens. The UK works through international organisations, including the UN, the Commonwealth and European institutions, to promote tolerance and non-discrimination towards LGBT people, and to address discriminatory laws.

In January, the Minister for Human Rights, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, met Victor Madrigal-Borloz, the newly appointed UN Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, to set out UK priorities on Gender Equality and LGBT rights, and our ongoing support for the Independent Expert role – a UN mandate which the UK fought hard to secure in 2016. He also met UN LGBT Core Group members in New York in June, to set out UK efforts to advance equality and non-discrimination through the UN system and other multilateral fora.

We continued to urge the international community to address all incidents of violence and discrimination against LGBT people. Our overseas missions monitored and raised LGBT human rights in their host countries, worked with and supported civil society organisations, and responded to LGBT human rights violations on a case-by-case basis. For example, in Indonesia UK officials continued to raise concerns over national and local legislation which risked discrimination against minority groups. The UK was also one of 16 countries which invoked the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) 'Moscow Mechanism' obliging Russia to facilitate independent investigation into the detention, torture, and reported killings of homosexual men in Chechnya which had begun in January 2017.

In April, at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), the Prime Minister, Theresa May, expressed regret that discriminatory legislation continued to affect the lives of people across the Commonwealth, with 35 out of 53 Commonwealth member states criminalising consensual same-sex relationships. The Prime Minister announced a £5.6 million programme to support Commonwealth countries wishing to combat structural and systematic inequality adversely affecting women and girls, and groups discriminated against because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. The then Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, discussed LGBT rights with a range of foreign ministers during CHOGM, including a session attended by over 30 Commonwealth ministers. The CHOGM Communiqué contained the most progressive Commonwealth language yet on LGBT rights. To promote change, the UK commissioned an International Best Practice Guide to Equality on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, to facilitate decriminalisation and legislative reform, which was published during CHOGM week in April.

Publicly demonstrating our commitment to LGBT rights, the UK marked the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia on 17 May, Pride, and other local anti-discrimination events in the UK and overseas. Our posts around the world also flew the rainbow flag whenever judged appropriate and not harmful to do so. In Paraguay, the UK Ambassador was the first ambassador to address the local Pride parade, in addition to his extensive media work, which stimulated considerable debate of a normally taboo subject.

In July, the UK government published a comprehensive LGBT Action Plan which responded to the findings of its 2017 national survey of LGBT people. In terms of its international work, the government pledged in the Action Plan to: continue its promotion of LGBT rights through multilateral organisations; deliver an international conference focusing on the issues faced by LGBT people around the world; support countries which want help to repeal laws discriminating against LGBT people; and continue funding to promote equality for LGBT people worldwide.

With a core objective to increase respect for equality and non-discrimination for all, the FCO's Magna Carta Fund (MCF) committed £1.1 million to LGBT rights projects worldwide. The figure represented a 107% increase in funding on the previous financial year, and 10% of the MCF's 2018 allocation. Through DFID's UK Aid connect programme, up to £12 million will be available for a consortium of organisations to promote LGBT rights and inclusion.

At the FCO International Human Rights Day event on 10 December, Lord Ahmad announced that the UK had successfully bid to be the next co-chair of the Equal Rights Coalition, a group co-founded by the UK in 2016 bringing together 40 governments to work to achieve equality for LGBT people. Alongside our co-chair, Argentina, the UK will work with international civil society to share best practice, skills, and experience to tackle violence and discrimination.

Modern slavery

Modern slavery exists in all societies. It is an umbrella term which covers offences of slavery, servitude, forced and compulsory labour and human trafficking. According to the Global Estimates on Modern Slavery 2017, published by the International Labour Organisation and the Walk Free Foundation, there were 40.3 million people living in conditions of modern slavery.

In line with the Sustainable Development Goals, the UK is committed to the eradication of all forms of modern slavery and human trafficking by 2030. The Prime Minister, Theresa May, has made the fight against modern slavery – both domestically and abroad – one of her personal priorities. The FCO works very closely with other government departments on this issue.

At the UN General Assembly in 2017, the Prime Minister launched the Call to Action to End Forced Labour, Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking at a high-level event co-hosted by the UN Secretary-General. We continued to encourage governments to endorse the Call to Action. By the time of the UN General Assembly in September, over 80 countries had done so – a concrete sign of the growing international consensus against modern slavery, with endorsements from source, transit and destination countries. The message is clear: that those who endorsed the UK's Call to Action will not tolerate crimes related to modern slavery and human trafficking.

Together with the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, the UK launched a set of principles for transparency in public procurement and for the removal of forced labour and modern slavery from supply chains. At a side event during UNGA in September, bringing together some of our Call to Action partners (Argentina, Australia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Canada, Nigeria, and the US), the then Secretary of State for International Development, Penny Mordaunt, announced that the UK would increase its funding to combat modern slavery from £150 million to over £200 million. Private companies and business spoke at the event about how they were eliminating modern slavery from their supply chains, including through the innovative use of technology.

The UK continued to use its membership of multilateral organisations to advance work on the modern slavery agenda and on reinforcing the global consensus. Modern slavery was on the agenda of both the G7 and G20 Summits in 2018, and of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in London. We continued to ensure that modern slavery issues were raised when countries underwent their Universal Periodic Review at the UN Human Rights Council.

In addition to our multilateral work, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister of State for Human Rights, instructed the UK's diplomatic network to build bilateral partnerships in order to counter modern slavery. Each country has its own challenges, and we recognise that we can only make progress if we work together with others individually to build sustainable partnerships.

The UK signed Memoranda of Understanding on aspects of combating modern slavery with Malta and the Philippines, and worked to improve the effectiveness of the law enforcement authorities including in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and the Philippines. We undertook projects to collect better data on modern slavery in order to understand better the scale of the problems in Sudan, Indonesia, South Asia, and Latin America. The UK supported projects looking at child labour, children in conflict, those working in the garment and construction industries, and safe migration. The UK contributed £20 million to the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery, which will be working in India and Bangladesh.

In 2019 we will use the Magna Carta Fund and the Home Office's Modern Slavery Fund and Modern Slavery Innovation Fund, to identify where the UK can make a difference; and will work with our partners both internationally and within the UK government to build the global alliance necessary to make a real difference in the fight against modern slavery.

Human rights and the private sector

Business and human rights

The UK continues to promote human rights in businesses, both domestically and in multilateral fora, through the UN Guiding Principles on business and human rights. We believe that these principles are the global standard for preventing and addressing the risks of adverse human rights impacts from business activity. The UK encouraged and supported countries to develop their own National Action Plans in this regard.

The FCO and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy led the implementation of the recommendations of the Joint Committee on Human Rights' report on the UK government's National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights. The FCO also promoted the work of the UK's National Contact Point for the OECD Guidelines on Multinational Enterprises.

The UK joined the advisory council of the Centre for Sports and Human Rights' advisory council, launched in June. The centre aims to support the prevention of human rights harms from occurring through sport; to support access to effective remedy where harms have occurred; and to promote a positive human rights legacy from sport and sporting events. The FCO will support the centre in its work in 2019, including its work promoting human rights around forthcoming major sporting events, such as the Pan-African Games.

Through the FCO's Magna Carta Fund and our global network of Embassies and High Commissions, we funded several Business and Human Rights projects. For example, in October, the British Embassy in Guatemala organised a business and human rights week, inviting 2 British experts to share their experience and best practice on the links between businesses and human rights.

Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights

The Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights (VPs) provide guidance on responsible business practice to mining and other extractive businesses operating in high-risk and conflict affected areas. In March, the UK took the chair of the Voluntary Principles Initiative. Further detail on the UK's VPs work in the past 12 months can be found in our 2018 VPs Annual Report.⁹

Private security companies

The Montreux Document, originally ratified in 2008 by 17 states, describes the application of international law to the activities of Private Security Companies (PSCs) operating in an armed conflict zone. It sets out good practice to help states implement these obligations. The UK advocated the implementation of the Montreux Document via the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Providers. The code outlines a set of principles for PSCs, showing how to translate them into standards, governance, and oversight mechanisms. The UK is on the Board of the International Code of Conduct Association (ICoCA), along with representatives from companies and civil society. We supported and promoted the benefits of PSCs pursuing certification to recognised international standards, including via their membership of ICoCA. We supported PSCs in developing and implementing monitoring and grievance processes.

We continued to work closely with the UK PSC sector through the Security in Complex Environments Group, which provides a valuable forum to strengthen further the development of industry standards.

Responsible sourcing

Companies involved in the mining of high-value-added minerals including tin, tantalum, tungsten, and gold (3TG) can generate income, prosperity, and stability for local communities. However, in conflict areas there is a risk that some proceeds from mining may be diverted to support armed conflict and to commit human rights abuses.

The UK remains committed to the principles and values of the Kimberley Process (KP) and will continue to be an active and independent participant once we no longer participate through the EU. Since the KP was established in 2003, trade in conflict diamonds has fallen from 15% of global trade in diamonds to less than 1%. The UK's participation in the KP has enabled us to take a leading role in preventing the rough diamond extraction industry from fuelling conflict, and in improving working conditions. The Government Diamond Office, based in the FCO, and UK Border Force are responsible for implementing the KP and for preventing illicit rough diamonds from entering or leaving the UK.

The UK encourages British importers of 3TG minerals to carry out their responsibilities based on the OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains of Minerals from Conflict-Affected and High Risk Areas. We remain a member of the Governing Board of the European Partnership for Responsible Minerals (EPRM). We contributed funding to the EPRM and OECD regional project programmes, including £75,000 towards a train-the-trainer project in Colombia. We worked with NGOs and companies to map the provisions of future UK 3TG conflict minerals legislation.

Transparency and open government

The UK recognises the power of transparency in tackling corruption, promoting accountability, and building stronger and more stable states through creating links between citizens and governments. The UK has led the world on this agenda, and the FCO aspires to be a world leader in transparency. Key milestones have included releasing details of all our Official Development Assistance funded projects, and participation in the Aid Transparency Index.

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) was established in 2011 to provide an international platform for civil society actors committed to making their governments more open, accountable, and responsive to citizens. The OGP drives reform through locally-led National Action Plans, produced through collaboration between governments and civil society, supported by the OGP. In July, the UK attended the fifth OGP Summit in Tbilisi and announced a £12 million programme enabling the UK government, Parliament and civil society to support open governance in Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria and Pakistan. The programme contributes to a new OGP Multi-Donor Trust Fund, hosted by the World Bank, and co-financed by France and Canada.

The UK continued to support projects and provide advice and assistance to countries which participate in the OGP, for example in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the transparency agenda is particularly helpful in countering corruption by building citizen trust in data provided by the government.

Freedom of religion or belief

Denial of the right to Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) is a matter of increasing international concern. Violations in 2018 ranged from inhibiting the freedom to worship, for example in the Maldives and Russia, to discrimination or targeted attacks against members of minority groups because of their religious identity, such as in Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, and Burma.

During 2018, 215 million Christians worldwide faced persecution for their faith. Christian women and children are particularly vulnerable, and are often subjected to sexual violence as a result of their beliefs. On 26 December, the Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, announced that he had asked the Reverend Philip Mounstephen, Bishop of Truro, to lead an independent review of the support which the FCO provides to persecuted Christians. The review will map levels of persecution and discrimination against Christians around the world; assess the impact of the FCO's current and recent support; and make recommendations.

In July, the Prime Minister, Theresa May, showed her commitment to supporting FoRB by appointing Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon as her Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief. This new position has enabled the FCO to increase significantly its focus on this universal human right. As Special Envoy, Lord Ahmad has led international FoRB diplomacy efforts; defended the right to FoRB in key countries where the UK can have a real influence; and responded quickly, along with our diplomatic network, to specific instances where FoRB is under attack.

Lord Ahmad led our efforts to increase advocacy on FoRB with visits to many countries to promote FoRB, including Indonesia, Iraq, Sudan, Tunisia, and Algeria. He met people who had been targeted because of their faith, such as members of the Yazidi and Christian minorities in Iraq. He also met victims of persecution who now live safely in the UK. During a visit to Egypt in November, Lord Ahmad chaired a round table discussion with Christian and Muslim leaders of the importance of defending FoRB, and announced UK funding for a joint scholarship with Al-Azhar University in Cairo for the academic year 2019 to 2020, to bring Al-Azhar students to study in the UK's leading universities.

The UK government significantly increased its funding support for FoRB in 2018. Lord Ahmad and Lord Bates launched the UK government's first ever programme to find innovative solutions to promote and defend FoRB with £12 million of funding to help ensure that all people, irrespective of their religion or belief, are empowered and have equal opportunity to realise their rights. The FCO also increased its support for FoRB projects, with over £1 million for projects in Iraq, Malaysia, Burma and Sudan. In addition, UK support for the UN Development Programme's Funding Facility for Stabilisation helped to rebuild communities in areas liberated from Daesh in Iraq, including in predominantly Christian and Yazidi areas.

Lord Ahmad regularly met representatives of civil society organisations and faith groups in the UK and overseas, to find ways to work together to deliver positive change on FoRB. Through the FCO's multilateral and bilateral work (including at the UN and OSCE), we regularly spoke out in opposition to discrimination against members of minorities. The UK also co-sponsored the resolution 'Rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities', which was adopted by consensus in April.

Lord Ahmad also worked to promote FoRB internationally, working closely with key partners such as the Holy See, the EU's Special Envoy for Promotion of Freedom of Religion, and the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief. In July, Lord Ahmad took part in a high-level ministerial meeting in Washington D.C. with Secretary of State Michael Pompeo, following which the UK and US issued a joint statement calling for the protection of the Baha'is in Yemen.

2018 saw an increasing number of FoRB violations in many parts of the world. In Pakistan, the constitutional discrimination against Ahmadi Muslims, the misuse of blasphemy legislation, and in particular the case of Asia Bibi, made global news. The UK government regularly applied diplomatic pressure on countries which abused their blasphemy laws to target religious minorities. These diplomatic efforts were often not publicised because of the sensitivity of the issue, and of the need to protect those abused and persecuted. The UK did make public statements where we judged doing so was in the best interests of victims, for example when Lord Ahmad met Pakistan's Human Rights Minister to call for the protection of members of religious minority communities and raised specific cases and concerns.

In Burma, we saw worrying levels of violence in Kachin and Shan states. Much of the violence targeted members of minority groups in particular the Rohingya. We continued to press the Government of Burma on the need for interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance, and to encourage legislative reform as part of this process.

Members of minorities in Sudan continued to suffer, with worrying limitations on religious freedoms, including restricting Christian schools opening days and reports of churches being destroyed. As well as funding FoRB projects, we maintained a regular dialogue with the Sudanese government on these issues and saw success in restrictions being lifted on Christian schools.

In the Middle East, the UK was at the forefront of global efforts to bring Daesh to justice for their crimes, including through our commitment of £1 million in support of an investigative team to collect evidence of Daesh crimes. We supported efforts to help Christians and other minority groups in Iraq to return home, and in Syria we provided a range of support to help bolster civil society, and promote human rights and accountability. The UK government has provided £252.5 million of humanitarian relief to Iraq since 2014, and £2.71 billion to Syria and Syrian refugees since the start of the conflict. This is the UK's largest ever humanitarian response to a crisis.

We have serious concerns about deepening crackdown by the Government of China on religious and ethnic minorities, including credible reports of the use of political re-education camps, and widespread surveillance and restrictions targeting particularly Uyghur Muslims. We raised our concerns on a number of occasions, including during China's Universal Periodic Review at the UN Human Rights Council in November.

In 2019, we will continue to use our diplomatic network to defend FoRB; promote respect between religious communities; and tackle violations of FoRB overseas. We will start to look into the role of education in promoting respect between people of different religions and of no religion, and will develop a toolkit to challenge educational norms which incite violence and hatred.

Post-Holocaust issues

The UK government continued to promote Holocaust education and remembrance. In January, the FCO together with the Embassy of Israel co-hosted an event to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day. Among the high-profile speakers were the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby; the Chief Rabbi, Ephraim Mirvis; and Israel's Ambassador to the UK, Mark Regev. The event enabled the London diplomatic community to reflect on 'The Power of Words', the theme for Holocaust Memorial Day, and to consider the continuing evil of anti-Semitism. British Heroes of the Holocaust medals were presented to honour British nationals who had performed acts of courage and self-sacrifice in order to help Jewish people and others during the Holocaust.

Lord Pickles, UK Envoy for Post-Holocaust Issues, continued to lead the government's international work on post-Holocaust Issues. Lord Pickles visited a number of countries including Italy, Austria and Belarus. In Rome he called on countries to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of anti-Semitism. In October, commemorative events marking the 75th anniversary of the liquidation of the Minsk Ghetto in 1943 took place, and Lord Pickles visited Belarus where he met the Foreign Minister, Vladimir Makei. Lord Pickles laid flowers at the Trascianiec extermination camp and met members of the Belarusian Jewish community and individuals working on Holocaust education.

As a founding and active member of the IHRA, the UK supported efforts to make progress on several practical post-Holocaust issues, such as property restitution, and the identification and protection of sites of particular significance during the Holocaust. Lord Pickles took part in meetings on property restitution in Poland, and met the US Special Envoy for Holocaust issues, Tom Yazdgerdi. Lord Pickles actively championed Australia's application for membership of IHRA at the IHRA meeting in June: we look forward to the vote on Australia's application in June 2019, and continue to encourage others to join the IHRA.

The UK supported the work of the International Tracing Service (ITS), as a member of its International Commission. Lord Pickles worked with the ITS to make their records accessible digitally, allowing victims of the Holocaust and their family members to undertake research more easily.

Death penalty and torture prevention

The UK's long-standing policy is to oppose the death penalty in all circumstances, as a matter of principle. We consider that its use undermines human dignity, that there is no conclusive evidence of its deterrent value, and that any miscarriage of justice leading to its imposition is irreversible and irreparable.

The UK continued to play a leading role in pressing to reduce the use of the death penalty overseas, through multilateral institutions including the UN, and through targeted bilateral interventions in priority countries.

We encouraged those countries which retain the death penalty to:

- reduce the range of crimes carrying the death penalty
- move towards a moratorium on the use of the death penalty
- stop the use of the death penalty against juvenile and vulnerable offenders
- be transparent about how they use the death penalty, in line with international standards

According to the 2018 report from Amnesty International ¹⁰, global executions fell by 31%, reaching lowest figure in at least a decade. However, several countries saw a rise in executions, including Belarus, Japan, Singapore, South Sudan and US, while Thailand resumed executions. China remained the world’s top executioner, followed by Iran, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam and Iraq.

The FCO continued to press for death penalty reform through our network of diplomatic missions, our partnerships with experts in international NGOs, and by collaborating with other countries which share our goal to abolish the death penalty worldwide.

There was some progress in 2018. On World Day Against the Death Penalty (10 October), the Government of Malaysia announced its intention to abolish the death penalty. The Caribbean Court of Justice declared the mandatory use of the death penalty unconstitutional in Barbados, an issue which had occupied domestic and international tribunals for over a decade. The incoming administration is acting to amend the legislation. The UK commissioned a public opinion survey on attitudes to the death penalty in Zimbabwe. The report identified that public opinion was not a barrier to abolition, and the president and justice minister have since publicly condemned the death penalty. At the UN, the biennial resolution calling for a moratorium on the use of the death penalty received its highest ever level of support, with 121 member states voting in favour at the General Assembly (up from 117 in 2016).

The UK remained very concerned about the continued use of the death penalty in Belarus. Our Embassy in Minsk worked with UK NGO Death Penalty Project and the International Commission against the Death Penalty to raise awareness of the arguments against the death penalty. The FCO continued to raise concerns over the use of the death penalty in the US.

The FCO supported several projects through the Magna Carta Fund dedicated to abolishing the death penalty. In Malawi, a project on re-sentencing concluded in March, ensuring that the majority of the 168 individuals affected by the mandatory death penalty received a re-hearing, with 112 being granted an order of immediate release. The FCO, working with the NGO Reprieve, delivered a project to support citizens on death row in Malawi and Tanzania and to campaign for the abolition of the death penalty. The FCO also facilitated a visit by the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Abolition of the Death Penalty to Indonesia, to inform efforts to revise the penal code in a way that would reduce recourse to the death penalty as a sentencing measure – especially for drugs offences.

The FCO funded projects aimed at preventing torture, in particular to encourage states to ratify and implement the UN’s Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture.

We supported the Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT) to reduce the risks of torture and ill-treatment in south and east Asia by supporting ratification processes and by strengthening the implementation of safeguards during the first hours of police custody. The APT helped establish a National Preventative Mechanism in Panama and Local Preventive Mechanisms in São Paulo, Rondônia and Alagoas in Brazil. The British Embassy in Afghanistan provided programme funding to enable the Gender Equality and Development Organisation to strengthen police training, following a critical report by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan on the treatment of detainees in police detention. The project supported the Afghan police to build capacity and prevent mistreatment, in accordance with international best practice and in compliance with international human rights standards. Our Embassy in Beijing worked on a project to improve pre-trial justice in China, and in the Philippines the FCO launched a project seeking to share UK experience on how complaints relating to detention are handled.

Overseas Security and Justice Assistance

The FCO continued to work with organisations across the UK government to implement the latest Guidance on Overseas Security and Justice Assistance (OSJA). This guidance is the government’s tool for assessing the human rights risks of our overseas security and justice assistance work and for identifying measures to mitigate those risks.

An estimate of the number of OSJA cases from across government during FY 2018 to 2019 is as follows:

Region	Number of OSJA cases for financial year 2018 to 2019
Europe	205
Central Asia	63
Americas	189
Middle East and North Africa	261
Sub Saharan Africa	191
South Asia	102
Asia Pacific	267

Export controls

UK export licensing processes are key to ensuring responsible UK defence and security exports. All export licences are rigorously assessed on a case-by-case basis against the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria. The government will not issue a licence if doing so would be inconsistent with our international obligations. These obligations include those related to sanctions or to the Arms Trade Treaty or where there is a clear risk that the items exported might be used for internal repression; for the commission of a serious violation of International Humanitarian Law; for the provocation or prolongation of armed conflicts, or the aggravation of existing tensions or conflicts in the country of final destination; for aggression against another country; or for asserting a territorial claim by force. These criteria apply to all types of licence applications, without distinction between civilian or military use. During 2018, the Export Control Joint Unit, located within the Department for International Trade, with input from advisory departments, assessed 16,559 Standard Individual Export Licence applications and issued 12,943, refused 226 and revoked 4 licences.

Migration and human rights

According to the UNHCR, in 2018 approximately 141,000 migrants crossed the Mediterranean or Aegean to Europe, a 24% reduction from 2017, and the lowest total of migrants since 2013. The estimated number of dead and missing is also slightly lower than in previous years, although fatality rates on some routes have increased.

The challenges relating to safe, orderly and regular migration continued to be complex. Mechanisms and structures remained fragile, and migrants undertaking these journeys continued to face multiple threats. Intervening at all stages of a migrant's journey – in countries of origin, transit, and destination – to reduce the drivers of irregular migration, tackle people-smuggling and human trafficking, and protect the vulnerable, remains important. This 'whole of route' approach underpins the UK government's efforts to address irregular migration.

The UK's £75 million 'Safety Support and Solutions Phase 2' migration programme provided humanitarian protection to vulnerable people travelling along the migration routes from West Africa via the Sahel to Libya, and raised awareness among prospective migrants about the dangers of onward travel.

At the Salzburg EU Summit in September, the Prime Minister, Theresa May, proposed a range of measures to tackle organised immigration crime. These included working with internet platforms to remove material advertising illegal immigration services, and increasing member state referrals to Europol. In addition, the Prime Minister proposed coordinated strategic communications to counter smugglers' narratives and to inform individuals of the alternatives to migration.

The UK maintained a Search and Rescue capability in the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas under Operation SOPHIA (the EU's counter migrant-smuggling operation in the Mediterranean) and EU Frontex operations. Since May 2015, UK assets have saved over 31,000 lives, and destroyed 172 smuggling boats.

The UK endorsed the UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, adopted by the UN General Assembly in December. This provides a non-binding international framework to manage migration with a menu of activities and approaches of relevance to countries of origin, transit and destination. The Global Compact helps protect migrants around the world through international cooperation, and emphasises that human rights apply equally to migrants.

As of September, the UK had resettled over 13,900 refugees from Syria under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. We have pledged to resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees by 2020. By 2020, we aim to have resettled 3,000 children and their family members from the Middle East and North Africa under the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme; over 1,000 have been resettled so far. We have also already relocated to the UK over 220 of the 480 unaccompanied children specified under Section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016 (the 'Dubs Amendment'). We are working with states and other partners to transfer the remainder as soon as possible.

Economic and social rights

The rights of people with disabilities

An estimated one billion people around the world have some form of disability – 80% of whom live in a developing country. The UK has recognised that disability is both a cause and consequence of poverty, and that people with disabilities are less likely than others to be able to lift themselves out of poverty. The UK government's vision is a world where all people with disabilities, in all stages of their lives, are engaged, empowered, and able to exercise and enjoy their rights on an equal basis with others.

In July, the UK government, in partnership with the Government of Kenya and the International Disability Alliance, hosted the UK government's first-ever Global Disability Summit. The summit heightened global awareness of the need to include disabled people and address their needs fully in development policies. Over 170 governments, civil society and the private sector organisations made global and national commitments at the summit, and over 320 organisations signed the Charter for Change¹¹, openly committing to working together and stepping up ambition for the inclusion of disabled people.

The UK's work in 2018 on the inclusion of disabled people extended beyond the summit, and many DFID programmes reached people with disabilities. DFID launched the new Disability Inclusive Development Programme, aiming to deliver tangible outcomes to improve the lives of people with disabilities by 2024, by enabling up to 100,000 people with disabilities to access health services, up to 45,000 people with disabilities to increase their incomes, and 10,000 children with disabilities to access education.

In December, DFID launched its first ever Disability Inclusion Strategy, which set out the approach to mainstream the inclusion of disabled people across the organisation, with time-bound commitments over the next 5 years.

The rights of older people

Many older people have no reliable source of income and are much more likely to have disabilities. Approximately 80% of people aged 60 years or older will live in developing countries by 2050. Work on ageing is integral to the UK's approach to the UN's programme on inclusion 'Leave No One Behind'. In this context, DFID signed the Inclusive Data Charter to improve the use of inclusive and disaggregated data, and published a draft action plan of steps to realise its vision. The UK government also continued to take the lead in the UN Titchfield Group on Ageing and Age Disaggregated Data.

In 2018, DFID continued its partnership with the Government of Uganda since 2010 to roll out a Senior Citizens Grant. The programme currently supports 153,000 older people and will expand to over 220,000 in the next 2 years.

Water and sanitation

The UK recognises that the right to water and sanitation derives from the right to an adequate standard of living. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 calls for universal access to safe water and sanitation. The SDG baseline report showed that, in 2015, 39% of the world's population lacked access to a safe water supply, and 61% lacked access to safely managed sanitation. In financial year 2017 to 2018, the UK helped 13 million people gain access to water and sanitation, of whom 7 million were in Africa. Current programming indicates that by 2020 the UK will have helped over 60 million people gain access since 2015. The UK continued to support the robust collection of global and national data on progress on SDG 6 through the WHO and UNICEF Joint Monitoring Program on water and sanitation. We also worked to ensure water and sanitation for health care facilities in poor countries to help reduce disease, and so tackle anti-microbial resistance by reducing the unnecessary use of antibiotics.

The UK will continue to support poor people in gaining access to water and sanitation in 2019 in 25 countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, putting an increasing focus on strengthening national systems of service delivery.

Rights to health

Worldwide, millions die from preventable causes, especially the most disadvantaged. Countries with weak health systems are vulnerable to health shocks, including outbreaks of disease. The UK directly supports developing countries to achieve universal health coverage, including by strengthening health systems to enable better access to high-quality essential services without risk of financial hardship. Globally, DFID is investing in strengthening the World Health Organisation's role in universal health coverage, health systems and emergency preparedness and response. The UK continues to invest in research, including new treatment options for drug resistant tuberculosis.

The UK continued to support Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, to reach 60% of the world's children with life-saving vaccinations. UK funding will directly immunise 76 million children between 2016 and 2020, saving 1.4 million lives. The UK continued to be a world leader in tackling Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) and continued to implement programmes to protect over 200 million people from NTDs. In April, the UK co-hosted a successful Malaria Summit with Commonwealth countries, pledging to halve the incidence of malaria by 2023.

The Overseas Territories

Each Overseas Territory has its own Constitution, government, and local laws. The UK government continued to expect the territories to abide by the same basic standards of human rights as the UK. We continued to encourage them to agree to the extension of UN human rights conventions ratified by the UK, but to do so only when they were ready to apply them.

The UK government continued to work with the governments of the Overseas Territories to help them deliver their commitment to ensure the highest possible standards for the protection of children and promotion of children's welfare. We developed tailored programmes of support with a number of territories. These aimed to build the capability of key staff (particularly police, social workers and educators); recognise child abuse and tackle it effectively; enhance legal frameworks; and develop more robust systems to enable agencies to work together effectively on child safeguarding. For example, the UK government supported the Cayman Islands to improve their multi-agency response on child protection, and to establish a helpline for children and young people. In the Turks and Caicos Islands, our support helped the police to enhance their capability on child safeguarding, and to establish a child protection centre designed to provide multi-agency support to vulnerable children. In 2019, the UK government plans to continue to this important work, including supporting the territories as they develop, finalise, and begin to implement their National Response Plans on child safeguarding.

Same-sex marriage has been legal in Pitcairn since May 2015 and in the Falkland Islands, St Helena, Tristan da Cunha and Ascension Island since 2017. In Bermuda, the Domestic Partnerships Act came into effect on 1 June, and removed the entitlement for same-sex couples to marry, though it provided for both same- and opposite-sex domestic partnerships. The act was challenged through the courts on the grounds of its incompatibility with the Bermuda Constitution. A ruling in November by the Bermuda Supreme Court that same-sex couples should be entitled to marry was appealed to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. A case was filed in the Cayman Islands courts following the refusal to grant a marriage licence to a same-sex couple. We believe that the strongest, safest, and most prosperous societies are those in which all citizens can live freely without fear of discrimination, and where all citizens, including LGBT people, can play a full and active part in society. In 2019, we will continue to encourage and engage with all of the Overseas Territories in 2019 to work towards greater equality, and to ensure that all legislation is compliant with human rights obligations.

Chapter 2: human rights and the multilateral system

Human rights at the UN

The UN is the leading international forum for the development of collective standards on human rights, scrutiny of human rights violations and abuses, and dialogue between states. The main intergovernmental forum on human rights is the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council (HRC), of which the UK was re-elected as a member in 2016. Other important UN fora include the UN General Assembly Third Committee, the UN Security Council (UNSC) and the UN Commission on the Status of Women. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein stepped down as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights at the end of August, and Michelle Bachelet took up the position at the start of September. The UK thanks former High Commissioner Zeid for his tireless efforts on behalf of global human rights, and has already begun working closely with High Commissioner Bachelet.

The UK also supports the work of the UN's expert human rights mechanisms, including the treaty bodies (bodies of experts set up to monitor state compliance with their human rights treaty obligations) and special procedures (expert individuals or working groups mandated to monitor and review specific country or thematic issues). The UK has an 'open invitation' to all special procedure mandate holders to visit the UK and we encourage other states to do the same. Likewise, we encourage mandate holders to operate within the terms of their mandate and to respect the code of conduct set out in HRC resolution 5/2.

In 2018, the UK increased its support for UN human rights work. This included money for UK projects on preventing conflict and combating sexual and gender-based violence, and country specific projects. During 2018, the UK continued to raise the priority issues of modern slavery, gender equality including girls' education, LGBT rights, media freedom, and freedom of religion or belief, at all relevant UN fora, making recommendations concerning modern slavery at all Universal Periodic Review sessions.

The UK also continued to co-sponsor a number of resolutions in UN fora reinforcing women's rights, including on girls' education, violence against women, and discrimination against women.

The UK also worked through the UN to raise concerns with regional UN offices about increasing reports of human rights violations and abuses in countries such as Cameroon. The UK encouraged the UN Office for Central Africa to continue to focus on building the capacity of regional organisations to enable delivery of their early warning mechanisms, conflict prevention, and peace-building initiatives.¹²

Human Rights Council

In June, the US announced its decision to withdraw from the Human Rights Council (HRC). While the departure of the US is regrettable, the HRC has continued to hold human rights violators to account, with sessions in June and September continuing to pass important resolutions on Syria, Burma, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Yemen.

While the UK shares US concerns that the focus in the HRC's agenda on the Occupied Palestinian Territories/Israel under what is known as Item 7, is disproportionate, unhelpful, and damaging to the council's credibility we remain fully engaged with efforts to strengthen the HRC and to ensure that it continues to hold human rights violators to account. The UK will continue to be a strong advocate of the HRC and strongly supports its work, and that of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), in promoting and protecting human rights worldwide. The UK will therefore seek re-election to the HRC in 2020 for the 2021 to 2023 term, after its current term comes to an end in December 2019.

Country issues

The UK has continued to raise Burma at the UN through the HRC, at the Security Council and in the General Assembly, in order to maintain international focus on the serious human rights issues there. During our presidency of the Security Council in August, we invited the Fact Finding Mission to brief the Security Council, following their powerful report – this was the first time that an HRC-mandated investigation had briefed the UNSC in formal session. In the margins of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in September, the Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, with his French counterpart, Jean-Yves Le Drian, hosted a meeting on the Rohingya crisis, and called for urgent action to be taken by the international community. We also played a leading role in ensuring that the resolution co-sponsored by the EU and the Organisation for Islamic Co-operation

(OIC), adopted by the HRC in September, included an independent mechanism to advance accountability in respect of crimes against humanity and genocide, by collecting and preserving evidence, and by preparing case files for use by national and international courts. This work was bolstered by a new joint EU-OIC General Assembly resolution, which the UK was active in helping to negotiate, and which called for the expeditious establishment of the mechanism.

The UK continued to lead action in the HRC on Syria, and to form part of the core group for the UNGA Third Committee resolution. The March session of the HRC renewed the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry (Col) on Syria for another year. The UK continued its commitment to support important accountability work, including through a contribution to the UN's International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism. We also repeatedly raised concerns about violations and abuses of human rights, and of international humanitarian law at the UNSC, and hosted an Arria format meeting at which the Col briefed the council.

In March, the HRC renewed the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on Iran. The UK is part of the core group on the UNGA Third Committee resolution, and we remain concerned about limitations on freedom of religion or belief, and restrictions on freedom of expression, on the operation of the rule of law, and on women's rights.

The March session of the HRC also passed five resolutions under Agenda Item 7 'Human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories'. The UK shares the international community's conviction that a two-state solution is the only sustainable path for delivering justice and human rights for both Israelis and Palestinians. The UK supports an effective HRC as a central element of the rules-based international system. However, the existence of a dedicated agenda item (Item 7) which singles out Israel does little to advance the achievement of a negotiated 2-state solution. The UK therefore again voted against the Syrian Golan resolution, and for the first time voted against the accountability resolution, abstaining on the settlements resolution, and voting in favour of the resolutions on both self-determination and human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. In his address to the Council in June, then Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson made it clear that in 2019 we would vote against all resolutions under Item 7.

The EU and Japan jointly led a resolution on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) at the HRC and at the UNGA Third Committee. The HRC resolution continued to address the most serious issues related to the dire human rights situation in DPRK, but noted developments such as the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Third Committee resolution similarly recognised developments on family reunions and diplomatic talks between the DPRK, the Republic of Korea and the US, but also for the first time included language on gender equality.

At the UNGA Third Committee, the UK was in the core group supporting a resolution tabled by Ukraine on human rights in Crimea. The resolution condemned Russia for its illegal annexation and sought to ensure Russia's accountability for its actions in Crimea.

At the March session of the HRC, the UK again worked closely with the authorities of Libya and the African Group to agree a resolution which sought to improve accountability for human rights violations and abuses in Libya.

The June session of the HRC adopted a resolution on the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), which passed by consensus. The resolution built on the report of the team of international experts into alleged human rights violations and abuses in the Kasai provinces, and established a robust follow-up mechanism to assess, support, and report on the implementation by the DRC authorities of the team's recommendations related to impunity. It also tasked the High Commissioner to monitor and report regularly on developments in the Kasais.

The September HRC passed 2 resolutions on Yemen, after efforts to negotiate a single consensus text failed. The resolution tabled by a group of Arab states, calling for further technical assistance to the Yemeni National Commission of Human Rights, was adopted by consensus, while the text led by the Netherlands, which renewed the mandate for the Group of Eminent, International, and Regional experts to monitor and report on the human rights situation, passed after a vote.

Taking over the role previously played by the US, the UK was instrumental at the September session of the HRC in brokering agreement on a resolution on technical assistance and capacity-building to improve human rights in Sudan, which renewed the mandate for the Independent Expert, unless a fully mandated OHCHR office is established.

In September, the HRC also renewed the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi, with an increased vote. At the UNGA Third Committee, Burundi objected to the inclusion of a dialogue with the Col in the agenda, but its procedural efforts to prevent the dialogue were voted down.

Supporting reconciliation and reform in Sri Lanka remained a priority. In the March and September sessions of the HRC, we delivered joint statements on behalf of the core group, and took over from the US as the core group coordinator.

The UK also led a joint statement on the Maldives in March, on behalf of 40 countries.

In all HRC sessions, the UK also worked with partners to renew the mandates of (among others) the Special Rapporteurs on Eritrea and Belarus, and Independent Experts on Mali, Côte d'Ivoire and Central African Republic. We raised concerns about a number of countries in our national statements, including China and Egypt, and in March responded to repeated violations of international law by Russia and its flouting of the Rules-Based International System, including by its use of a nerve agent in Salisbury.

Thematic issues

At the opening of the June session of the HRC, the then Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, gave a speech emphasising the importance of 12 years of quality education for girls. He also hosted a side event on girls' education with Kenyan Education Minister, Amina Mohamed, and with Andria Zafirakou, winner of the 2018 Global Teacher Award. The UK drafted a joint statement on girls' education, which called on states to "leave no girl behind, and provide opportunity for at least twelve years of quality education for all girls and boys ... to work together to make this vision a reality as a matter of urgency". This statement was signed by 152 countries – a record number for any UK initiative at the HRC.

At UNGA in September, the Prime Minister, Theresa May, together with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of Canada and President Emmanuel Macron of France, held a high-profile event on girls' education, which showcased the #LeaveNoGirlBehind campaign.

The June session of the HRC adopted resolutions on the ending of female genital mutilation, discrimination against women, and violence against women and girls. In November, the UNGA Third Committee passed resolutions on child, early, and forced marriage, trafficking in women and girls, violence against women, efforts to end obstetric fistula, and female genital mutilation. The UK and other partners spoke strongly in favour of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). Alongside objections by long-standing opponents of SRHR, changed US policy prevented progress in this area. The UK and likeminded countries were able to resist their efforts to remove or caveat existing language.

The UK again worked successfully to help secure consensus on the two religion-related resolutions at the HRC and the UNGA Third Committee: on Freedom of Religion or

Belief (led by the EU), and on Combating Intolerance (led by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation).

The UK again lobbied in support of the biennial UNGA Third Committee resolution on a 'Moratorium on the use of the Death Penalty', which passed with the highest vote count yet, signalling an increase in support for the global trend towards abolition.

Also at the UNGA Third Committee, the UK spoke out against an amendment to the resolution on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions which would have removed agreed language, setting out groups of people vulnerable to extrajudicial killing. Proponents of the amendment wanted to remove the list solely because it included a reference to sexual orientation or gender identity as the determinant on one of the groups.

Universal Periodic Review

In 2018, the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), a UN process in which the human rights records of UN member states are subject to peer review, entered its second year. As a strong supporter of the UPR process, the UK participated in all reviews (42 in total) in 2018, raising human rights concerns such as freedom of religion or belief, freedom of expression, women's rights, children's rights, LGBT rights, the death penalty and modern slavery, among others. During Russia's review in May, the UK expressed concern over the deteriorating human rights situation and Russia's disregard for international commitments, and raised LGBT rights and the protection of LGBT people, as well as media freedom. In November, both China and Saudi Arabia came up for review. The UK raised China's political and civil rights record, including increased restrictions on the freedoms of peaceful assembly, expression, and religion or belief, with a particular focus on Xinjiang, as well as the increased persecution and harassment of those peacefully exercising their constitutional rights. At Saudi Arabia's review, the UK focused on women's rights, severe constriction of political space, mass arrests of human rights defenders, increased use of terrorist courts for political dissidents, and continuing extensive use of the death penalty. The UK also called for comprehensive and transparent investigations into the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

The UK will continue to promote best practice as the third cycle continues in 2019 and will participate in all upcoming reviews. The UK will continue to raise important human rights issues, including freedom of religion or belief, freedom of expression, women's rights, children's rights, LGBT rights, the death penalty and modern slavery, among others.

Treaty monitoring bodies and special procedures

The UK extends a standing invitation to any UN Special Rapporteur who wants to undertake an official visit. In 2018, the UK received the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, Tendayi Achiume; the Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy, Joseph Cannataci; and the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Philip Alston.

UN Security Council

The Security Council

As a permanent member of the UN Security Council (UNSC), the UK is committed to supporting the 3 pillars of the UN's work: maintaining international peace and security; fostering development; and protecting and promoting human rights. In 2018, the UK worked to ensure that the protection and promotion of human rights remained prominent in UN Security Council resolutions and other products.

Set within the context of the UN Secretary-General's framework of sustaining peace and supporting the 'Peace Continuum', the UK supported UN institutions in their efforts to prevent conflict, and to help countries emerging from violence progress towards sustainable peace. The UK maintained its support for the UN Secretary-General's initiatives to reform and refresh the UN. These reforms will enable the UN to deal with complex future challenges flexibly, creatively, and efficiently.

Mass Atrocity Prevention and Responsibility to Protect

The UK is committed to early and effective international action to prevent mass atrocities, which are of grave concern to the UK government. Addressing and preventing conflict, instability, and state failure is a key priority running through UK aid policies and programmes. This includes the prevention of identity-based mass violence, alongside other forms of violence and instability. We continue to drive international policy, leading policy within the Security Council on Burma, Yemen, and Libya.

Responsibility to Protect is a further tool available within the UN system to prevent atrocities. The UK provided £75,000 to support the work of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. This funding helped to strengthen international understanding of the obligations which 'responsibility to protect' brings, and raises awareness of countries at risk.

Peacebuilding

The UK continued to support UN peacebuilding, both financially and politically, in line with our National Security Strategy priorities. The UK supported the Secretary-General's reforms in this area, which aim to deliver a more coordinated UN approach to peacebuilding across the conflict continuum. The reforms will lead to delivering peacebuilding initiatives which address the underlying causes of conflict, including in peaceful countries at risk of a return to violence, or in countries where conflict has not yet occurred. The structural reforms to the UN's peace and security architecture and the development system will also support peacebuilding goals by making the UN more efficient, and its various bodies more coordinated.

Linked to atrocity prevention, the UK focused on a number of thematic agendas which contribute to building inclusive and stable environments, and help prevent conflict and possible atrocities. These priorities included women, peace and security, girls' education, children and armed conflict, the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative, tackling modern slavery, promoting freedom of religion or belief, and – as articulated by the Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, in his speech at the Policy Exchange in October¹³ – freedom of the media. This programme activity is consistent with and supports the UN's activities on the rule of law, good governance, and human rights, since we believe that they are the fundamental building blocks for sustaining peace.

The UN's Special Political Missions (SPMs) are important instruments for delivering effective peacebuilding, as is the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF). SPMs are the UNSC's primary tool for delivering peacebuilding activities in conflict-affected areas. The UK leads within the UNSC on SPMs in Somalia, Libya, Iraq, and Colombia. We support this work through our position as a permanent member on the UNSC, setting and reviewing mission mandates. The UK has been the largest contributor to the PBF since its establishment. To enable the PBF to achieve the Secretary-General's desired goal of significantly increasing the scale of its peacebuilding efforts, the UK confirmed that it will double its annual contribution to the PBF, from £8 million to £16 million, in financial year 2019 to 2020.

Peacekeeping

UN peacekeeping plays a crucial role in preventing inter-state conflict, ending cycles of civil war, mitigating humanitarian crises, and extending state authority where state capacity is weak or contested. It helps create the conditions for lasting peace, promoting a secure environment in which non-military conflict prevention activities can take place. The impact of war falls primarily on civilians, particularly women and children. Civilians continue to be the victims of violence, and are sometimes deliberately targeted. This is why the UK ensures that protecting civilians and reducing the threat of human rights violations and abuses is a core element of all peacekeeping operations where this risk is present.

The UK continued to work closely with the UN and member states to reform UN peacekeeping, focusing on the '3Ps': better mission Planning; more and better Pledges of personnel and equipment; and stronger mission Performance. We pursued this reform through mandate negotiations in the UNSC, direct support to missions and countries contributing troops and police, and by using our influence and funding to improve UN structures and policies. UK funding helped leverage additional funding from other member states. For example, our peacekeeping programme helped to identify and reduce gaps in peacekeeping capabilities through the UN's Strategic Force Generation Cell.

The UK's peacekeeping support strategy complements and contributes to the UN Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiative. A4P includes independent, strategic reviews of 8 peacekeeping missions (part-funded by the UK), and an action plan to improve the safety and security of peacekeepers. A4P also produced the Declaration of Shared Commitments on UN Peacekeeping Operations, on which we worked closely with the UN Secretariat, including co-chairing consultations, and which the Foreign Secretary endorsed in August. The focus is now on A4P implementation.

Commonwealth

The Commonwealth continues to be an important forum for the protection, promotion and strengthening of democracy, human rights, good governance, and the rule of law.

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting

In April, the UK hosted the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting (CHOGM), which 46 heads of state and 49 foreign ministers attended and agreed actions and commitments to create a fairer, more secure, more sustainable, and more prosperous future. Ahead of the intergovernmental meetings, 3 days of official fora provided the space for business, civil society, and women and youth representatives to feed their perspectives into the intergovernmental discussions which followed.

The CHOGM communiqué included forward-leaning language on a range of issues, including the importance of social, economic, and political participation for all Commonwealth citizens. Leaders agreed to address the stigma of disability and mental health, and encouraged member states to ratify and implement the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. They further committed to ratify and implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and encouraged continued action to prevent child, early and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation.

Bearing in mind that 35 of 53 Commonwealth member states criminalise consensual same-sex relationships, the Prime Minister, Theresa May, expressed regret over the legacy of violence, and even death, which outdated discriminatory legislation continues to inflict on LGBT people across the Commonwealth. The Prime Minister was clear that the UK stands ready to support any Commonwealth country wishing to reform outdated legislation which discriminates on the grounds of sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation. To underpin this commitment, the UK launched a £5.6 million programme, led by a consortium of civil society organisations which will provide advice and assistance to interested Commonwealth states.

As Commonwealth Chair-in-Office, the UK will continue to work with the three pillars of the Commonwealth – the Commonwealth Secretariat, its member states, and its organisations and networks – to strengthen cooperation, solidarity, and delivery on a range of human rights issues. The UK believes that by upholding the values and aspirations of the Commonwealth Charter, member states can ensure a fairer future, which is essential for the development of peaceful, just, and inclusive societies.

Commonwealth and human rights institutions

At CHOGM, heads of government recognised the importance of sharing human rights best practice and expertise. They agreed to support National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and enable effective participation by Commonwealth states in the Universal Periodic Review process at the Human Rights Council (HRC). The UK delivered on these commitments by funding the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, in their role as chair of the Commonwealth Forum of NHRIs (CFNHRI), and by ensuring that the annual meeting of the CFNHRI could take place in the margins of CHOGM. In partnership with the Secretariat for Pacific Communities, the UK provided support for Pacific Commonwealth countries to establish and strengthen NHRIs, and deliver each state's international human rights commitments.

In Geneva, the UK facilitated greater engagement from member states by funding the appointment of two resident human rights advisers in the Commonwealth Small States Office. The FCO also hosted a series of meetings of all Commonwealth Permanent Representatives to discuss human rights issues and how they could cooperate more effectively in the HRC. We look forward to working with the five Commonwealth member states due to join the HRC in 2019.

Protecting and promoting democracy

At CHOGM, heads of government acknowledged the importance of promoting peace, providing access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable, and inclusive national institutions. The heads of government agreed 'Revised Commonwealth Guidelines for the Conduct of Election Observation in Member Countries'. This was a new approach which puts greater emphasis on the whole electoral cycle. In September, the Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, announced further UK support for the Commonwealth Election Observation Programme, which, since the adoption of the revised guidelines, has delivered observation missions in three countries. In November, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and Westminster Foundation for Democracy launched updated benchmarks for democratic legislatures. The benchmarks form part of the UK-funded Commonwealth Partnership for Democracy, which aims to promote inclusive and accountable democracies with the increased participation of women, members of minorities, and members of other underrepresented groups.

In September, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon attended the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG). The CMAG received an update from the Commonwealth Secretary General on developments in member states, and recognised the important work of the Commonwealth's organisations in advancing the fundamental political values of the Commonwealth. CMAG, in conjunction with the Good Offices of the Commonwealth Secretary General, plays a fundamental role in championing the values and principles of the Commonwealth Charter.

Europe

The European Union

The UK continued to help shape the EU's human rights priorities in both the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) and the UNGA Third Committee. We contributed to the drafting of resolutions tabled by the EU on countries with the most egregious human rights records, such as DPRK, Syria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Burma, and on the illegally annexed Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol (Ukraine). Also of note were the UK's successful efforts to strengthen the EU statement under the HRC's 'Item 4' (situations which require the HRC's attention) on the worsening human rights situation in Venezuela. The UK contributed towards EU resolutions on a number of priority thematic issues, such as freedom of expression (both online and offline), freedom of religion or belief, women's rights, and gender equality. The UK's influence ensured the EU's constructive engagement in the UN Open Ended Working Group on ageing, which met in July.

The UK was also a major contributor to the EU position at the annual Commission on the Status of Women. UK Heads of Mission, working closely with their EU colleagues, contributed towards local EU human rights strategies guiding engagement with host countries. In the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the UK was the lead EU member state in the Permanent Council advancing freedom of assembly and freedom of the media, drafting and delivering statements on behalf of the 28 EU member states both in the Permanent Council and at Europe's largest human rights gathering, the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw in September.

The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe

The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) provides a forum for dialogue between its 57 participating states, including on human rights. The UK Ambassador chaired the Human Dimension Committee (HDC), the OSCE human rights forum, for a second consecutive year, leading thematic meetings on issues including media freedom, freedom of religion or belief, gender equality, freedom of association, and democracy. The UK also ran HDC events on freedom of cultural expression, and on combating racism and xenophobia.

As HDC chair, the UK led negotiations on potential new human dimension commitments for the Milan Ministerial Council in December. Following considerable UK effort, in close cooperation with the Italian OSCE chairmanship, OSCE states reached consensus on a new human dimension decision for the first time since 2014. The OSCE representative on freedom of the media described the decision as a "landmark". Member states also agreed a new commitment on preventing and combating violence against women.

Beyond the HDC, at Europe's biggest human rights conference, the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw in September, the UK delivered six statements, and organised well-received events on fundamental freedoms and new technologies, and on human rights defenders. Throughout the year, the UK worked closely with like-minded states to keep human rights on the agenda of the weekly OSCE Permanent Council. The UK was also active in 2 Vienna-based initiatives, Democracy Defenders, and the Group of Friends on the Safety of Journalists, and were one of 16 states to invoke the OSCE Vienna Mechanism and the Moscow Mechanism in relation to violations of the human rights of LGBT people in Chechnya in the Russian Federation.

Council of Europe

The Council of Europe (CoE) remained an important institution for the advancement of UK human rights objectives in Europe. The Minister for Europe and the Americas, Sir Alan Duncan, reaffirmed the value attached by the government to the work of the CoE in a Westminster Hall Debate in April. attended the CoE's ministerial meeting in Denmark in May, where he ensured that modern slavery and freedom of religion or belief were explicitly referenced in the chair's proposed list of topics on which the Council of Europe should focus over the coming years. Lord Ahmad also met Dunja Mijatović, the new CoE Commissioner for Human Rights, with whom the UK had worked closely in her previous role in the OSCE as Representative on Freedom of the Media.

The UK demonstrated its continued commitment to the CoE treaty system by ratifying the Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, known as the Lanzarote Convention. The UK also signed a new convention relating to sports competitions¹⁴ and ratified 2 amending protocols to existing ones on European Landscape and on Personal Data.

2018 was the 20th anniversary of the CoE European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages.¹⁵ In May, the UK hosted a visit from a Committee of Experts, which reported positively on the UK's implementation of the charter in several fields, with special mention given to work in the Isle of Man, Scotland, and Wales.

The UK has been one of the most vocal supporters of reform of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR)¹⁶, to improve its efficiency, and ensure that the court can focus on the most important cases before it, underpinned by the requirement for robust implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights at the domestic level, in line with the principle of subsidiarity. In April, the UK supported the Danish chairmanship to secure the adoption of the Copenhagen Declaration¹⁷, which carried forward the process of reforming the ECtHR, building on the progress provided by the 2012 Brighton Declaration.¹⁸

On implementation of judgments, the UK in the Committee of Ministers welcomed Azerbaijan's release of Ilgar Mammadov in August, following the ECtHR's 2014 ruling, although there remained concern that his release was conditional. In December, the Committee of Ministers approved the non-legislative package of measures put forward by the UK government as implementation of 'Hirst No 2 v UK', and closed its supervision of this long-running judgment on prisoner voting.

Despite these successes, the CoE faced significant challenges, with Russia continuing to withhold its budgetary contribution, in protest at action taken against its delegates in the CoE Parliamentary Assembly following the annexation of Crimea. This led to a deficit of over €54 million in the CoE's budget. The CoE Secretary General, Thorbjørn Jagland, introduced a first outline of plans for reforms to mitigate the impact of this shortfall. The UK offered advice and support.

The UK strongly supported the appointment of an independent investigation panel in relation to allegations of corruption in the CoE Parliamentary Assembly, and welcomed the findings of the resulting report.¹⁹

International criminal justice

Support for international criminal justice is a fundamental part of the UK's foreign policy. Our approach is not limited to punishing the perpetrators: it aims to help victims and their communities come to terms with the past, to contribute to lasting peace and security, and to deter those who might otherwise commit such violations in the future.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) is the world's first permanent independent international criminal court with jurisdiction over the most serious crimes of international concern, including genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. The UK government believes that the ICC has an important role in pursuing accountability when national authorities are either unable or unwilling to do so. We provided both practical and financial support to the court, contributing £9.7 million in 2018. The ICC considered

situations from across Africa, the Middle East, Europe, South East Asia and South America, with proceedings continuing in three trials: the Ongwen case (Uganda), the Ntaganda case (Democratic Republic of Congo), and the Gbagbo and Blé Goudé case (Ivory Coast). Al Hassan (Mali), and Yekatom (Central African Republic) were surrendered to the ICC.

In June, the ICC's trust fund for victims launched an assistance programme in Central African Republic, to provide physical and psychological rehabilitation, as well as material support, for victims and their families. The UK contributed to the work of the trust fund for victims in Mali. The UK continues strongly to support the role of the ICC. Positive reform is required for the ICC to fulfil its mandate as intended under the Rome Statute. The UK will work with other States Parties and the ICC to achieve this goal.

The International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT) continued its mandate to fulfil the residual functions of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. The tribunal heard the high-profile appeal case for Radovan Karadžić, who had been convicted by the ICTY of committing genocide during the Balkans conflict. The IRMCT also continued to hear the retrial in the case of Stanišić and Simatović and issued a decision in the Šeselj contempt case. The UK supported the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia and the Residual Special Court for Sierra Leone through a total contribution of over £500,000.

The UK has been at the forefront of international efforts to gather and analyse evidence of atrocities committed in the Middle East. We contributed £250,000 to the UN International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism to support the preparation of legal cases for serious crimes committed in Syria since March 2011. The UK led international efforts on UNSCR 2379, which resulted in the creation of the United Nations Investigative Team for the Accountability of Daesh (UNITAD) to collect, preserve, and store evidence of Daesh crimes in Iraq. To date the UK has contributed more than £1 million to the operation of UNITAD. In reaction to the Rohingya crisis in Burma, the UK worked closely with the EU and the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation to secure a UN Human Rights Council Resolution to establish a mechanism to collect and preserve evidence of human rights violations to support future prosecutions.

In Nepal, we supported victims of armed conflict who are operating as part of the organisation 'Conflict Victims Common Platform', to enable them to hold and document truth telling conventions, and to improve understanding of human rights abuses perpetrated during the conflict. Our funding helped them to memorialise how they were affected by the conflict, and to mark their subsequent struggle for justice.

Sanctions

Sanctions, such as arms embargoes, asset freezes, and travel bans, are one of the tools the UK uses, in coordination with multilateral bodies, to promote human rights and democracy. We use sanctions as part of a broader political and diplomatic strategy, aiming to change behaviour, constrain the ability of those sanctioned to continue unwanted behaviour, or signal disapproval of that behaviour. The UK promotes a 'Smarter Sanctions' policy to ensure that sanctions are both legally robust, and effective in delivering our policies, including on human rights. This includes considering when sanctions should be increased or lifted, and guarding against harmful consequences such as humanitarian suffering, which undermine the long-term viability of sanctions as a foreign policy tool.

In 2018, we worked with EU partners to impose travel bans and asset freezes on members of the Burma armed forces (Tatmadaw), Border Guard Police, and associated individuals who committed human rights violations against ethnic minorities, including the Rohingya in Rakhine State. These violations included obstructing the provision of humanitarian assistance to civilians in need, and obstructing the conduct of independent investigations into allegations of serious human rights violations or abuses. Along with continued diplomatic efforts, the Burma sanctions regime is an important tool to attempt to deter further human rights violations, to open up humanitarian access to Rakhine State, and to establish the conditions for the eventual safe return of the refugees who fled to Bangladesh.

In 2018 the UK supported efforts to establish an EU global human rights sanctions regime. We have continued to coordinate with EU member states to make further advances towards a new regime.

At the UN, we championed imposing further designations on individuals under the Libya sanctions regime to support our wider efforts to address human trafficking and to make progress on reaching an inclusive political settlement in Libya. Working closely with our partners, we secured agreement at the UN to impose sanctions against six major people-traffickers operating in Libya. This was a first for the UN and was the result of work initiated by the UK.

Currently the UK's legal framework for sanctions is derived from EU law. In anticipation of the UK leaving the EU, Parliament passed the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act, which received Royal Assent on 23 May. The act provides powers for the UK to make secondary legislation to allow us to take a range of actions against those suspected of gross human rights violations, as well as other criteria.

Chapter 3: human rights programme funds

Human rights and democracy programme spending

The UK's extensive diplomatic work on human rights and democracy is supported through a diverse portfolio of policy programme work. This FCO policy programme spending is designed to achieve specific outcomes to defend or promote human rights in priority countries, while remaining flexible to enable us to adapt to changing circumstances and work with a variety of partners. In some cases the FCO's funding provides long-term support on issues which require sustained engagement to deliver change. In other cases the FCO uses programme funding to support emerging priorities and campaigns like modern slavery and girls' education. Sometimes our programmatic support increases the UK's access and influence and can be directly linked to achieving a specific objective like the passage of improved legislation. In other cases it is a way to support local stakeholders to keep issues on the agenda in circumstances where change is contested and slow.

FCO's human rights and democracy programme spending across the globe supported: democracy; freedom of expression; human rights defenders; justice and penal reform; LGBT rights; media freedom; work to tackle modern slavery; the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative; torture prevention; responsible business; women and girls' rights and international justice. This is in addition to DFID programme spend overseas, and funding through cross-government funds such as the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF).

Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy

The Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy (MCF) is the FCO's flagship fund to deliver projects around the world aimed at furthering human rights and democracy objectives. MCF projects complement our diplomatic work to further British interests overseas by tackling the root causes of human rights violations, strengthening institutions and governance, supporting the promotion and protection of human rights, and promoting democracy and the rule of law. The fund's main focus is to support projects and activity in the 30 Human Rights Priority Countries identified in this report.

The MCF allocated approximately £10.6 million to projects in financial year 2018 to 2019 focusing across a range of human rights and democracy themes including strengthening civil society, abolition of the death penalty, promoting democracy, freedom of religion or belief, freedom of expression, preventing torture, the rights of LGBT people, and the rule of law.

Supporting the rules-based international system

The rules-based international system is founded on relationships between states, and through international institutions and frameworks which share rules and agreements on behaviour and standards. In financial year 2018 to 2019, in addition to MCF funding, the FCO allocated £7.79 million to work supporting the rules-based international system which directly and indirectly supported human rights and democracy including:

- promoting gender equality
- promoting the active participation of women in peacebuilding discussions
- expanding the reach and implementation of the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative
- strengthening the efficiency and capacity of the UN
- strengthening the Commonwealth
- supporting the International Criminal Court
- working with business to deliver stability in conflict zones

Departmental policy programme funding also helps advance the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular goals 5 (Gender Equality) and 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). The FCO is committed to making its policy programme spending as transparent as possible. More details of the FCO's Overseas Development Assistance funded human rights and democracy programming are available on GOV.UK²⁰ and via the International Aid Transparency Initiative's online registry.²¹

Case studies of programme work supporting human rights and democracy

In 2018, the FCO funded the 'Road to Abolition' project, which seeks to progress the abolition of the death penalty in Malawi and challenge the death penalty in Tanzania. It built upon the successes of the 'Malawi Resentencing' project run by NGO Reprieve from 2016 to 2018, which saw the majority of the 168 individuals affected by the mandatory death penalty in Malawi receive a rehearing. Of these, 154 individuals received a new sentence, 112 of which were granted an order of immediate release. These successes laid the ground work for the next two-year 'Road to Abolition' project starting in 2018 which sought to empower and strengthen the capacity of local lawyers and grassroots organisations to campaign for legal abolition in Malawi and to use strategic litigation to secure restrictions to the death penalty in Tanzania.

The UK has a long-standing policy to oppose the use of the death penalty. Our policy programmes support this work by either helping increase the number of abolitionist countries, reducing the number of executions and restricting its use, and reducing the use of the death penalty against juvenile and vulnerable offenders. In 2017 to 2018, the project on 'General Standards for Death Penalty Drug Cases' in China provided effective guidance for lawyers defending cases across China and included guidance, workshops and training to enhance the ability of defence lawyers to apply different techniques and arguments. Defence lawyers have drawn directly on the guidelines to successfully overturn several death penalty verdicts.

A free and independent media is essential. It can act as an enabler for the full range of human rights and contributes to good governance, democracy and equality. Our programmes work to promote a free and independent media and to contribute to the safety of journalists worldwide. In 2017 to 2018, the MCF supported media freedom in Uzbekistan, by helping deliver media content from Reuters Media Express to a number of regional TV stations with significant viewing figures.

Prosperous societies go hand in hand with table and secure countries. As a result, one of the key areas of the programme is working with the private sector and civil society on initiatives that tackle the drivers of conflict. In 2017 to 2018, the MCF supported a project in Colombia to introduce the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and to reduce conflicts associated with business operation in conflict-affected areas. The project successfully constructed a protocol of early alerts and urgent measures with the Working Group of Coal Companies. The project worked with the Presidential Advisor for Human Rights to strengthen local capacity to use non-judicial remedies to resolve potential conflicts. Community-focused guidelines aimed at preventing conflicts have also been developed and delivered to business, local organisations, and communities, at regional and national level.

In Sudan, FCO funding over two years has supported the creation of a Women's Taskforce (WT) to hold regular community consultations across Sudan, advocate women's participation in the national and regional peace-building processes and co-ordinate with the work of other civil society organisations and women's rights defenders. As well as advocacy work domestically, the WT also represents the views of Sudanese women internationally: members campaigned for the human rights situation in Sudan to be fairly represented at the Human Rights Council, and they brought the views of women in conflict areas in Sudan to the Commission on the Status of Women. The WT's work has also supported other UK projects with the African Union.

As part of a longer-term project which started in 2014, the FCO continued to provide funding for work in Kosovo that provided access for survivors of sexual violence, including minorities, to trauma-sensitive multidisciplinary rehabilitation. The majority of the beneficiaries reported improved psychological functioning and improved relations with family members and their community. Two surveys showed significant positive change and perception of the general public towards victims of gender-based violence. This project significantly contributed towards the completion of secondary legislation for reparation schemes for victims of sexual violence during the conflict in Kosovo.

Chapter 4: consular – human rights and assistance

Consular cases

The advice and practical support provided by UK consular staff to support British nationals overseas when something goes wrong is at the heart of the FCO's work. Our priority is to assist those most in need, with the level and type of assistance offered tailored to the individual circumstances of each person. The UK continued to provide professional, non-judgmental assistance to British nationals overseas, irrespective of gender, race, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, disability, and religion or belief. We dealt with over 22,000 new assistance cases in 2018.

Respect for an individual's human rights is integral to the provision of consular assistance. We continue to lobby against the death penalty and judicial corporal punishment; raise allegations of torture and mistreatment and other human rights violations; provide support to those in detention; and give advice and support to victims and potential victims of forced marriage. We also work to remove the need for consular assistance by altering attitudes to forced marriage; supporting improved detention conditions; increasing awareness of international standards; and informing British nationals of the law and customs in other countries and the potential penalties for violating them.

Death penalty

As of December, 14 British nationals faced the death penalty worldwide. Over 30 more were detained on charges which could attract the death penalty if the defendants were found guilty.

The UK opposes the use of the death penalty in all circumstances. If a British national is facing a charge which carries the death penalty, or has been sentenced to death, with their consent we will normally intervene and seek to prevent their execution at whatever stage and level is deemed most effective. We work closely with legal teams engaged by British nationals facing the death penalty, and are supported in this work by 2 respected NGOs: Reprieve, and the Death Penalty Project, which provide legal assistance and advice. In 2018, the UK supported projects which contributed to a greater culture of compliance with human rights standards in those countries which retain the death penalty. For example, in Indonesia we funded a project which aimed, through a series of expert-led workshops, to improve the training available to lawyers handling death penalty cases.

In 2019, we will continue to intervene in death penalty cases as necessary and to look for other opportunities to support local efforts to abolish the death penalty.

Torture and mistreatment

The UK takes all allegations of torture and mistreatment affecting British nationals extremely seriously. With the consent of the affected individual, we follow up as soon as possible with action appropriate to the circumstances of the case. Our overriding priority in such cases is to ensure the safety of the person involved. If the person is detained or in hospital, our support could include increasing the frequency of our visits, assisting the individual to gain access to medical treatment, or considering support for a transfer to another wing or facility.

Although we cannot ourselves formally investigate torture or mistreatment allegations overseas, with the individual's permission we can raise them with the local authorities, demanding an end to the mistreatment and investigation of the incident, in line with international standards. When responding to an allegation, consular staff will avoid any action which might increase the risk to the person concerned, or to any other person who may be affected.

In addition, we hold periodic reviews of all such cases to identify regional trends, and develop strategies to engage and lobby the local authorities. In November, we reviewed a total of 132 allegations reported to the FCO, of which 91 were reported since November 2017.

We also consider how we can help improve countries' compliance with their obligations to prevent and combat torture and mistreatment. For example, in Thailand we worked in partnership with the local authorities and experts to identify areas of policy or practice which may present a risk to the fair, reasonable, and safe treatment of detainees, and to recommend improvements. This work led to the development of standard operating procedures for prisons. A similar project was developed to improve the operation of immigration detention centres.

In 2018, we continued to train and advise our staff on international obligations on torture and mistreatment and on the appropriate action to take in high-risk countries.

Overseas detainees

In addition to taking action on specific human rights violations, we aim to support the welfare of all British nationals in detention overseas who request consular assistance. As of November, the FCO was supporting 2,335 British nationals in detention overseas (including those in police custody, in immigration detention, on remand, and sentenced prisoners).

To do this, we work in close partnership with the respected charity, Prisoners Abroad, which offers practical and emotional support to British detainees overseas and to their families in the UK. We worked together on over 1,000 cases, particularly those involving vulnerable detainees. The Minister for Consular Services, Harriett Baldwin, co-hosted a reception in November to celebrate the 40th anniversary of Prisoners Abroad.

Forced marriage

The UK remains a world leader in the fight to tackle forced marriage, with the Forced Marriage Unit (FMU), a joint FCO and Home Office Unit, leading efforts to combat the practice at home and abroad.

In 2018, the FMU provided advice or support related to a possible forced marriage in over 1,700 cases relating to over 70 countries. We delivered outreach events to a wide range of agencies, schools, and communities. Through these, we aimed to raise awareness of forced marriage, and to help professionals recognise the warning signs and take the right action to protect children and adults from this abhorrent abuse.

In November, the UK hosted a two-day international conference on Ending Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and Forced Marriage, bringing together international FGM and forced marriage experts, law enforcement practitioners, politicians, activists, and survivors. This offered a forum to discuss the response to the crimes and to share best practice, strengthen links, and consider further action which might be taken internationally.

The UK continued to fund five NGOs, based both overseas and in the UK, to provide refuge for those at risk abroad and to support repatriated victims of forced marriage.

In 2019, the FMU will continue to engage internationally with likeminded countries to share best practice; provide assistance to victims and potential victims; build frontline capability; and raise awareness of the issue across communities in the UK.

Chapter 5: human rights priority countries

Afghanistan

The ongoing conflict continued to be the greatest barrier to improving the human rights situation in Afghanistan. The most pressing human rights issues concerned civilian casualties in the conflict, women's rights, the situation of religious minorities, media freedom, and torture and ill-treatment in detention.

In 2018, the UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) documented 10,993 civilian casualties. Of these, 3,804 represented civilian deaths; an increase in 11% as compared to 2017.²² Anti-government elements – predominantly the Taliban and Daesh – were responsible for the majority of casualties. In October, UNAMA released a special report expressing particular concern over the increased use of deliberate and indiscriminate attacks by anti-government elements against the civilian population.²³

2018 also saw an increase in mass casualty attacks directed specifically at the Shi'a Muslim religious minority, many of whom are ethnic Hazara.²⁴ UNAMA documented 705 civilian casualties resulting from such attacks in the first 9 months of the year. Attacks also targeted the Sikh and Hindu community; an attack in Jalalabad in July killed 19 people, including the sole Sikh candidate in the parliamentary elections. Daesh claimed responsibility for the majority of attacks against religious minorities. British Embassy staff in Kabul maintained regular engagement with Hazara and Sikh representatives in the Afghan parliament and with members of their wider communities. The UK government continued to highlight the need to enhance the Afghan government's capacity to counter such attacks on freedom of religion or belief.

Although significant progress has been made on women's rights since the end of the Taliban regime in 2001, women continue to face major challenges, primarily in relation to gender-based violence, access to education, political participation, and economic empowerment. In May, UNAMA highlighted how violence against women remained widespread, and access to justice for victims continued to be inhibited.²⁵ The UK provided funding to improve the health sector response to gender-based violence. We also carried out work to widen access to education among the most marginalised girls. The UK's Girls' Education Challenge has helped over 300,000 Afghan girls attend primary school. A second phase will support over 70,000 highly marginalised girls to go on to secondary education. Afghanistan remains a focus country in the UK's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). We will continue to work with the Afghan government in implementing its own National Action Plan on WPS to ensure that women have a meaningful role in Afghan society.

The Afghan government has been able to reduce, but not eliminate, instances of torture and ill-treatment of people detained by the Afghan National Police and National Directorate of Security, since the publication of UNAMA's 2017 Treatment of Detainees report. The death penalty also remains a legal punishment in Afghanistan. The UK continues to express its strong opposition to the use of the death penalty, including with the EU on the World Day Against the Death Penalty and when Minister for Human Rights Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon met Afghanistan's Chief Executive, Abdullah Abdullah.

Modern slavery remains a problem in Afghanistan, despite the Afghan government making efforts to improve the situation through a revised penal code. This increases the penalties for human trafficking crimes, and criminalises activities relating to 'bacha bazi', a practice whereby men exploit boys for social and sexual entertainment. The most common forms of modern slavery include labour exploitation, sexual exploitation, and forced marriage.

Despite the media's greater independence and diversity than under the Taliban regime, Afghanistan still ranked only 118 in the World Press Freedom Index.²⁶ The safety of journalists remained a critical problem. Reporters without Borders describe Afghanistan as one of the most dangerous places in the world for journalists to work. The high and growing number of journalist deaths continued, with 14 journalists being killed during 2018.²⁷ The security challenges faced by journalists put freedom of expression under serious threat.

Parliamentary elections took place in October, with high numbers of Afghan people, including women, turning out to exercise their right to vote. This was despite a difficult backdrop of security threats and organisational challenges. UNAMA documented 56 deaths and 379 injuries among civilians resulting from violence against polling centres and voters during the three days in which voting took place.²⁸

In 2019, we will continue to encourage progress on human rights in Afghanistan, particularly in the priority areas of civilian casualties, women's rights, media freedom, the protection of minorities, and torture and ill-treatment in detention. We will do so bilaterally and with international partners, through our excellent relationship with the Afghan government, and in partnership with key civil society organisations.

Bahrain

2018 saw a mixed picture of challenges and positive developments with regard to the human rights situation in Bahrain. The UK government continued to reiterate the need for the state to protect and defend universal human rights.

Deprivation of nationality, where this renders an individual stateless, remained a concern. The UK raised this issue with the Government of Bahrain. Bahraini courts ordered the removal of Bahraini nationality from a number of individuals, the majority of whom having been convicted of acts of terrorism. Bahrain is not a signatory to the 1954 and 1961 UN Conventions on Statelessness and is not bound by their provisions.

Bahrain retains the death penalty, but did not carry out any death sentences in 2018. The UK welcomed the decision of King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa who, in April, commuted the death sentences of four individuals who had been tried and convicted in a capital case. However, we remained concerned about the death sentences which continued to be handed down by Bahraini courts. The UK is firmly opposed to the death penalty and it is our long-standing policy to oppose capital punishment in all circumstances. The Government of Bahrain is fully aware of our position.

The UK government raised concerns over the upholding of the 5-year sentence given to Nabeel Rajab, a Bahraini activist convicted on charges related to his activity on social media, in addition to the 2-year sentence he had already served. We urged the Government of Bahrain to protect freedom of expression for all its citizens in line with its international commitments. The then Minister for the Middle East, Alistair Burt, issued statements expressing our concerns in February and December. Bahrain was ranked 166 on the World Press Freedom index score,²⁹ down from 164 in 2017.

The UK government issued a statement of concern over the life sentence handed down to Sheikh Ali Salman, the former Secretary General of the proscribed Bahraini group Al Wefaq Society. We continue to monitor the case.

The UK worked with Bahrain's independent human rights oversight bodies, including the Ministry of Interior Ombudsman, the Special Investigations Unit, the Prisoner and Detainees' Rights Commission and the National Institute for Human Rights, the first such organisations to be established in the region. The UK has supported the development of effective mechanisms to hold state institutions, including the police, the security service and the prison service, to account. Getting this right will have a positive impact on a range of human rights issues, including providing independent oversight of security personnel, monitoring standards of detention, and investigating allegations of mistreatment.

While these human rights oversight bodies still have more to do, they have already had a positive effect, including by prosecuting police officers accused of human rights abuses. Following an investigation conducted jointly by the Ministry of Interior's Ombudsman and the Special Investigations Unit, the Bahraini Ministry of Justice ordered a retrial in the capital cases of Muhammad Ramadan and Hussein Moosa. The UK welcomed this decision and we continue to monitor these cases.

In July, Alistair Burt co-chaired the UK-Bahrain Joint Working Group in London, which focused on a number of areas, including the provision of UK expertise in support of Bahraini-led reform initiatives. The Minister also responded on behalf of the UK government to a debate on Bahrain in Westminster Hall on 11 September.³⁰ This covered a range of issues, including human rights, and the Minister commented on the unprecedented Bahraini reform programme while noting that we raise concerns.

Bahrain was elected to the UN Human Rights Council in October. The UK believes this to be an opportunity for Bahrain to strengthen its engagement with the UN human

rights institutions, including the Office of the UN Human Rights Commissioner.

In November, Bahrain held parliamentary elections for the fifth time. Alistair Burt issued a statement welcoming the successful conclusion of elections, and noting that Bahrain was one of only 2 Gulf countries with a democratically-elected parliament. The UK welcomed continuing progress in and commitment to the democratic process.

There was progress on a number of other human rights issues. New legislation providing for alternatives to detention for some criminal offences was implemented. Bahrain became the first country in the Arab region to be granted Tier 1 status in the US Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report.³¹ This means that Bahrain has fully met the Trafficking Victims Protection Act's minimum standards, including the prohibition of severe forms of trafficking in persons and punishment of acts of such trafficking. Bahrain is recognised as a regional leader on work to combat human trafficking; Bahrain co-hosted an event with the UK on modern slavery in the margins of the UN General Assembly. Bahrain built on its strong reputation on women's empowerment, with the Supreme Council of Women proactively promoting the participation of women in public life. The first female Speaker of Parliament (and currently the only one in the Middle East) was elected, and the number of women MPs doubled following the elections in November.

The UK will continue to support Bahraini-led reform in 2019 by providing a range of technical expertise to promote the rule of law and further develop the work of Bahrain's human rights oversight bodies. We believe that working together in this way offers the best opportunity to see the positive changes which the Government of Bahrain has committed to implementing, including on international agendas such as women's empowerment and combating modern slavery.

We will continue to engage with the Bahraini government and relevant institutions on a wide range of human rights issues and, where appropriate, will continue to have open and frank discussions, both in private and in public.

People's Republic of Bangladesh

The protection of human rights and democracy in Bangladesh diminished in 2018, and a general election in December was affected by numerous credible allegations of irregularities and by significant violence. There was an increase in allegations of extrajudicial killings and freedom of expression was further reduced. Homosexuality remains illegal in Bangladesh, and LGBT campaigners have been targeted by extremists in the past and remain under pressure. Enforced disappearances, freedom of religion or belief, and modern slavery remain UK human rights priorities in Bangladesh.

The UK was consistent and clear that we wanted to see free, fair, inclusive, and peaceful elections which would support Bangladesh's development as a democratic and prosperous country. The Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, delivered this message to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in September during the UN General Assembly. Ministers repeatedly raised concerns about the election with the Government of Bangladesh and with opposition parties throughout 2018. While it was encouraging that all opposition parties eventually contested the elections, there were credible accounts of obstacles, including arrests, which constrained or prevented campaigning by opposition parties, and of irregularities in the conduct of elections on polling day which prevented some people from voting. The UK urged a full, credible and transparent resolution of all complaints related to the conduct of the elections.

The number of reports of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's 'war on drugs', which took place from May to July, supported allegations that the security forces continue to be able to act with impunity. Many incidents from previous years remained unresolved. The FCO continued to raise the importance of compliance with human rights standards with the Government of Bangladesh, including at the Universal Periodic Review at the UN Human Rights Council in May.

Freedom of expression attracted significant UK and civil society attention following the introduction of a new and controversial Digital Security Act in October. The Bangladeshi government sought to reassure the public that the law was designed to protect privacy and maintain religious harmony, but civil society saw it as a restriction on freedom of expression ahead of the general election. The British High Commissioner joined an EU statement raising concerns that the act would unduly restrict freedom of expression and calling for it to be brought in line with the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Minister for Asia, Mark Field, raised the issue with Bangladesh's Information Minister in December.

Bangladesh is ranked 146th out of 180 countries in the 2018 World Press Freedom Index compiled by Reporters Without Borders, the same position as in 2017.³² According to Ain o Salish Kendra, a law and mediation organisation based in Dhaka, 54 journalists were charged in 2018 under the Information and Communication Telecommunications Act, which criminalises the posting online of inflammatory or derogatory information against the state or individuals. Dr Shahidul Alam, a photo-journalist and human rights activist, was arrested under the act in August. The Foreign Secretary, other ministers, and the High Commission raised Dr Alam's case with the Government of Bangladesh. Dr Alam was subsequently released in November.

Bangladesh has a National Plan of Action to Combat Human Trafficking for 2018 to 2020. Progress remained slow, but we continued our work on preventing child labour, child marriage and irregular migration. Our modern slavery strategy pulls these and other thematic work strands together, and we will use the UK Bangladesh Strategic Dialogue in 2019 to pursue these issues in greater depth.

We saw no progress towards the abolition of the death penalty: 191 death sentences were reportedly issued (including 19 for the 2004 attack on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina), although none were carried out. On World Day Against the Death Penalty, the UK joined other EU members to call on the authorities to introduce a moratorium on executions as a first step towards the abolition of capital punishment, and to reiterate our opposition to the death penalty in all circumstances.

The UNHCR estimated that the Rohingya refugee population in Bangladesh increased by a further 14,649 during the period between January and October. This brought the total population of refugees who have fled atrocities in Burma to over 900,000. Bangladesh showed great generosity in welcoming the Rohingya refugees and conditions in the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar improved in comparison with the start of the crisis in August 2017. However, risks remained, including of sexual violence, trafficking, violent crime, abduction, exploitation, and limited access to basic services for men, women and children in the camps. Challenging conditions and issues relating to their legal status under Bangladeshi law meant that access to justice and security remained limited. The UK committed an additional £70 million through UN agencies and NGOs, prioritising the protection of rights, including essential documentation, child protection, anti-trafficking measures, case management for survivors of abuse and exploitation, and legal assistance services. The total UK commitment is £129 million.

Burma (Myanmar)

The human rights situation in Burma remained poor in 2018. In addition to abuses and violations suffered by the Rohingya, human rights violations were committed by the Burmese security forces across the country, including in Shan, Chin, and Kachin States. Lack of accountability for these crimes remained a concern. Widespread gender inequality persisted, with women severely underrepresented in public life. Freedom of expression continued to be restricted, as shown by the sentencing of 2 Reuters journalists in November, and the arrest of others who have criticised the civilian government or the military.

In September, the UN Independent International Fact Finding Mission (IFFM) published its report on the situation in Rakhine, Kachin and Shan States. Drawing on 875 detailed interviews conducted in five countries, the report's recommendations included that senior Burmese military generals should be investigated and prosecuted in an international criminal tribunal for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

In Rakhine State, the IFFM found that the Rohingya continued to be denied freedom of movement, with those remaining in Rakhine state confined to their houses with limited access to markets and livelihoods. The Rohingya continued to fear for their safety, lacking protection against vigilante attacks and theft of property, and fled to Bangladesh at an average rate of 1,733 per month. The UK provided emergency food, safe water and hygiene for nearly one million people living in refugee camps or host communities in Bangladesh. The UK continued to urge the Burmese government to implement the Rakhine Advisory Commission's recommendations, which would be a clear and demonstrable step towards improving the human rights situation.

Human rights violations and abuses were also documented in Shan and Kachin states, where decades of conflict between ethnic armed organisations and the military continued to displace thousands. In December, fighting between the Arakan Army and the Burmese military in Rakhine State escalated, displacing upwards of 10,000 people. A Rakhine nationalist leader was also imprisoned amid civil unrest. The IFFM found evidence of soldiers shooting civilians, and of widespread looting and the destruction of homes. Striking similarities were found in operations and conduct across different states, indicating a systematic approach by the military.

Following the release of the IFFM report in September, the UK invited the IFFM members to brief the UN Security Council in October. The UK played a leading role in the UN General Assembly Third Committee resolution on Burma, expressing concern at the human rights situation. Through the EU, we pushed to maintain pressure on the military by imposing targeted sanctions on 14 individuals. Burma took an encouraging step in June, launching a domestic Commission of Inquiry to investigate alleged violations and abuses. However, questions remain over the credibility and transparency of the inquiry's work. The UK was instrumental in establishing an investigative mechanism through the UN Human Rights Council. This will document, store and analyse evidence of the most serious international crimes and violations of international law, and prepare files to facilitate and expedite possible future criminal proceedings.

Throughout Burma, women continued to be heavily underrepresented in decision-making processes. Only 10% of national MPs are women (the second fewest in ASEAN) and only State Counsellor and de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi holds a national ministerial position. Of the almost 17,000 ward and village administrators across the country, about 100 are women. The British Embassy supported work at the local, state and regional level to improve women's participation in politics, peace, and civil society.

The UK supported the Girls' National Conference to create 'safe networks' for girls to discuss politics with confidence. We launched the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2018 to 2022, with Burma as a focus country. To raise awareness of sexual violence in conflict, the UK invited two filmmakers from Burma to attend the international film festival in London in November, which focused on fighting the stigma associated with sexual violence. Within Burma, the UK supported Action Aid Myanmar to deliver a project which empowers women to identify their safety needs and raise their concerns with the authorities.

Freedom of expression faced further challenges. During his visit in September, the Foreign Secretary raised concerns with Aung San Suu Kyi over the trial of two Reuters investigative journalists, who were sentenced to seven years in jail in November for their reporting on military violations. The Embassy raised concerns over the arrest of two Eleven Media journalists for defamation, and issued a statement condemning the sentencing of three activists for peacefully protesting against the conflict in Kachin. The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners in Burma reported in December that there were 35 political prisoners and 292 awaiting trial. The UK also funded projects to support the mental health of former political prisoners.

In 2019, the UK will continue to work for a sustainable resolution to the situation in Rakhine, with a country-wide focus on freedom of expression and on preventing sexual violence in conflict.

Burundi

The main human rights violations in Burundi in 2018 concerned democracy, freedom of expression, sexual violence, slavery, torture, and discrimination against LGBT people.

The most serious violations of human rights, notably extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, sexual violence, and enforced disappearances continued unchecked. The UN Commission of Inquiry on Burundi corroborated this trend in September.³³ The human rights organisation Ligue Iteka registered 1,884 people killed, 892 tortured and 10,776 persons arbitrarily arrested since the outbreak of the political crisis in April 2015.³⁴ The National Intelligence Service and the police were most frequently responsible for these violations. However, the ruling party's youth league, the Imbonerakure, took an increasing role in the Government of Burundi's security apparatus and in the persecution of political opponents and civil society representatives, while operating outside any formal structure of accountability or state control. The judiciary's lack of independence and a lack of public trust allowed this culture of impunity to flourish. As a result, a deep and widespread climate of fear existed in Burundi where there remained little space for normal democratic freedoms.

On 17 May, the Burundian government held a referendum to amend the Constitution to allow the president to stand for a third term. There were repeated violations of the human rights of people who refused to register to vote, or who were suspected of calling on voters to reject the constitutional amendment. Of voters, 73% voted in favour of the constitutional amendment, which further strengthened and concentrated presidential powers.

Incidents of hate speech continued, increasing the risk of fostering a climate of ethnic confrontation. Many broadcasters, including the BBC, were suspended from reporting within Burundi, and those who continued were subject to a number of limitations, restricting civil society and media space.

The political crisis severely affected the economic and social rights of the population, often resulting in democratic freedoms being undermined. According to a report by the UN Commission of Inquiry on Burundi in September, the Government of Burundi failed to devote the greatest possible share of its domestic resources to the realisation of economic and social rights.³⁵ A 3-month suspension was imposed on the operations of all international NGOs, unless they complied with a range of conditions, including meeting ethnic staff quotas. This suspension had a direct impact on the most vulnerable in the population who rely on NGOs to meet their basic needs.

Burundi had the second highest prevalence of modern slavery within Africa because of compulsory civic service requirements in areas such as education or national defence.³⁶

The Burundian government viewed same-sex relationships as being against Burundian culture, maintaining the ban on homosexuality introduced in 2009. Under Burundian law, a person engaged in sexual relations with someone of the same sex may be fined and imprisoned for up to 2 years. LGBT people continued to face threats of physical intimidation, arrest, and discrimination.

The Burundian government's policy of non-cooperation in multilateral fora continued. It ordered the closure of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Burundi, restricting their capacity to report on human rights violations.

The UK's human rights objectives in Burundi focused on human rights monitoring and minimising violations, opening up political space, and media freedom. Funded by the UK government, the Burundi NGO 'Bridges to Justice' provided training to judicial police officers on respecting the human rights of suspects and those detained. At least 150 judicial police officers from across the country benefited from this training.³⁷ The UK provided funding to support local human rights networks and an independent media outlet. The Minister for Africa, Harriett Baldwin, met the Burundian Foreign Minister at the UN General Assembly, and urged the Burundi government to respect fundamental freedoms for all, stressing the importance of continued engagement within the Inter-Burundi dialogue to resolve the continuing political crisis and ensure open and inclusive elections in 2020.

The UK worked through the EU and UN to intensify international monitoring and reporting of human rights violations and abuses. We lobbied to ensure that Burundi remained on the UN Security Council agenda. The UK supported the rollover of the suspension of direct EU financial support to the Burundian administration, ensuring that EU development funds went directly to programmes which benefited the Burundian population, and not through government channels.

In 2019, the UK will continue to focus on preventing human rights violations and abuses, especially in the run-up to the 2020 presidential elections. The UK will support regional and international efforts to find a peaceful political solution to the conflict within Burundi, in line with the Arusha Accords, and will work with the international community to bring an end to the violence and to hold the perpetrators to account.

Central African Republic

The human rights situation in Central African Republic (CAR) continued to deteriorate. Human rights abuses and violations included killings, torture, conflict-related sexual violence, the recruitment of children to armed groups, attacks on humanitarian workers, civilians, and UN peacekeepers, attacks on schools, hospitals, and places of worship, and denial of access to humanitarian aid. Religion continued to be used as an instrument of violence, with attacks often taking place along ethnic and religious lines.

In September, the UN Independent Expert on the human rights situation in CAR, Marie-Therese Keita Bocoum, reported that more than 60% of violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law had been perpetrated by members of armed groups.³⁸ Widespread and violent clashes continued between various armed groups, including ex-Séléka, (Muslim) rebel factions, Antibalaka (Christian) and criminal gangs, who control large areas of the country, particularly in and around mining areas. The situation was exacerbated by ongoing impunity, as well as contempt for and violation of international humanitarian law by armed militia.

The resurgence of human rights violations and abuses in the country has resulted in large numbers of displaced people and refugees. In November, violent clashes between armed militias in the town of Alindao occurred in internally displaced camps in Alindao, and Batangafo. This resulted in the secondary displacement of 42,000 people, deaths of over 100, and massive destruction to the assets and shelters of already very vulnerable people.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2018 Human Development Indices and Indicators report ranked CAR second from bottom of the 188 countries included in the analysis.³⁹ The 2018 Global Slavery Index estimated that 101,000 people in CAR were absolute victims of modern slavery.⁴⁰ Consequently, the human rights outlook for CAR remained extremely difficult and complex.

The UN Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in CAR cited the fight against the impunity of perpetrators of serious human rights violations and abuses as essential to solving the country's crisis.

The lack of a functioning judicial system resulted in little action being taken to address grave human rights violations and abuses. However, progress was made towards establishing a Special Criminal Court (SCC) with a mandate to end impunity for crimes under international law. The court held its inaugural session on 22 October. The UK commended the effort taken by the CAR government and partners which made this possible. The court will investigate, prosecute and try serious violations of human rights and serious violations of international humanitarian law, in particular the crime of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes committed in CAR since 1 January 2003.

One of the key demands at the Bangui Forum in 2015 on national reconciliation was the call for accountability and justice. The overarching objective of the SCC's work will be to fight impunity, strengthen the rule of law, and, crucially, support victims who lie at the heart of transitional justice. Between November and December, there were 2 high-profile transfers of CAR nationals to the International Criminal Court in The Hague. Those accused are being tried for serious atrocities, including crimes against humanity. This marked a significant step by the CAR authorities in taking the fight against impunity seriously.

In November, the UK participated in the Universal Periodic Review at the Human Rights Council of CAR's fulfilment of its human rights obligations. A UN report containing stakeholder submissions and observations highlighted an array of complex human rights violations and abuses by a number of armed militia.⁴¹ Human Rights Watch noted "the lack of access to the health service for victims of sexual violence due to insecurity, poverty, and stigma".⁴² Furthermore, members of the armed forces continued to use sexual violence as a weapon of war and as a mechanism to punish women and girls, with instances of gang rape being particularly serious. We recommended that CAR should abolish the death penalty, investigate all reported cases of sexual exploitation against children, and establish a national action plan to protect children against sexual violence. The CAR government will respond at the 40th session of the Human Rights Council in March 2019.

In 2019, the UK will continue to work with the UN and EU to improve the political and security situation in CAR, and to provide humanitarian assistance. The UN peacekeeping mission (MINUSCA), renewed from 13 December 2018 to 15 November 2019, will maintain its focus on the protection of civilians. The UK will support the EU training mission in prioritising human rights educational training for CAR's armed forces, ensuring that deployments are effected in a way which minimises the risk to civilians.

China

Civil and political rights in China continued to be eroded, with the situation in Xinjiang in particular attracting international condemnation. China became more active in the UN Human Rights Council, attempting to shift the international understanding of human rights to focus more on development, and on social and economic rights. The continuing detention and trials of human rights lawyers and defenders, and lack of due process and judicial transparency, remained important concerns.

China's escalating crackdown in Xinjiang, particularly against Uyghur Muslims, was a major human rights concern for the UK in 2018 and was an important focus for our lobbying.⁴³ There were credible reports of more than one million Uyghur Muslims and members of other ethnic minority groups being held in extrajudicial 'political re-education' camps, of widespread surveillance and restrictions targeted at minorities, and of families detained and children forcibly adopted. China cited 'de-extremification' as its motivation. We assessed that China's actions were indiscriminate and disproportionate, and risked fuelling ethnic tensions.

Restrictions to the freedom of religion or belief and restrictions targeted at ethnic minorities continued across China, particularly in the Tibet Autonomous Region and other Tibetan areas. Tibetan language advocate Tashi Wangchuk was sentenced in May to 5 years in prison. Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the Dalai Lama's choice of Panchen Lama, remained missing. There were reports of self-immolations in Sichuan.

New regulations introduced in February gave the authorities more control over how individuals practised their religions. In September, the Vatican signed an agreement on the appointment of bishops with China. However, reports of the persecution and detention of Christians continued, and Beijing's largest house church (the Zion Church) and the Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu were closed.

Members of the Falun Gong movement continued to be targeted for peacefully following their belief. Some observers, including some MPs, continued to be concerned that Falun Gong practitioners might be victims of organ harvesting.

The authorities tightened their control over freedom of expression, association, and assembly. Tens of thousands of social media accounts were made illegal, millions of online posts deleted, and many online news outlets closed. LGBT relationships were banned from being shown in the media and forced 'conversion therapy' continued. Chinese Foreign NGO legislation continued to close off international links, causing continued damage to local civil society development.⁴⁴ Freedom House again ranked China bottom in the world for Net Freedoms.⁴⁵ Reporters Without Borders once again ranked China as the country with the most journalists in jail, with 60 in detention.

Lawyers and human rights defenders continued to come under significant pressure. Lawyer Wang Quanzhang was tried on 26 December, having spent over three years in pre-trial detention. Lawyer Yu Wensheng was detained in January, but was not brought to trial. Gao Zhisheng remained missing. Many lawyers working on 'sensitive' issues had their licences revoked. In July, Liu Xia (widow of Nobel Peace Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo) was allowed to leave China, but the next day veteran pro-democracy campaigner Qin Yongmin was sentenced to 13 years in prison. Swedish national (and Hong Kong bookseller) Gui Minhai was detained in January.

The People's Assessors law, adopted in April, sought to promote public participation in the justice system. However this was preceded by the introduction of the National Supervisory Law in March, which legalised extrajudicial detention without access to a lawyer for up to 6 months, including for foreigners. China continued to use the death penalty, with the number of people executed remaining a state secret.

The Prime Minister, Theresa May, raised human rights concerns with President Xi and Premier Li during her visit to China in January. The Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, also raised concerns during his visit in July; and ministers and senior officials issued statements and raised concerns with their counterparts. Ministers and officials met human rights defenders, and British diplomats attempted to attend trials, but were not allowed access. We made recommendations to legislators on several draft laws. We funded projects across China, including on improving access to justice in the criminal system and expanding space for civil society. China did not agree dates for the 25th round of the UK-China Human Rights Dialogue.

The UK was vocal in the UN Human Rights Council. We included China in our Item 4 (situations which require the council's attention) statement at every session, supported EU statements, and participated in China's Universal Periodic Review.

In 2019, we will continue to monitor the human rights situation and to raise our concerns on the full range of human rights issues; we expect our focus will continue to be on Xinjiang.

There was increased pressure on Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy and the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Joint Declaration; particularly freedom of expression and press freedoms. Examples included the refusal of a visa extension and subsequent denial of entry to the Financial Times Asia news editor and the prohibition of the pro-independence Hong Kong National Party.⁴⁶

Colombia

In 2018, the second year after the signing of the peace agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in November 2016, the Colombian government's efforts to ensure universal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms were hampered by limited state capacity in rural areas, slow implementation of legislative measures, and the exploitation of vulnerable Venezuelans escaping the situation in their home country.

The situation for human rights defenders did not improve: according to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 110 human rights defenders were murdered. The Colombian Attorney General's Office reported significant advances in investigations of around half the cases reported by the UN between 2016 and July 2018, but impunity – especially for those responsible for ordering these attacks – remains extremely high.

The Colombian government demonstrated a genuine interest in building a more comprehensive protection system for human rights defenders, but the process remained bureaucratic and lacked capacity. Nonetheless, the issue attracted real attention and political will. For the first time in almost a decade, the Colombian government agreed to a formal visit of a UN Special Rapporteur. During his visit to Colombia in December, Michel Forst, the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, highlighted the magnitude of the problem and issued initial recommendations, observing that there was evidence of systematic targeting in the attacks on human rights defenders.

In 2018, the challenges faced by human rights defenders remained one of the UK's top priorities. We supported over 200 at-risk human rights defenders, through training on how to protect themselves individually and collectively. We provided legal support in 14 emblematic court cases relating to attacks on human rights defenders, following up on every step of the procedure.

The UK continued work to tackle impunity in historic cases of sexual violence which had occurred during Colombia's long internal conflict. We facilitated the documentation of around 2,000 cases presented before Colombia's transitional justice system, introduced after the signing of the peace deal with the FARC.

Colombia's Constitutional Court intervened in a long-running political dispute by ruling that sexual violence crimes would be tried by the transitional justice system (rather than the ordinary justice system), meaning that perpetrators could benefit from the transitional system's alternative punishments, and avoid imprisonment even if convicted. Civil society organisations had argued this was a vital step to foster truth on the scale of the issue and fight impunity.

While the formal conflict has ended, sexual violence remains widespread in Colombia. In the first ten months of 2018, the Colombian government acknowledged almost 20,000 cases, while the Attorney General's office issued over 34,000 protection orders for those deemed at risk of intra-family violence.

The UK provided training for over 150 local authorities and health providers to improve the quality of service for victims of sexual violence. In addition, we provided training on gender issues and gender-based violence to over 1,600 students, women, and community leaders, from nine regions, as part of the global campaign to end the stigmatisation of victims of sexual violence.

Modern slavery became a visible issue on Colombia's human rights agenda. The migration of Venezuelans to Colombia – around 1.3 million are thought to be living in Colombia, many of whom are vulnerable – led to a massive rise in reported cases of sexual exploitation across the country. Between January and October, there were nearly 300 reports of sexual exploitation in the city of Cartagena alone, where a police operation freed nearly 100 Venezuelan victims. According to the Colombian authorities, there are 870,000 children between the ages of 5 and 17 working as child labourers in Colombia.

The UK supported prevention campaigns for 150 girls from vulnerable communities and started a multi-year regional programme – working across eight countries – to identify gaps in routes for modern slavery victims, and develop recommendations for public policy to tackle modern slavery.

In May, Colombia underwent the Universal Periodic Review process at the UN Human Rights Council. The UK statement specifically highlighted continuing violence against human rights defenders, impunity in conflict-related sexual violence, and concerns related to modern slavery, while recognising the efforts of the Colombian government to tackle these challenges.

The UK has sought to address human rights risks in the Colombian mining industry by encouraging compliance with the OECD's Due Diligence Guidance and by fostering partnerships between the private sector and international organisations, local government, and civil society to support responsible mining practices.

The UK provided £71,000 to fund a project to support the engagement of the private sector with Colombia's Truth Commission in its work as part of Colombia's transitional justice process. Concluding in early 2018, the project developed methodologies, tools, and recommendations aimed at addressing and promoting the role of the private sector in the transitional justice process.

In 2019, we will continue promoting the creation of better collective and self-protection mechanisms for human rights defenders and will continue strengthening our work preventing sexual violence, with a special focus on justice access and health services improvement. In addition, we will start the implementation of recommendations to tackle modern slavery in the region.

On the policy side, we will be paying special attention to the recommendations made by Michel Forst on Human Rights Defenders and the advances made by the government one year after Colombia's UPR.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Despite the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)'s diplomatic activity in 2018, there was no visible improvement in the human rights situation. The regime continued to deny its citizens freedom of expression, and of religion or belief, and sought to exercise total control over information and social life. The press were not free to report on the real situation inside the country, to ensure that media coverage did not contradict the regime's ideology and propaganda. Those who did not follow regime orthodoxy faced imprisonment or death.

The DPRK was once again top of the Global Slavery Index in 2018,⁴⁷ with an estimated 2.6 million North Koreans – one person in ten – a victim of modern slavery. People worked long hours for minimal or no payment. This included students and schoolchildren routinely taken out of school to take part in rice or tree planting, or other communal activity.

The DPRK authorities continued to deny allegations of human rights violations and to refuse human rights practitioners access to the country. They refused to cooperate with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights in North Korea, Tomás Ojea Quintana. They continued to reject the 2014 Commission of Inquiry report, which had highlighted wide-ranging and ongoing "crimes against humanity".⁴⁸

In November, Human Rights Watch released a detailed and deeply troubling report 'You Cry at Night but Don't Know Why'⁴⁹ about sexual violence against women in the DPRK. The report detailed numerous accounts of acts of sexual violence committed by high-ranking party officials, prison guards, police officers, prosecutors, and soldiers.

2018 saw memorable steps forward in inter-Korean rapprochement, including the reunion of separated families. Unfortunately, the DPRK regime continued to use family reunions as a political tool, with the welfare of the affected families a minor consideration. Approximately 600 Koreans from 169 families were reunited, but only for a matter of hours. The ageing participants will probably never see each other again.

The UK continued to raise and challenge the DPRK's human rights record in multilateral fora. We were particularly active at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), which in March adopted a resolution to pursue the prosecution of North Korean leaders and officials responsible for crimes against humanity. In June, the then Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, opened the 38th session of the HRC with a call on states to support 12 years of quality education for girls. Following this call, and engagement by our Embassy in Pyongyang, the DPRK decided to become one of the states which signed up to a joint declaration of commitment. This was a positive step which we welcomed. At the 39th session of the HRC in September, we called on the DPRK to engage constructively with the international community during its next Universal Periodic Review in 2019.

At the UN General Assembly in November, the UK was a main sponsor through the EU, and together with Japan, of a Third Committee resolution on the human rights situation in the DPRK. The General Assembly adopted the resolution by consensus for the third consecutive year. The resolution called on the DPRK to protect its population from crimes against humanity, and included strengthened language on gender equality.

We also played a prominent role in enforcing UN Security Council sanctions on the DPRK. That work will continue in 2019, when under UNSCR 2397 all UN member states will be required to repatriate North Korean overseas workers by the end of the year. Such workers are forced overseas to earn money for the regime and often work in conditions tantamount to slavery in their host country. We urge all member states to take seriously their obligations under UNSCR 2397 to repatriate DPRK overseas workers. We are examining the implementation reports submitted to the UN as part of these obligations closely, and continue to engage with states that host DPRK workers in violation of sanctions.

Through DFID, the UK provided \$70,000 to the UNICEF Bangkok regional office in July to contribute to child protection and education campaigns in the DPRK. UNICEF successfully encouraged incremental but important changes in the DPRK system. But there was very little progress in the DPRK's implementation of the recommendations made by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child during their visit in September 2017.

The UK continued to use its bilateral relationship to engage with the DPRK government on its human rights record. Throughout 2018, the Ambassador and other embassy officials raised their concerns in meetings with DPRK officials in Pyongyang, while FCO officials used meetings in London with DPRK Embassy officials to do the same.

In 2019, the UK will continue to raise the human rights situation in the DPRK at every opportunity. We will urge the regime to cooperate fully with relevant UN human rights mandate holders, and allow them immediate and unhindered access to assess directly the human rights situation in the country. In co-ordination with our partners, we will also use the Universal Periodic Review as a means to engage the DPRK in meaningful dialogue on its human rights record, and seek specific areas for constructive engagement and improved performance.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

The human rights situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) continued to deteriorate in 2018. The UN Joint Human Rights Office (UNJHRO) reported 6,831 human rights violations and abuses throughout DRC in 2018, a 5% increase compared to 2017. Human rights violations and abuses included: sexual and gender-based violence, arbitrary arrest and detention, extrajudicial killings, inhumane and degrading treatment, and restrictions to democratic space. UNJHRO reported that 61% of the human rights violations and abuses recorded in 2018 were carried out by state agents. Armed groups continued to target civilians, carrying out serious human rights abuses including mass killings. Impunity for those committing human rights abuses and violations remained widespread.

Restrictions to democratic space, freedom of expression and the right to peaceful assembly remained a concern. On 21 January and 25 February, peaceful demonstrations by the Lay Coordination Committee of the Catholic Church were responded to violently by state officials, resulting in at least 7 deaths. The authorities regularly suspended internet and SMS access across the country in response to demonstrations.

In the build up to elections on 30 December, UNJHRO reported that activists, journalists and members of political parties continued to suffer intimidation and arbitrary arrests, and several protests and political gatherings were repressed by state agents using excessive force. The electoral campaign itself included incidents of violence across the country, the suspension of campaigning in Kinshasa for several days, and a decision from the electoral commission to suspend elections in Beni, Butembo and Yumbi until March 2019, meaning that approximately 1.2 million people were not able to vote in presidential elections. International observers outlined that although election day itself passed with an atmosphere of relative calm, there were incidents of violence in several areas of the country, and there were a number of reported technical and procedural delays, incidents of assisted voting, and congested polling stations. Throughout the preparation for elections, during and after the vote, the UK pressed through the UN, EU and bilaterally for the DRC government to open up political space, release political prisoners, lift a block on internet communications, recognise peoples' right to peaceful assembly, and refrain from using excessive force against protesters.

Armed groups continued to target civilians indiscriminately, including committing mass killings, abductions, torture and sexual violence. UNJHRO documented the continued recruitment and use of children by armed groups and militias, as well as grave human rights abuses including sexual violence, killings and maiming. The UK has focused on long-term stability and peacebuilding in eastern DRC through our contributions to the UN Stabilisation Mission in DRC (MONUSCO), the work of the Department for International Development (DFID), and programmes supported by the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF). In December, the UK supported the rollover of EU sanctions against 14 individuals responsible for human rights abuses and for obstructing the political process.

Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV) perpetrated by state officials and armed groups remained high. Rape, including mass rape, continued to be used as a weapon of war. The UK helped fund Trial International, who provided support for survivors, promoted accountability for sexual violence crimes, built local capacity to effectively document, investigate and litigate sexual violence cases, and provided non-financial assistance to sexual violence survivors. UK-funded education and health programmes set up 820 school-related gender-based violence monitoring committees in four provinces. The aim of the committees was to curb school-based gender violence, provide SGBV survivors with post-exposure prophylaxis kits, and establish a legal clinic for victims. In addition the UK established 47 micro-credit groups which have benefitted 556 women. Dr Dennis Mukwege was jointly awarded the Nobel Peace prize for his treatment of women who have been victims of violent rape and sexual assault and his efforts to raise awareness about rape as a weapon of war. The UK is supporting the scoping phase of a pilot project managed by the Mukwege Foundation to set up a survivors' assistance fund in DRC. This will assess how financial support for survivors of sexual violence can be implemented on a national basis.

The UK has focused other human rights programme work on protecting political space and peacebuilding. We supported projects to educate human rights defenders and promote conflict resolution. The UK helped fund the United Nation Joint Human Rights Office, which tracks human rights violations and abuses in DRC. We financed projects in support of the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative, tackling modern slavery, and improving democratic participation.

In 2019, the UK will continue to support the protection of civilians through our contributions to MONUSCO and humanitarian funding. FCO programmatic work will remain focused on the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative, press freedom, women, peace and security, modern slavery and increasing democratic space following the elections. We will continue to encourage the DRC government, as a member of the UN Human Rights Council, to take steps to demonstrate leadership on respect for human rights. This includes encouraging active cooperation with the UNHRC investigation into the human rights abuses in the Kasais area of southern DRC bordering Angola.

Egypt

The human rights situation in Egypt continued to give cause for concern, with new restrictions on media and online freedoms, and a campaign against civil society by the authorities. Human rights defenders, artists, media workers, and activists were detained on charges of association with terrorist groups, spreading false news, or attempting to overthrow the government. However, there were some positive developments, for example on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB), where President Sisi was vocal about the need for peaceful co-existence between Christians and Muslims, particularly in the face of a continuing terrorist threat. The UK welcomed the announcement on 4 November that the 2016 NGO law would be amended, and the acquittal in December of 43 defendants of the so-called Foreign Funding Case – a long-running investigation into the funding and activities of local and international NGOs operating in Egypt.

The presidential election in March was marked by international concerns about restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly. The National Elections Committee threatened to fine voters for abstaining, while the chief editor of an independent website was detained for translating a New York Times report on electoral bribes.

A series of laws continued to restrict freedom of expression. In particular, the new Law Regulating the Press, Media and the Supreme Council for Media Regulation prohibited the press, media and websites from publishing 'false news', granting the Supreme Council very broad censorship powers, and enabling the criminal prosecution of media workers. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, there were 25 journalists in prison in 2018 – the third highest number in the world.⁵⁰

Media independence continued to decline, with some of the few remaining outlets being closed directly or indirectly. Over 500 websites, including many providing virtual private networks and mainstream news, had been blocked since 2017, preventing Egyptians from accessing independent information.

Egyptian lawyers documented at least 61 arrests targeting the LGBT community in 2018, mostly on charges of 'debauchery' or 'inciting debauchery'. Several detainees reported that they were subject to forced anal examinations while in detention.

The Government of Egypt showed positive intent on gender issues. However, the activities of grassroots feminist organisations were restricted, and in some cases they were prevented from operating altogether. In March, the women's rights organisation, Nazra for Feminist Studies, was forced to shut down its office, as a result of the Foreign Funding Case. Activists who spoke out about sexual harassment also faced legal charges. Amal Fathy was given a 2-year jail sentence for spreading false news and public indecency after publishing a video on Facebook criticising the government's failure to combat sexual violence.

Cases of torture, enforced disappearance, and extended pre-trial detention continued to be widely reported. At least 250 cases of enforced disappearances were documented by lawyers, with thousands of individuals estimated to be in pre-trial detention, often in solitary confinement for extended periods. Journalist and human rights activist, Hisham Gafaar, continued to be held in pre-trial detention beyond the 2 year maximum allowed under Egyptian law, while photo-journalist 'Shawkan' remained in detention months after his release date.

The use of the death penalty continued. At least 542 death sentences were issued – a significant increase on the 331 sentences issued in 2017. While the number of executions is difficult to verify, at least 37 executions were reported in 2018. Both UK and EU statements at the Human Rights Council on 18 September expressed concerns at the use of mass trials, and called for the suspension of death sentences. At least one loophole in the Child Law allows children to stand trial alongside adults in these mass trials, placing children at risk of receiving death sentences.

The UK government consistently raised concerns about human rights with the authorities. The Prime Minister, Theresa May, called President Sisi on 4 April and spoke of the opportunity which he now had to take Egypt further along the path of democratic transition. In September, we raised our concerns at the Human Rights Council, and then Minister for the Middle East and North Africa, Alistair Burt, raised concerns about restrictions on civil society during his visit in October. In November, the Minister for Human Rights and the Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, visited Cairo, to reaffirm our mutual commitment to FoRB and to progress on human rights.

In 2019, we will continue to urge Egypt to uphold the highest standards of human rights, including by protecting the freedoms set out in the 2014 Constitution. Our priorities will include media freedom, civil society, and criminal justice. We will continue to support programmes designed to support Egypt's stability, prosperity, and democracy, including through an independent and flourishing civil society.

Eritrea

The main human rights problems in Eritrea were the continued use of arbitrary detention as a means of suppression, and the indefinite system of national service. A Human Rights Council resolution on 6 July highlighted these concerns and renewed the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Eritrea.

Eritrea has no constitutional government or elections and 2018 saw a continued poor record on arbitrary detention, in particular of political opponents and adherents to unapproved religions. It is not possible to obtain verifiable information, because the government does not allow any access to places of detention and does not share information on detainees. There are consistent reports that numerous high-profile political figures remain in detention, including leaders of an opposition movement (G-15), which tried to force a return to constitutional government in 2001. They remain in detention with no access to justice. In September, there were credible reports that former minister, Berhane Abrahe, was detained following the publication of his book in which he criticised government policy. His wife, Almaz Habtemariam, was already in detention.

The Government of Eritrea permits and regulates the practice of four religions: Orthodox, Catholic, and Lutheran Christianity; and Sunni Islam. Activity by other religions is suppressed and there are frequent reports of groups of peaceful worshippers being detained. Even those practising permitted religions can face censorship. Patriarch Abune Antonios of the Orthodox Church has been in detention for over 11 years. More positively, in June, there was credible reporting that a group of around 90 detainees, thought to include minors, had been released from detention. They had been arrested during protests in 2017 following the closure of a religious school.

Eritrea continued to operate a system of universal and compulsory national service, with few exemptions, which for many was open-ended. The justification for such service had been the frozen conflict – 'no war, no peace' – which had existed between Eritrea and Ethiopia for a number of years. There continued to be credible reports that many of those in national service were allocated poorly paid non-military jobs in industry and construction.

Eritrea was ranked 179th out of 180 in the World Press Freedom Index, with all media closely controlled by the state. Journalists were arbitrarily detained, with one group having been held incommunicado and without trial since 2001. However, there was no attempt to block access to foreign broadcasters, or internet sites.

Impressive improvements on some key indicators of social, particularly women's, rights were made. Eritrea's next national report to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, due in 2019, is expected to show good progress in girls' education; combating Female Genital Mutilation (FGM); combating child, early, and forced marriage; and providing access to healthcare. A new 5-year health strategy drawn up in close consultation with the World Health Organisation included strong plans in maternal and child health. A campaign, launched in December, to achieve Open Defecation Free status by 2020, had positive indirect implications for girls' education, as they are the ones who stay home to tend the sick.

DFID has contributed to tackling FGM in Eritrea through its funding of the United Nations Population Fund and Unicef (UNFPA-UNICEF) Joint Programme on Female Genital Mutilation, which has entered its third phase (2018 to 2021). The programme aims to accelerate the abandonment of FGM through a holistic and multi-sectoral approach at all levels from household to government. The programme has also placed more emphasis on gender norm transformation to highlight the importance of gender roles and power relations in changing social attitudes towards FGM.

In July, the presidents of Eritrea and Ethiopia signed a peace declaration, ending years of hostility between the 2 states. This was cemented by a further peace agreement agreed in Jeddah on 16 September, coming a few days after the formal re-opening of the border. Many Eritreans thereafter enjoyed free movement to Ethiopia and reunification with family members for the first time in a generation.

Despite these positive and welcome political developments, Eritrea did not announce any meaningful reform of national service, nor release any political detainees from detention. In September, the Minister for Africa, Harriett Baldwin, raised our concerns about this lack of progress with Eritrean Foreign Minister, Osman Saleh.

In 2019, the UK will continue to press for meaningful reforms in Eritrea, particularly regarding national service and justice, and for the release of political activists, journalists, and worshippers detained arbitrarily by the state. Eritrea's Universal Periodic Review report (UPR), due in January 2019, will be an important point of engagement with the international community on human rights. The UN and the EU supported Eritrea in implementing some of the recommendations from the 2014 UPR as part of a UNDP-led programme, focusing among other things on issues such as the development of the rule of law, and the rights of children and the disabled. In 2019, we will offer the Government of Eritrea support in implementing the 2019 UPR recommendations, and making progress on human rights-related issues more generally.

Iran

Iran continued to violate human rights. The UK government's main concerns were the widespread use of the death penalty, limitations on the right of women to participate fully in society, the lack of access to legal representation and of fair trials for dual nationals (covered in more detail in the consular section), and violations of the right to freedom of expression, and to freedom of religion or belief. One positive development was the application of the Anti-Narcotics Law, introduced in 2017, which appeared to have reduced the number of people sentenced to death in Iran.

Not all executions in Iran are made public so it is difficult to accurately monitor how many take place each year. NGOs estimate there were 285 executions in Iran in 2018.⁵¹ Though significantly lower than the figure for 2017, Iran still ranks as one of the most prolific users of the death penalty globally. This included eleven public executions, a practice which usually involves death by hanging in a public square, and at least 6 executions of juvenile offenders, under 18 at the time of their arrests. Execution of juvenile offenders violates the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, both of which Iran has ratified.

At least 15 executions for drug-related crimes took place in 2018, according to estimates by the organisation Iran Human Rights. In applying the 2017 Anti-Narcotics Law, the Prosecutor-General announced in July that 1,700 cases of prisoners sentenced to death or to life imprisonment for drug-related crimes had been reviewed, with most sentences reduced to imprisonment, and 1,300 more were outstanding and awaiting review in court. The death penalty still applies to the production and distribution of particular amounts of opium, heroin, and methamphetamine, as well as for armed smugglers, ringleaders, and financiers.

This positive news was tempered by the Iranian authorities' response to the protests which started at the end of 2017 and continued into 2018, and in particular by reports of deaths in custody, including from torture, of those detained for participating. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights issued a statement in January stressing that peaceful protests must not be criminalised, and highlighted reports that more than 20 people, including an 11-year-old boy, had died, and hundreds had been arrested during the protests. The UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Iran issued a statement in November, calling on Iran to guarantee the rights of those arrested, including the right to fair legal proceedings.

There were wider concerns with freedom of expression in Iran. At least nine journalists and 20 citizen journalists, including bloggers and social media activists, were imprisoned during 2018. The government exerted some form of control over the majority of newspapers, TV, and radio stations, and restrictions were in place on the use of the internet. During the protests, the authorities suspended the Telegram messaging app (consistent with the Iranian authorities' sustained attempts to control social media). On 30 April, a judicial order was issued stating that Telegram would also be permanently banned on the grounds that it was being used to spread 'propaganda' and to incite 'terrorist activities'. A number of major social networking websites, including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, remain banned in Iran.

Iranian authorities continued to violate the right to freedom of religion or belief, and to discriminate against ethnic minorities. Members of religious minorities faced restrictions and discrimination for peacefully manifesting their beliefs. For example, members of the Baha'i faith were once again subject to persecution. The authorities continued to pursue the economic persecution of Baha'i, including through shop closures, and by the denial of mainstream education. Despite notionally benefiting from constitutional recognition and protection, Christians continued to be persecuted in a systemic and institutionalised manner. In June, four recent converts to Christianity were each sentenced to ten years in prison, and in December 114 Christians were arrested on charges of proselytising.

Women in Iran continued to be denied the same rights and privileges as men, and to face discrimination, ranging from mandatory wearing of the hijab, unequal rights in marriage, divorce, and child custody, to being unable to attend sporting events. Protests against the compulsory wearing of the hijab continued, resulting in the arrest and imprisonment of several women.

Iran continues to deny consular access to dual nationals in detention. In November, the Foreign Secretary visited Iran and raised the cases of a number of British-Iranians detained in Iran, including that of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, who was arrested while on holiday in Tehran in 2016. We will continue to raise our dual national detainee cases with Iran, including making requests for medical treatment and access to legal representation.

In 2019, we will continue to hold Iran to account for its human rights record. We will support human rights resolutions on Iran at the UN Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly, as we did in 2018 as co-sponsors, and will continue to support the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Iran. We will also coordinate with EU Member States on the next EU-Iran human rights dialogue.

Iraq

The principal human rights concerns in Iraq in 2018 were the lasting effects of Daesh atrocities, the use of the death penalty, gender disparity in society and politics, violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression, and the excessive use of force against demonstrators. Following significant military progress against Daesh at the end of 2017, 4.1 million internally displaced persons had safely returned home by December 2018 to begin rebuilding their lives, while 1.8 million remained displaced. National elections in May were held according to democratic standards and were largely peaceful. However, the continuing security threat of Daesh, preparation for elections, and a protracted period of government formation distracted the Government of Iraq from addressing major human rights issues.

There was a pressing need to address the societal effects of Daesh atrocities, in particular the stigma associated with survivors of sexual violence, children born of rape, and widows of Daesh members. The UK funded projects to reduce stigma, promote community action to prevent sexual violence, and facilitate access to services for survivors. The UN Investigative Team, established following UN Security Council Resolution 2379, was deployed to Iraq to embark on its mandate to hold Daesh accountable by collecting, preserving, and storing evidence of Daesh crimes. This included supporting and complementing investigations carried out by the Iraqi authorities, and exhuming mass graves. The first mass grave exhumation took place on 15 March 2019 in the village of Kojo, the hometown of Nadia Murad. The UK-led Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative is working with partners to develop the Murad Code. Drawing on the International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict and in consultation with Nadia Murad's Initiative, the Murad Code will capture international standards and best practice that governments, international agencies and NGOs should adhere to when gathering evidence for judicial purposes.

The use of the death penalty remained a significant concern over the summer, when the then Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi expedited cases of convicted Daesh members, with strong public support. The Iraqi Ministry of Justice announced that 32 executions had taken place between January and August. The UK publicly condemned the use of the death penalty on a number of occasions, and continued to press the Government of Iraq to improve transparency on death penalty cases, and adhere to international standards on due process and fair trials.

In the run up to the national elections in May, the intimidation of female candidates forced some to withdraw their candidacy. The UK and EU jointly and publicly criticised this behaviour. Despite Iraq's Constitution requiring 25% of MPs to be female, women remained sidelined from political decision making. October saw the murder of 2 high-profile women, Souad al Ali and Tara Fares, demonstrating the continuing threat of violence against women. The UK regularly highlighted the importance of gender equality in society and in politics, including by supporting the formation of a women's caucus to strengthen the voice of Iraq's 83 female MPs. We worked closely with the UN Assistance Mission to Iraq to support the development of Iraq's second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security.

Lack of security, access to services and jobs, and marginalisation in general were the principal concerns for Iraq's religious and ethnic minority communities, which in turn accelerated the emigration of members of minority groups. We consistently raised with the Government of Iraq, including the new Foreign Minister, the need to protect vulnerable people, including members of minority groups. By December, we had contributed over £14.4 million to the UN's Funding Facility for Stabilisation to help the Government of Iraq rebuild communities in liberated areas, including the Ninewa Plains, home to many minority groups.

While Iraq's media environment remained relatively free in comparison to the wider Middle East region, serious issues persisted. In April, Human Rights Watch reported arbitrary detentions and violence by Kurdish security forces against protesters and journalists. In July, the Government of Iraq shut down the internet for several days to disrupt the organisation and reporting of protests in southern Iraq. In September, Amnesty International reported that the Iraqi security forces had responded with excessive force and violence to these protests. The UK repeatedly underlined the importance of an effective and impartial media. To support fundamental media freedoms, we funded training for 280 journalists, media specialists, social media activists, and university professors.

In 2019, the UK will both press and support the Government of Iraq to make substantive reforms to be more inclusive, protect vulnerable people, deliver services to all Iraqis, and ensure that the conditions which enabled Daesh do not return. The formation of a new Government of Iraq is an important opportunity to continue Iraq's positive human rights trajectory, but we need to maintain the pressure. We will continue to press for improvements on human rights, with a particular focus on the women, peace and security agenda, and on freedom of religion or belief. Ensuring the rule of law and fundamental human rights are crucial to Iraq's long-term stabilisation and security.

The State of Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories

2018 saw continued violations by the Israeli government of international human rights and international humanitarian law in the context of Israel's occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza (Occupied Palestinian Territories, or OPTs). There were also continued human rights abuses by the Palestinian Authority (PA), and by Hamas, the de facto administration in Gaza.

The humanitarian crisis in Gaza was exacerbated by unrest linked to the 'Great March of Return' protests. Palestinian demonstrations along the Israel/Gaza security fence included violence and the launching of incendiary devices into Israeli territory. The Israeli Defence Forces were criticised for using live fire in response. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reports that 184 Palestinians were killed (180 by live ammunition), including 35 children and medical and humanitarian workers. Over 25,000 Palestinians were injured in demonstrations in Gaza between 30 March and 31 December. The UK supported calls for an independent investigation.

1,153 rockets and mortars were launched indiscriminately from Gaza towards Israel, reaching a peak of 450 on 12 November. The Israeli Air Force responded with strikes against Hamas and militant sites. Sniper fire, rockets, missiles, and explosive devices from Gaza killed 3 and injured 20 in Israel.

Israel continued to impose strict movement and access restrictions in Gaza. The UK funded projects to ease those restrictions and the conditions caused by them.

Israel continued its systematic policy of settlement expansion, a breach of international humanitarian law, and advanced 7,663 housing units in the West Bank, which the UK continued to oppose. The then Minister for the Middle East, Alistair Burt, condemned plans announced in December to construct over 2,800 settlement units.

The number of acts of violence and vandalism against Palestinians by extremist settlers in the West Bank rose, with the OCHA reporting that the monthly averages were the highest recorded since 2014. OCHA reported that 31 Palestinian citizens had been killed in 2018 by Israeli forces and settlers in the West Bank. The Israeli Security Agency reported that 9 Israeli citizens, more than double the number in 2017, had been killed by Palestinians from the West Bank, as well as five Israeli soldiers.

Israeli demolitions of Palestinian houses and other structures continued: 459 structures were demolished or seized, and 472 Palestinians were displaced, including 216 children. We continued to urge the Israeli government not to demolish the Bedouin village of al-Khan al-Ahmar. Through the funding of legal aid, the UK continued to support Palestinians whose homes faced demolition or who faced eviction in Area C of the West Bank.

We continued to seek improvements in the treatment of Palestinians in Israeli detention, with a particular focus on minors, of whom 203 were detained at the end of December, the lowest monthly figure in 2 years. At the end of December, the total number of Palestinians held in administrative detention by the Israeli authorities increased to 494 (compared with 425 held at the end of 2017). UK ministers and officials made repeated representations to the Israeli government about detention practices. We continued to fund projects providing legal aid to minors and capacity building to local lawyers.

In October, Human Rights Watch published a report documenting arbitrary arrest and torture in both PA and Hamas custody. We raised our concerns with the Palestinian Prime Minister, who committed to a package of institutional reforms. We continued to urge the PA to respect human rights, ensure that complaints of mistreatment or arbitrary detention were properly investigated, and continue to improve the security sector's compliance with human rights standards.

In June, PA President Mahmoud Abbas signed instruments of Palestine's accession to seven human rights conventions. However, the PA continued to restrict space for civil society actors in the West Bank, as well as limit freedom of expression. In Gaza, Hamas continued to exercise strict control of civil society.

LGBT rights remained restricted in the OPTs. Same-sex sexual activity, although legal in the West Bank, remained taboo in Palestinian society. It is illegal in Gaza, carrying a ten-year prison sentence.

Hamas issued 13 death sentences in 2018. While the UK maintains a no-contact policy with Hamas, we have made clear publicly, including through EU statements, our objections to its use of the death penalty.

There was limited progress as far as women's rights in the OPTs were concerned. In July, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women welcomed efforts to reduce discrimination, while underlining the need to adopt a comprehensive definition of discrimination against women and to incorporate commitments effectively into law.

Israel remained a robust open democracy with a vibrant civil society. However, pressure continued on those criticising Israel's conduct in the OPTs. This included rhetoric by politicians, pressure on foreign governments to cease funding for certain NGOs, and a reported increase in visa delays and denials for activists. The Israeli parliament passed the Nation State Basic Law in July, which downgraded the status of Arabic language from an official language. We expressed concern that the law might undermine the equality of members of minorities, in particular of Israel's Arab Christian and Muslim community. At the end of 2018, several petitions challenging the legality of the law were pending in the High Court.

In 2019, we will continue to work towards improving human rights, and will support renewed peace negotiations leading to a 2-state solution, including through our project work with NGOs. We will continue to raise our concerns with the Israeli government on instances constituting a breach of international human rights or international humanitarian law in the context of Israel's occupation of the OPTs. We will continue to oppose human rights abuses by the PA and Hamas.

Libya

Human rights abuses in Libya in 2018 included loss of life, limits on freedom of expression, and discrimination against women and girls. Libya's instability and insecurity exacerbated these problems; Libya lacked a stable and unified government or credible institutions, leading to impunity for armed groups and to a divided society. The UK worked to address this situation through a comprehensive approach: we fully supported the UN-led political process to support progress towards greater security and stability, and a range of UK programming aimed to tackle some of the most acute human rights challenges. UK programming also supported efforts to improve human security, including through removal of explosive threats.

Episodic violence contributed to the displacement and death of many civilians. Fighting in September in Tripoli killed over 100 people, including civilians, and indiscriminate shelling affected several neighbourhoods. Meanwhile, the Benghazi-based Libyan National Army's continued campaign to regain control of Derna resulted in civilian deaths.

A lack of basic institutions resulted in limited or no access to basic services. Instances of arbitrary detention, including of migrants, remained a concern. However, in September, the authorities released dozens of prisoners whose incarceration had exceeded the legal period of detention without charge. The death penalty remains part of the Libyan legal framework, although executions have not been carried out for several years. In August, the Criminal Circuit of the Tripoli Court of Appeal announced 45 death sentences for militia members. The UK voiced its concern both through an EU statement and directly with the Libyan Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The fatality rate for migrants crossing to Europe increased,⁵² although their overall numbers decreased. The situation for migrants remained dire, with thousands at serious risk of harm and exploitation. The UK continued to press the Libyan authorities to improve conditions in overcrowded detention centres, and to offer alternatives to detention. We were pleased that the UNHCR Gathering and Departure facility finally opened in December, and will monitor how effectively it operates. UK funding supported a number of EU projects, including offering basic humanitarian assistance in official detention centres, facilitating voluntary returns, and addressing upstream issues such as human trafficking. Meanwhile, the UK supported the coastguard and navy in securing Libya's maritime borders in a manner compliant with its human rights obligations, focusing on rescue activities and disrupting human trafficking.

Women continued to face discrimination, and gender-based violence was widely underreported. We continued to raise gender-related issues at the highest levels, but also tried to reach the wider population: the #GenderNovember campaign promoting gender equality reached political leaders, activists, international actors, and nearly 300,000 Libyan citizens through UK in Libya social media, and over 800,000 through our CSSF-funded media project El Kul. Libya remained a focus country of our National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. A CSSF-funded social media project produced and promoted content relating to peacebuilding and women's empowerment, reaching over one million Libyans. Through other CSSF-funded work, we sought to strengthen female political and economic empowerment and leadership, including through training, and had some success in increasing the space for women to engage at the national, local, and community level. We continued to push the Presidency Council to enact the provision in the Libya Political Agreement for a women's empowerment unit, which was established in November. UK programming included support for the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, which worked with local partners across Libya to address discrimination against women and girls.

Education was another priority. An estimated 546,000 children were out of school, and 300,000 were in need of emergency education support in Libya. We worked with the Ministry of Education and like-minded international partners to develop a programme that will improve the delivery of quality education to girls and boys, through providing a cohort of newly promoted female teachers in school leadership roles with leadership skills.

There were continued and widespread restrictions on freedom of expression, association, religion or belief, and assembly.

Press freedom remained under attack. In the 2018 World Freedom Press Index, Libya ranked 162nd of 180 countries.⁵³ In July, Reporters Without Borders warned that the foreign media's ability to operate had "declined dramatically".⁵⁴ The Foreign Media Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs increased pressure on international media outlets and journalists, including through attempts to introduce punitive new media regulation, using safety as a justification. For local media, the power and prevalence of militias created a culture of fear and intimidation, with journalists at risk of arrest or attack. For instance, a journalist was found dead in August near Sebha, with signs of his having been tortured.

The UK worked with international news organisations to lobby at the highest levels to encourage support for a diverse, free and fair media. This included a CSSF programme on content creation, animation development, and training provision, underpinned by freedom of speech. The UK also funded the appointment of a Strategic Communications Adviser to the Government of National Accord to champion media freedom.

The challenges identified in 2018 are likely to continue in 2019. The UK will continue to advocate improved human rights and deliver programming to address the most acute challenges. The UK will continue to support UN-led efforts towards a sustainable political settlement. Achieving stability throughout the country, underpinned by a unified and inclusive government and transformed security conditions, would constitute the single most powerful contribution to improving the human rights situation in Libya.

Republic of Maldives

The human rights situation in Maldives deteriorated significantly in the first 9 months of 2018, with the erosion of political and civic freedoms, and attempts to undermine the independence of the judiciary and parliament. However, the election in September of a new president representing a broad coalition of parties which campaigned in support of human rights and democratic values, and substantive changes thereafter in tone and action, generated expectations of future improvements.

The Government of Maldives declared a State of Emergency on 5 February, suspending fundamental freedoms enshrined in the Constitution, including the rights to peaceful assembly, and privacy, and freedom from unlawful arrest and detention. This followed an order by the Supreme Court on 1 February that nine political leaders should be immediately released and their cases retried. The Supreme Court also ordered that suspended MPs should be permitted to sit in the People's Majlis (parliament), so that they could exercise their duties in accordance with the Constitution and the law.

In a statement on 5 February, the then Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, called on the Government of Maldives to end the State of Emergency peacefully, restore all articles of the Constitution, take immediate steps to implement the full order of the Supreme Court, and permit and support the full, free, and proper functioning of the People's Majlis. The UK played a leading role in securing the EU Council Conclusions in February, expressing concern at the deteriorating situation, and signalling the possibility of targeted measures against the government should the situation not improve.

The State of Emergency was lifted on 22 March, but the Government of Maldives continued to tighten its grip on power. Trials of high-profile figures arrested during the State of Emergency (including the Chief Justice) progressed rapidly through the courts. At the UN Human Rights Council in March, in a joint statement supported by over 40 countries, the UK expressed grave concern that the human rights situation had deteriorated significantly. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights had earlier described the outlook as "an all-out assault on democracy". At the UN Human Rights Council in June, the UK expressed concern about the detention of members of the judiciary and opposition leaders, the sustained misuse of parliamentary process, and continued restrictions on basic freedoms.

The Council of the EU adopted a sanctions framework in July, which provided for targeted restrictive measures against persons and entities responsible for serious human rights violations or abuses. Restrictions on the media continued. In March, at the UN Human Rights Council, the UK expressed concern that the Maldives' Defamation and Freedom of Speech Acts were used to penalise broadcasters for airing speeches from opposition rallies, and that journalists were targeted, attacked and pepper sprayed by the police. An opposition-aligned channel suspended broadcasting temporarily in February, when the police refused to offer protection to journalists who were threatened.

Women continued to be underrepresented in public life. Social attitudes, poor facilities, and geographic isolation contributed to limited education opportunities for girls, particularly in more remote islands. While primary education levels were generally balanced, there were 112 boys in secondary education for every 100 girls.

During 2018, Maldivian ministers repeated their intention to resume implementing the death penalty. In December, the new government voted against a UN General Assembly resolution in support of a moratorium on the death penalty.

The UK funded a number of small capacity-building projects focusing on human rights, gender equality, and building election-monitoring capability in civil society. We worked with the United Nations Population Fund to encourage public debate about gender issues, and to increase the visibility of and recognition for young Maldivian women leaders willing to make Sustainable Development Goals a reality. We supported a workshop which brought together Maldivian journalists and civil society to network and share experiences with their regional counterparts, who had faced similar challenges on media freedom in the past.

The new president was sworn in to office on 17 November, and published an ambitious '100 day agenda' which included some important human rights commitments, such as freeing all political prisoners, submitting a Child Rights Protection Act to parliament, and rejoining the Commonwealth, which Maldives left in 2016.

In 2019, the UK will work with international partners to strengthen democratic institutions, weakened under the previous government, with a particular focus on parliament, the judiciary, and media. We will also open an Embassy in Malé, which will significantly improve our ability to support human rights work.

Pakistan

The main human rights concerns in Pakistan in 2018 were restrictions on freedom of expression and on civil society, intolerance towards and discrimination against members of religious and other minorities, failure to uphold women and children's rights, the prevalence of bonded labour, and the continued imposition and use of the death penalty. There were positive developments, including strengthened laws aimed at protecting transgender persons, and at tackling human trafficking. More remained to be done to ensure full and effective implementation of human rights legislation.

Elections in July marked an unprecedented second successive transfer of power from one full-term civilian government to another. New legislation made improvements to the process, incorporating recommendations from the observers of the 2013 elections. However, a number of terrorist attacks sought to disrupt voting, including one of the deadliest attacks in Pakistan's history in Mastung, Balochistan on 13 July, which killed 150 people.

Freedom of expression and the ability of civil society to operate came under increased pressure. Press freedom was repeatedly challenged, including through reports of the intimidation of journalists. Reports of enforced disappearances of human rights defenders, journalists, and others continued. In October, 18 international NGOs were instructed by the Government of Pakistan to leave the country, having not been granted registration under a process introduced in 2015.

Allegations of discrimination and violence against members of religious minorities continued, especially against Ahmadiyya Muslims and Christians, but also against Hindus, Sikhs and Shia Muslims. Misuse of the blasphemy laws was frequent. In October, the Supreme Court acquitted Asia Bibi, a Christian woman who had been convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to death in 2010. There were recurrent reports of forced conversions to Islam and forced marriages to Muslim men of Hindu and Christian women. In May, an Ahmadi mosque in Sialkot was damaged by anti-Ahmadiyya protestors. The election law, which places members of minorities on a segregated voter list, continued to act as a barrier to Ahmadi Muslim voters participating freely in elections. In a positive step, the Pakistan and India governments opened the Kartarpur Corridor in November, allowing pilgrims to access Sikh holy sites in both India and Pakistan.

In Pakistan, discrimination and violence against women and girls remained common. Pakistan ranked 148th out of 149 countries cited in the World Economic Forum 2018 Gender Gap Index, with a female literacy rate at just 44%. Despite stronger laws to protect women from violence, including from 'honour killings', enforcement remained weak.

Modern slavery, including bonded and child labour, continued to be a major problem. The Global Slavery Index 2018 estimated that over three million people were living in modern slavery in Pakistan. In May, the National Assembly passed anti-trafficking legislation. UK expert advice helped strengthen the legislation to protect vulnerable members of society from exploitation.

Pakistan retained the death penalty for 27 separate offences. Particular concerns remained over prisoners with mental and physical illnesses on death row. In February, the National Assembly passed the Juvenile Justice System Act, strengthening the safeguards against minors being tried as adults.

The use of military courts to try terrorism suspects continued. These courts lack transparency and are not subject to independent scrutiny, making it difficult to assess their compliance with international standards. There were ongoing reports of the detention of prisoners without trial, and of extrajudicial killings by the security forces.

In May, the National Assembly passed the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, banning discrimination based solely on sexual identity and expression. The government also committed to providing medical facilities, psychological care, and adult education to the transgender population. However, homosexuality remained a crime, and lesbian and gay persons continued to face discrimination and the threat of violence.

In 2018, the UK continued to urge Pakistan to improve the human rights situation for all its citizens. We engaged with the government, parliamentarians, and civil society across the full range of human rights issues, including freedom of religion or belief, modern slavery, freedom of expression, and abolishing the death penalty. British ministers raised concerns about the rights of people belonging to minorities and modern slavery with the government at a senior level. UK support facilitated the registration of 405,000 women voters. Projects supported by the Global Britain Fund sought to improve citizens' awareness of their constitutional rights and tolerance of diversity. Online animations reached an audience of 45 million, alongside classroom-based workshops in Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces.

UK aid continued to support the Pakistan government in making education more inclusive, including supporting the enrolment of children with disabilities, encouraging the promotion of tolerance, inclusion, and respect for minorities, and improving education outcomes for girls. New interventions were launched with government and local communities to promote the rights of children, young people, women, and members of religious minorities and excluded groups. These helped members of these groups strengthen their control over their own development.

Following the elections, the new Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf government committed to establishing institutions for the protection of minorities, tackling inequality, and guaranteeing press freedoms. The Ministry of Human Rights, headed by Dr Shireen Mazari, began work on a range of legislation, relating related to the rights of members of minorities and of people with disabilities, the protection of children from abuse, improved access to justice, and protection against torture.

In 2019, we will support projects to improve awareness of modern slavery, and to promote religious tolerance and diversity. Our Conflict, Stability and Security Fund will continue to help strengthen democracy and human rights institutions, and to support the justice system become more accountable to citizens. We will continue to encourage Pakistan to take the necessary steps towards meeting its international obligations on human and labour rights in full, in line with its commitments under the EU Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus framework.

Russia

The human rights situation in Russia continued to deteriorate in 2018, with abuses of human rights recorded across the country. Freedom of assembly, religion or belief, and expression came under particular attack.

Protest activity continued, linked to domestic economic issues and non-democratic elections. The authorities responded by further reducing space for protest, including widespread violations of the right to freedom of assembly. The presidential elections in March saw a coordinated campaign of harassment targeting opposition activists. During September's regional elections, 1,018 people were arrested while protesting against pension reforms.

The use of vague 'extremism' laws to crack down on independent media and voices critical of the Russian government affected many ordinary Russians. There were regular reports of citizens being arrested or detained for 'extremism' simply for exercising their right to freedom of speech. Space for freedom of religion or belief was constricted further. Jehovah's Witnesses in particular faced further persecution following their designation in 2017 as an 'extremist organisation'.

The Russian LGBT community continued to face a hostile environment. Russia failed to conduct a credible investigation into the detention, torture, and reported killings of homosexual men in Chechnya in 2017. The UK was one of 16 states to invoke the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe Moscow Mechanism in November, setting up an independent investigation, but Russia refused to co-operate. The UK publicly called for international human rights standards to be upheld, and for an end to discrimination against LGBT people.

The operating environment for NGOs in Russia continued to be extremely challenging. Oyub Titiev, head of the Chechnya division of the human rights NGO Memorial, faced long-term detention on drug charges which were widely acknowledged as politically motivated. The Minister for Europe and the Americas, Sir Alan Duncan, issued a statement on 18 January pressing the Chechen authorities to ensure Mr Titiev's safety and his right to a fair trial.

There were numerous reports of torture in prisons and detention centres, attracting an unusual degree of criticism domestically. A Russian investigation was set up to assess treatment of prisoners across the country. Nonetheless, a Russian journalist who released a video of one of the worst examples of torture was forced to flee Russia following harassment.

The UK used the 2018 World Cup as an opportunity to promote human rights in Russia. We ran or supported human rights-related events, and used our public diplomacy channels to support the rights of LGBT people, anti-racism activity, and access to sport for all.

Russia continued to commit human rights violations beyond its borders, including in illegally annexed Crimea and via support to separatists in eastern Ukraine. On 4 March, a Novichok nerve agent was deployed in Salisbury, UK, by the Russian military intelligence service the GRU. This first offensive use of a nerve agent in Europe since the end of the Second World War left 4 people in a critical condition, was linked to the death of Dawn Sturgess and endangered the lives of many more.

Human rights in Crimea remained under severe pressure, particularly freedoms of assembly, expression, association, belief, and movement. Ethnic minority groups were targeted by Russian authorities. Crimean Tatars were disproportionately affected through regular raids on homes and mosques. Russia continued to prevent the operation of representative institutions of the Crimean Tatar community, in violation of an order by the International Court of Justice in 2017.

Arbitrary arrests, detentions, and enforced disappearances contributed to a climate of fear in Crimea. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reported torture and sexual violence in detention centres. In December, the UK supported a resolution at the UN General Assembly calling again for Russia to uphold its obligations under international law in Crimea, and to allow access for international human rights monitors.

Oleg Sentsov, a Ukrainian filmmaker from Crimea, has been detained since 2014 on terrorism charges which are widely recognised as fabricated. In 2017, Mr Sentsov went on a 145-day hunger strike, demanding the release of over 65 Ukrainian political prisoners. The UK called repeatedly for his release, including in a statement by Sir Alan Duncan on 21 August.

In eastern Ukraine, the UN estimated that the Russian-backed conflict had resulted in over 10,300 dead and 1.5 million internally displaced. Russia continued to violate the 2015 Minsk Agreements by supplying weapons and personnel to separatists, and by supporting illegitimate elections in eastern Ukraine in November. The OHCHR reported that detention, mistreatment, and violence had been carried out with impunity by Russian-backed separatists. 2018 marked the tenth anniversary of the Georgia-Russia conflict. Russian influence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the breakaway regions of Georgia, continued to contribute to infringements of human rights. This included intimidating members of civil society organisations. With the majority of crossing points closed and increased fencing along the Administrative Boundary Line, restrictions on freedom of movement continued. This affected access to education, healthcare, and property. There were also credible reports of discrimination against ethnic Georgians' ability to access identity documents. The UK supported Georgian resolutions at UNGA (on internally displaced persons) and the UN Human Rights Council (requesting access for the OHCHR).

The UK will continue to support human rights in Russia in 2019. We will also act where Russia violates human rights outside its borders. Together with our international partners, we will attend trials, support human rights defenders, and focus international attention on Russia's human rights violations. We will continue to work with civil society as a whole, including in promoting media freedom.

Saudi Arabia

The positive trajectory of social reform in Saudi Arabia continued in 2018, particularly the increased participation of women in society. However, the observance of civil and political rights in Saudi Arabia continued to deteriorate. The reduced political and civil space resulted in the mass arrests of journalists, activists, clerics, and opposition figures, increased use of terrorist courts to prosecute activists, and the murder and harassment of dissidents overseas. We continued to have concerns about the implementation of the death penalty and the treatment of migrant workers.

There were some improvements in women's enjoyment of human rights. From June onwards, women were allowed to drive. Women's economic participation increased, and more professions became open to women, including roles in the military. Although female labour force participation remained low at 23.4% (compared with 21% in 2017), Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia's economic reform programme, aimed to increase this to 30%. However, guardianship laws still required women to obtain permission from a guardian to apply for a passport, travel abroad, or marry.

Between May and August, the Saudi authorities arrested prominent women's rights defenders. At least 10 of the women arrested remained in detention at the end of 2018. In November, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch alleged that some of these women had been subject to torture and mistreatment. The Prime Minister, Theresa May, raised these cases with the Crown Prince, Prince Mohammad bin Salman, and other British Ministers raised our concerns with the Saudi authorities on a number of occasions. As of the end of 2018, we continued to call for these women to have access to legal representation, and for their rights to due process to be upheld.

Arrests of political dissidents, prominent clerics, journalists, and academics continued. In June, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms while countering terrorism, Fionnuala Ni Aoláin, raised concerns about the use of the Special Criminal Court (SCC) to prosecute human rights defenders, the use of counter-terrorism legislation to suppress free speech, and the failure to investigate allegations of torture. From November, accredited diplomats were no longer permitted to observe trials at the SCC. The UK raised concerns about the use of SCC to try cases beyond the scope of internationally accepted definitions of terrorism, and made formal representations to the Saudi government on the prevention of diplomatic observation of trials. We also raised our concerns regarding the human rights situation during Saudi Arabia's Universal Periodic Review in November.

There was a deterioration in freedom of expression and freedom of the press in Saudi Arabia. In October, the dissident Saudi journalists Jamal Khashoggi was murdered in the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul. The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, raised our serious concerns with King Salman and with the Crown Prince, and urged that those responsible should be held to account and that the Saudi authorities should give credible assurances that such a crime could never be repeated. We called for accountability and for the launch of legal proceedings in accordance with international standards.

According to statistics issued by the Saudi Press Agency, and confirmed by NGOs, Saudi Arabia executed 149 people in 2018 (compared with 146 in 2017). In 2018, a law was passed codifying the age of majority for some crimes which attract the death penalty. We continued to express to the Saudi authorities at all levels our strong opposition to the death penalty in all circumstances. The UK, together with EU partners, also continued to press for a reduction in death sentences and executions, for the application of EU minimum standards, and for implementation to be consistent with the provisions of Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

In November, there were reports that a group of twelve Shia men were due to be executed imminently. The UK government made formal representations to the Saudi government and continued to monitor the situation closely. As of the end of 2018, these executions had not been carried out.

It remains illegal in Saudi Arabia to practise publicly a religion other than Islam, with penalties including imprisonment. The Crown Prince met the Archbishop of Canterbury during his visit to London in March, and Saudi Arabia welcomed a high level delegation from the Vatican in April.

Migrant workers in Saudi Arabia remained vulnerable to abuse and exploitation as a result of the sponsorship system giving disproportionate power to the migrant's sponsor. Employers still confiscated passports, despite legislation forbidding the practice.

In 2019, we will continue to identify opportunities to work with the authorities in Saudi Arabia and with NGOs to encourage further steps towards women's full participation in society. We will look for opportunities to work with Saudi Arabia to increase media freedom. We will continue to focus on the application of the death penalty when not consistent with international minimum standards. Officials will continue to attend trials where possible. We will continue to raise specific cases of concern with the Saudi Arabian authorities at a senior level.

Somalia

The human rights situation in Somalia remained challenging in 2018 due to ongoing insecurity and political instability which have been further exacerbated by competing Middle Eastern interests, most notably the Gulf Dispute. There has been a continuation of violations of the right to life (including extrajudicial killing); gender-based violence; exclusion of women and members of minorities; recruitment of children into armed groups; and restrictions on media freedom. Overall, human rights protections and domestic mechanisms in the country remained extremely weak. Protracted humanitarian crises contributed to the displacement of over 2.6 million people, restricting many people's access to adequate food, housing, and security, and exacerbating gender-based violence.

Key developments included Somalia's election to the UN Human Rights Council and accession to the Convention on the Rights for Persons with Disabilities. The Federal Government at the Somalia Partnership Forum in July also strengthened its commitment to support the protection of human rights.

The UK played a major part in international efforts to strengthen security, stability, and the rule of law, necessary to underpin stronger human rights protections, including through a fairer and more stable political settlement. There was agreement to establish universal suffrage for Somali citizens in national elections. However, poor relations between the Federal Government and Federal Member States as well as competing interests from the region continued to block progress on commitments to achieve a more inclusive and lasting political settlement.

The presidential election in South West State in late 2018 was marred by violence and unrest. The UN raised human rights-related concerns about the handling of the election.

The UK worked closely with the African Union Mission in Somalia and with the Somali security forces to raise awareness of human rights standards and ensure that the security forces were in a position to protect civilians from abuse. The UK delivered gender training in the security sector to improve protection for vulnerable women and girls. The UK is supporting the drafting of legislation and national policy, compliant with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, for processing former child combatants, including a process for effective screening and rehabilitation.

Accountability for the security forces remained crucial, and we reiterated calls made at the Human Rights Council for Somalia to move forward with full implementation of the independent Human Rights Commission.

Somalia retained the use of the death penalty. We continued to call on the Federal Government to introduce a moratorium on its use.

UK investment helped to counter the threat posed by radicalisation, terrorism, piracy, and unregulated migration, which was exacerbated by the large number of internally displaced people and large refugee populations in neighbouring states.

Child, early, and forced marriage continued to occur, but some evidence suggested that it might be declining. We continued to support the delivery of relevant legislative

protection, such as the Sexual Offences Bill, pressing for it to provide clarity on the age of consent.

The UK welcomed the Federal Government's commitment to bring legislation on female genital mutilation (FGM) to parliament. It is important that any legislation or policy recognises that all forms of FGM constitute violence against women and girls.

Somalia continued to have one of the world's highest proportions of primary-age children out of school. The UK supported education programmes across Somalia, including the Girls' Education Challenge, helping almost 100,000 marginalised girls through improved access to education, better quality teaching, and life skills training.

At the Global Disability Summit⁵⁵ which the UK co-hosted in July, Somalia committed to establish a National Disability Agency and to introduce legislation to protect the rights of persons with disabilities. This constituted a major step forward in a country where those with physical and mental disabilities, in spite of their relatively high numbers, continued to endure significant stigma.

Journalists continued to face considerable restrictions, arbitrary detention, and intimidation from the security forces, as they attempted to exercise their right to freedom of expression. The European Parliament passed a resolution on Somalia which called on the Somali government to respect the right to freedom of association, and recognise the leadership of the National Union of Somali Journalists.

In Somaliland, a new law has been drafted which will decriminalise most media offences and end the practice of journalists being jailed. The UK supported Somaliland's first ever Women's Journalism Prize to reward, acknowledge, and publicise journalism.

In 2019, the UK will continue to work closely with the Federal Government to support Somali-led efforts to strengthen protection of human rights for all Somalis. We will support the political settlement which is required to protect and promote human rights and the rule of law, and will contribute to building accountable and capable security forces which can offer civilians effective protection. We will urge respect for rule of law throughout electoral processes, and will raise concerns of violations against freedom of expression.

South Sudan

Human rights in South Sudan were negatively affected by continuing conflict and a worsening humanitarian situation. Key issues of concern related to the targeting of civilians by all sides, widespread rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence, the recruitment and use of child soldiers, the displacement of civilian populations, restrictions on freedom of expression, and the detention of political prisoners. According to the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan (the Commission), as well as other UN human rights bodies and NGOs, many cases may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity.⁵⁶

The humanitarian situation did not improve, as food insecurity intensified. By June, nearly 60% of the population (over 6 million people) were facing acute food shortages, including 1.7 million on the edge of famine, and 47,000 in famine-like conditions. The parties to the conflict, including the Government of South Sudan, compounded the suffering by actively continuing to impede access to humanitarian aid.

Sexual and gender-based violence remained a pervasive hallmark of the conflict. In November, Médecins Sans Frontières reported that groups of men in military uniforms and civilian clothing had brutally raped, beaten, and robbed over 150 women and girls in the town of Bentiu. Girls as young as ten and women over 65 were among the survivors. The attacks occurred despite commitments made by the parties to the 12 September peace agreement to cease all forms of sexual and gender-based violence.

These attacks were just one appalling example of the continued use of sexual and gender-based violence. In February, the Commission reported widespread evidence of rape, gang-rape, forced stripping, forced sexual acts, castration, and genital mutilation: all committed with impunity by government and opposition forces alike. In July, the UN reported on the use of rape as a weapon of war in ruthless attacks perpetrated in the most part by government forces, seemingly to terrorise civilians. The victims included girls as young as 4, and pregnant and lactating mothers. The social stigma associated with such violence contributes to the further victimisation of survivors. The government took no meaningful action to address the shortfall in provision of healthcare or judicial services, despite the overwhelming needs of survivors. The negative attitudes towards women in South Sudanese society continued to fuel the prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence.

The devastating impact of the conflict on South Sudan's children did not improve. In September, the UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict reported that all parties to the conflict had committed grave abuses and violations against children. In September, Amnesty International reported that soldiers had killed children as young as two by swinging them against trees. The UN estimated that government forces were responsible for nearly 60% of attacks on schools, and that 2.4 million children had been deprived of education since 2013. Rates of child marriage remained among the highest in the world and were a major cause of girls' inability to access education – UNICEF reported in March that 52% of South Sudanese girls are married by the age of 18.

South Sudan was ranked 144th out of 180 countries on the World Press Freedom Index. The closure of media organisations, the blocking of websites, and the arrest and intimidation of journalists all continued. The space in which the media could operate narrowed, with many forced to self-censor after years of sustained repression. The government continued to use detentions to silence criticism. While some detainees were released in October, many continued to be held without trial or access to a lawyer, often in violation of the government's peace agreement commitments. Conditions in detention, including the use of physical and mental abuse by government authorities was a major concern.

In 2019, our priority will be to support the implementation of the peace agreement. It is too early to determine whether it will result in lasting peace, without which the human rights situation cannot improve. The UK will continue to urge all parties to demonstrate genuine commitment to full implementation of the peace agreement. To address widespread impunity, we will push the government to take action on transitional justice mechanisms as called for in the 12 September agreement, including establishing the Hybrid Court (an independent judicial body combining elements of domestic and international law to prosecute those bearing criminal responsibility for atrocities). Where impunity persists, we will consider alternative options for action against those undermining peace and stability. DFID will remain at the fore of the response to the humanitarian crisis, providing support to address sexual and gender-based violence, food insecurity, and to promote girls' education.

Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

The human rights situation in Sri Lanka was mixed in 2018. Key concerns included increased inter-communal tensions, the slow delivery of key reconciliation commitments, delays in introducing new human-rights compliant counter-terrorism legislation, and a stalled transitional justice process. A 51-day constitutional crisis, which began in October, further disrupted effective delivery on these points, although it ultimately confirmed the resilience of parliament and the judiciary.

In February and March, anti-Muslim riots took place in Ampara and Kandy, resulting in three associated deaths, the damage or destruction of over 400 Muslim-owned properties, and a 12-day State of Emergency, during which some social media platforms were blocked by the government. Over 100 arrests were made, although no trials have taken place as yet. In May, a prominent extremist Buddhist monk was convicted on multiple counts of harassment and intimidation of witnesses. We continued to support district inter-religious dialogue, including through our Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) programme, to help mediation in inter-communal tensions.

In May, the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka was upgraded to 'A' status by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions, in recognition of its efforts to promote and protect human rights and its full compliance with the Paris Principles relating to NHRIs. The constitutional crisis which began in October further highlighted the important role of independent institutions, with the judiciary delivering a number of important determinations, upholding and safeguarding the Constitution. Reports of intimidation of the media and civil society increased during this period, while throughout the year human rights defenders in the north and east raised increased concerns of surveillance and harassment. Minister for Asia and the Pacific, Mark Field, made statements in October and November, setting out our concerns over the constitutional crisis. The Minister in a further statement in December welcomed the progress which had been made subsequently towards a peaceful resolution of the political situation, and reiterated the UK's commitment to supporting Sri Lanka's work to improve governance and safeguard human rights across the country. Respect for gender and child rights was mixed. The number of elected female officials significantly increased under a new 25% quota introduced for local elections in February. However, conservative Muslim community leaders continued to reject calls to reform the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act, which permits the marriage of girls as young as 12. In June, the British High Commission in Colombo supported the 14th Colombo Pride Week, for a third consecutive year. Despite no recent prosecutions of homosexual acts, LGBT people continued to face social stigma and discrimination.

Notwithstanding political rhetoric threatening the re-introduction of the death penalty in the second half of 2018, Sri Lanka voted in favour of the UN moratorium on the death penalty in December. The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka and a number of international NGOs continued to report allegations of torture and other ill-treatment by the security forces. Sri Lanka acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture on 5 December 2017. It entered into force for Sri Lanka in January.

A draft Counter Terrorism Act, intended to replace the much criticised Prevention of Terrorism Act, was tabled in parliament in October. Following several petitions related to human rights, the Supreme Court determined that specific clauses in the act would need to be amended, further delaying its adoption.

The Government of Sri Lanka remained committed to combating human smuggling and trafficking. In August, the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister attended the 7th Bali Process Ministerial Conference, reiterating commitments to combat people smuggling.

At the UN Human Rights Council in September, the UK welcomed the progress of the Government of Sri Lanka in implementing HRC resolution 34/1, while identifying a number of areas for improvement, including a need to show more progress on constitutional reform, the establishment of transitional justice mechanisms, and the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act. In January, the report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights acknowledged some improvement in the overall situation in Sri Lanka, but noted a lack of progress on accountability for conflict-related violations. The long-awaited Office of Missing Persons began operations in February, and submitted an interim report with recommendations in September. In October, parliament passed the Office of Reparations Bill, although it is yet to be operationalised. There was some further return of military occupied land, but the size of the military presence in the north remained similar to 2017. Throughout the year, including at CHOGM in April, and during a visit to Sri Lanka in October, Mark Field urged the government to make more progress on its HRC commitments.

In August, Mark Field announced an extra £1 million of funding to help with the resettlement of displaced families in the north and east of Sri Lanka, followed by an additional £400,000 in October to add to existing UK support for de-mining work in the north. The UK has provided Sri Lanka with a total of £8.3 million CSSF funding from 2016 to 2019, including for police reform, de-mining, inter-faith dialogue, and support to the UN's Peacebuilding work.

In 2019, the UK will continue to press for further progress on human rights, including efforts to improve press freedoms, tackle gender inequality, and encourage the reform of discriminatory laws. We will continue to urge the government to deliver on its commitments reflected in HRC resolution 34/1.

Sudan

The human rights situation in Sudan was mixed, with positive engagement and policy changes contrasting with the worsening situation on the ground. The decision to hold over 200 political activists without trial for peacefully protesting in February and March, and the use of violence against protestors in December, were particular low points. The daily lives of Sudanese people continued to be affected by laws relating to public order and emergency, with reports of women and young men in particular being harassed, and of human rights violations resulting from military policing deployments in civilian areas. A lasting peace deal covering Darfur and the regions of South Kordofan and Blue Nile remained elusive, and we continued to have grave concerns about the threat to the human rights of internally displaced people and of those within conflict zones.

Sudan engaged constructively with the UK on these and wider human rights issues, although commitments to sign up to major international treaties were not met, and routine human rights violations continued. The UK welcomed Sudan's decision to support the opening of an Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights before September 2019.

The UK continued to press the case for clear conditions to govern the planned drawdown of the UN/African Union Hybrid Peacekeeping Mission in Darfur (UNAMID). In December, the UK welcomed a statement by the President of the UN Security Council which prioritised the protection of human rights in Darfur, as UNAMID withdraws.

Threats to the freedom of the media remained a very serious concern, with the security services regularly harassing journalists, and seizing newspapers in retribution for critical articles. We continued to engage with parliamentarians and government on the draft media law, making clear the importance of protecting freedom of the media.

Over 200 individuals were arrested by the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) during political demonstrations at the start of 2018, with a number of further arrests during the protests which started in December. We were very concerned by reports that demonstrators had been mistreated in NISS detention.

The UK made clear that the Sudanese government needed to enact the promised reforms to the National Security Act, and to ensure that all detainees were treated according to international standards. In March, the British Embassy funded a workshop for senior Government of Sudan representatives, which focused on the steps needed for Sudan's ratification of the Convention against Torture.

While freedom to worship is generally accepted in Sudan, we expressed concern at ministerial level and via public messaging, over a range of infringements of religious freedoms. These include restrictions on Christian schools, the refusal of permits for places of worship, and cases of church seizures and demolition – although we are pleased to note that this situation after UK interventions and constructive engagement with faith leaders has resulted in positive change.

The situation faced by women and girls in Sudan remained of deep concern. Sexual and gender-based violence continued to be carried out with impunity. The plight of 19-year-old Noura Hussain attracted international attention when she was sentenced to death for killing her husband after he raped her. We called for the sentence to be overturned, and welcomed the court's subsequent decision to do so.

Through DFID's Sudan Free of Female Genital Cutting programme we continued to advocate for the passing of the draft law making FGM illegal. We supported the passing of laws in two states banning the practice, and worked with state bodies, organisations and communities to build support for efforts to end FGM in a generation. We also committed to a further £15 million programme to combat FGM in Sudan.

We continued to lobby the Government of Sudan to effect meaningful change to the country's human rights situation, including at the April and November rounds of the UK-Sudan Strategic Dialogue. The Minister for Africa, Harriett Baldwin, and Minister for Human Rights, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, each visited Sudan, meeting key activists, and encouraging senior ministers to introduce human rights reforms. In September, the UK successfully led negotiations for a resolution on Sudan at the UN Human Rights Council. The resolution renewed the mandate of the Independent Expert on Sudan, and called for the establishment of a country office for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

We engaged constructively with the Government of Sudan on issues relating to forced labour and people trafficking, including the need to improve processing and protections for those freed from traffickers. We expressed concern about reports of abuse by officials in adult detention facilities of child victims of trafficking, of raids on safe houses, and of intimidation by security forces of community safe house employees. UK project funding supported victims of trafficking, rule of law work in conflict areas, the effective participation of women and members of marginalised groups in the peace and other political process, the strengthening of parliament, and capacity building for political parties.

In 2019, we will continue to urge the Government of Sudan to observe and protect the constitutional rights of all Sudanese citizens, and to implement the recommendations of the inclusive political discussions which took place in Sudan's National Dialogue, and Universal Periodic Review. We will continue to promote reform and work with the government to provide technical assistance and capacity building. We will focus on freedom of the media, particularly in view of the 2020 presidential elections, and will work with OHCHR and the Government of Sudan to support the opening of a fully-mandated OHCHR country office. We will also support Sudan's ratification of international treaties including the Convention against Torture and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Syria

There was no improvement in the grave human rights situation during the continuation of the Syria conflict in 2018. There were numerous, credible reports of the most serious human rights violations and abuses. The Syrian regime was the main perpetrator, although Daesh, other proscribed terrorist organisations, and a number of other armed groups also committed abuses.

The Syrian regime recaptured several former opposition-held areas in Syria, at a huge human cost. The regime attacked heavily populated areas indiscriminately, particularly in Eastern Ghouta. Following a request to investigate by the UN Human Rights Council, the UN Commission of Inquiry (Col) concluded that between February and April, through the widespread and systematic bombardments of civilian inhabited areas and infrastructure, and the continued denial of food and medicine to besieged civilians, pro-government forces had perpetrated crimes against humanity and inhumane acts causing serious mental and physical suffering.

Fighting in 2018 led to over one million people being newly displaced. The Col report in September focused on displacement and the failure of all warring parties to take precautions to protect civilians. It highlighted violations committed by the regime, Kurdish forces and opposition groups on different fronts of the conflict, and the displacement of thousands of fighters and civilians as part of 'evacuation deals'.

In areas where hostilities ceased and control returned to the regime, the security apparatus resumed its violations against civilians. Despite protection 'guarantees' in so-called 'reconciliation agreements', there were credible reports of arrests of former opposition leaders in areas retaken by the regime.

In March, the Col highlighted the arbitrary detention of tens of thousands of individuals, particularly by the Syrian authorities and affiliated militias. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights estimated that 60,000 to 80,000 people have gone missing since the start of the conflict. Over 16,000 are estimated to be held by the Syrian regime. The true number may be substantially higher. The Assad regime issued notices of deaths which had occurred in detention, but failed to take steps to investigate or bring those accountable to justice.

Following the capture of Afrin by Turkish-supported armed groups in March, the Col found reasonable grounds to believe that armed group members committed the war crimes of hostage taking and pillage and highlighted "the glaring absence of the rule of law" in the district.

The use of chemical weapons in Syria continued, with a number of instances of alleged use reported to the Col and to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). The most brutal incident, given the number of casualties, was the regime's chlorine attack on Douma in April, which killed as many as 75 and injured over 500 people. Following this, the UK participated in targeted air strikes with the US and France to alleviate human suffering by degrading the Syrian regime's chemical weapons capability and deterring further attacks.

Women continued to be disproportionately affected by the conflict, including through displacement, and sexual violence. Many female-headed households faced particular challenges since women are not permitted to own or inherit property. As a consequence, they faced difficulties in accessing services, livelihoods, and the legal system. The UK continued to work for the protection of women's rights in Syria. During the June session of the HRC, the UK hosted an event on women's participation in the political process, demonstrating the UK's commitment to achieving the UN Special Envoy's objective that 30% of the participants in the Syria peace talks should be women. We used the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict to highlight brave Syrians providing medical support and helping those affected by sexual and gender-based violence to seek justice. In November, the UK arranged a briefing of UN Security Council members by the Col.

International NGOs continued to express concern about civilian casualties during the campaign by the Global Coalition and Syrian Democratic Forces to liberate areas of north-east Syria from Daesh control. All UK and other Global Coalition Against Daesh missions comply fully with international humanitarian law, and the UK takes every precaution to minimise the risk to human life from airstrikes. The coalition investigates all credible claims, and the results of any investigation are published.

In areas where it retained control, there were continued reports of terrorist acts committed by Daesh including hostage-taking, torture, and summary executions targeted against civilians of different religion or ethnicity. This included the barbaric killing and kidnapping of Syrians, including women and children, from the Druze community in the southern city of Sweida.

The UK continued to apply diplomatic pressure to highlight violations and abuses and to push for a swift end to the conflict, including through our leadership on the Syria resolution at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC). We used programme funding to support accountability, including through a £250,000 contribution to the UN's International Impartial and Independent Mechanism. In June, States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention agreed a UK-led proposal to empower the OPCW to attribute responsibility for chemical weapons attacks in Syria. In July, the UK led an international effort to evacuate 422 White Helmets volunteers and family members from Southern Syria as they faced an urgent threat to their lives from a regime advance. Of these, 99 were subsequently resettled in the UK.

In 2019, the UK will continue to press for improvements in the appalling human rights situation, and to demand accountability through the UN Security Council and HRC, and to support organisations working on accountability and assisting victims. We will also continue to support UN efforts to reach a political settlement to end the conflict.

Turkmenistan

The UK's main human rights concerns in Turkmenistan were the continuing allegations of torture and poor prison conditions, a lack of freedom of opinion and expression (including access to information), limited freedom of religion or belief, significant gender discrimination, and a failure to protect the rights of LGBT people. Turkmenistan's acceptance of a range of Universal Periodic Review (UPR) recommendations signalled progress, but there was little evidence of implementation. Most human rights defenders still work outside the country.

The UK submitted three recommendations to Turkmenistan during its UPR. It accepted two: signing the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture; and working with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to eliminate forced labour during the cotton harvest. But it rejected our recommendation to take measures to protect and respect the right to exercise freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression. In total, Turkmenistan accepted 172 UPR recommendations and rejected 19.

At the 10th EU-Turkmenistan human rights dialogue in June, the EU raised concerns about torture, conditions in detention, freedoms of movement, opinion and expression, association and peaceful assembly, and of religion or belief.

In March, the UK, with like-minded Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe heads of delegation, wrote to the Turkmen Ambassador in Vienna to express concern over the continuing incommunicado detention of over 100 victims of enforced disappearances, in particular those detained since the attempted coup against former President Niyazov in 2002. The Turkmen reply gave information about only 18 individuals and no information on the rest. During its UPR, the Turkmen delegation continued to deny the use of torture. They said that the government had introduced measures to prevent torture or ill-treatment in detention, although they also accepted some torture-related UPR recommendations. In November, the British Ambassador and other heads of mission were given permission to visit the men's medium security prison at Tejen, but were denied a request to visit the high security Ovadan Depe detention centre, where NGOs reported that political prisoners had been tortured. There were reports from outside Turkmenistan that the authorities had permitted some visits by relatives to prisoners in Ovadan Depe.

In May, Turkmenistan's Human Rights Ombudswoman attended the UK-chaired Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe Human Dimension Committee meeting on gender equality. Her first annual report, in June, flagged the need for citizens to understand their basic rights, and for state actors to understand their obligations. But her report did not address key specific human rights issues in Turkmenistan. The British Embassy promoted gender equality in their outreach activities, benefitting from having a female Ambassador as a role model. The UK supported a United Nations Population Fund project which empowered girls living in rural communities. The project provided leadership, innovation, and civic engagement workshops in Ashgabat and 5 regions.

The media in Turkmenistan remained under state control and foreign publications were prohibited. Most social media and many internet sites remained blocked. Turkmenistan accepted one UPR recommendation on freedom of opinion and expression. But it denied that there were restrictions on media outlets which were critical of the government, and claimed that there was widespread access to social media and the internet.

NGOs outside the country and the foreign media reported that state employees were forced to pick cotton to meet quotas set by the state. Turkmenistan agreed to the UPR recommendation to work in partnership with the ILO to eliminate the use of forced labour in the cotton harvest. In response to a further UPR recommendation to establish a time-bound national plan to address this issue, Turkmenistan said the new Constitution prohibited forced labour and the 'worst forms' of child labour. There were credible reports, largely from NGOs outside Turkmenistan, of surveillance of and reprisals against activists monitoring the harvest.

There has been no improvement in the human rights situation of LGBT people. Turkmenistan noted a number of UPR recommendations on the elimination of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, but said that this contradicted "the existing views of civil society". The Turkmen government noted, but did not accept, recommendations to take legislative measures to protect people against all forms of discrimination, including discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and to repeal the criminalisation of consensual sexual relations between adults of the same sex.

NGOs such as Forum 18 reported that Turkmenistan imprisoned a number of conscientious objectors to military service, including Jehovah's Witnesses. This appeared to have reversed a previous decision in 2014 to punish conscientious objectors through corrective labour, or through suspended prison sentences. Turkmenistan noted a UPR recommendation to reform government practices which restrict freedom of religion or belief, and to ensure that individuals are not punished for expressing their opinions or beliefs.

The British Embassy used project funding to support the United Nations Development Programme, raising awareness of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and promoting human rights education. Lord Ashton, Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, raised the UK's human rights concerns with the Turkmen Foreign Minister during a visit to Ashgabat in October.

In 2019, the Embassy will continue to work for improvements in human rights in Turkmenistan, and specifically will press the Turkmen authorities to implement the UPR recommendations which they accepted and noted.

Uzbekistan

The UK welcomes the clear progress there has been on human rights in Uzbekistan. The UK's primary concern in Uzbekistan centres on the restrictions which continue on freedom of association, of opinion and expression, and of religion or belief. Uzbekistan continued to make progress in strengthening transparency, improving government accountability and reforming the security services. Uzbekistan accepted 201 recommendations during its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) at the UN Human Rights Council in May, while rejecting 11.

At the UPR, the UK acknowledged progress on eliminating torture, on protecting labour rights, and on the release of political prisoners. Uzbekistan accepted UK recommendations to eradicate the drivers of forced labour, to implement recommendations by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, and to guarantee freedom of expression, assembly and association by ending the harassment of journalists, human rights defenders, and those exercising their constitutional right to peaceful protest.

Uzbekistan continued to engage with international human rights bodies and NGOs. Human Rights Watch now visit regularly. Foreign journalists routinely visit and report, but the BBC has yet to accredit a local correspondent. More political prisoners were released, but others remain in detention. In May, a judge acquitted three journalists. He found the fourth, Bobumurod Abdullaev, accused of attempting the overthrow of the constitutional order, guilty on a lesser charge, and released him into community service. The judge called for an investigation into the security service's handling of the case. However, international NGOs reported the harassment of some released political prisoners. Ex-prisoners cannot appeal their convictions, and with a criminal record it is difficult to get a job, integrate in society, or travel abroad.

There was progress on press freedom, despite significant self-censorship. Uzbek media, particularly local media, gained confidence in criticising policy and politicians, although direct criticism of President Mirziyoyev remained rare. But there was regular critical discussion of government policy, online and via social media, although websites such as Facebook and YouTube were regularly inaccessible. An outcry against photographs shared online which publicly humiliated officials led to the dismissal of a deputy prime minister.

In May, Uzbekistan relaxed restrictions on NGOs, but registration remains difficult including for those dealing with human rights. President Mirziyoev called on parliament and MPs to hold the executive to account more effectively, and parliament's role was strengthened. But there was no progress on the registration of independent political parties.

Following the visit by the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Ahmed Shaheed, to Uzbekistan in 2017, the Uzbek government continued addressing his recommendations, for example on the registration of religious groups, reducing the requirement for numbers of followers in a locality from a few hundred to 50. Nonetheless, it remained difficult for new religious groups to register, or for existing groups to register to practise in new locations. Bureaucratic processes remained opaque. Applications could be rejected without explanation, particularly at local level. By law, only the 16 registered religious groups were permitted to practise. Individuals and other groups seeking to practise their beliefs remained vulnerable. In November, NGOs and media representatives reported involvement by the security services in a raid on an unregistered Baptist church.

In September, the US removed Uzbek cotton from its list of goods produced through child labour. The Uzbek government continued measures against forced labour by again raising the wages of cotton pickers, increasing fines for forced labour, and dismissing or fining senior officials. The government made regular public statements about the illegality of forced labour. Human rights defenders worked with government officials to raise awareness about forced labour and to train regional officials. For the first time, human rights defenders monitored the harvest alongside the International Labour Organisation. Preliminary results indicated that 7% of the workforce were subjected to forced labour, 46% down from 2017.

Homosexuality remained illegal, and LGBT people continued to face discrimination. There were reports of police persecution of members of the LGBT community, and wider social stigmatisation of LGBT people. Uzbekistan rejected UPR recommendations on decriminalisation of same-sex relations and elimination of discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Reports of torture have decreased. President Mirziyoyev publicly spoke out against torture, and legislation passed in November 2017 made evidence gained through torture inadmissible in court. In January, the President removed the leadership of the National Security Service, which had often been cited for violating detainee rights, and curbed the powers of the service. CCTV was installed in detention facilities and police stations. The newly established Human Rights Ombudsman was given the right to visit prisons without advance notice. Human Rights Watch accompanied the Ombudsman on a prison visit in December. Uzbekistan continued work towards ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture.

The UK increased programme funding from £900,000 in 2017 to £2 million. We contributed to the process of drafting new laws on media freedom, brought law enforcement bodies and journalists to work together on a safer media working environment, and engaged the BBC to train journalists. The Westminster Foundation for Democracy worked with the Uzbek parliament on scrutiny and research. We funded the work of the UK's Government Partnerships International with the Ministry of Justice on the delivery of justice sector reforms and of public services. Through other projects, we worked to improve governance, strengthen the rule of law and civil society, advance gender equality, and prevent domestic violence.

In 2019 we plan to continue to focus on further promotion of human rights including strengthening media freedom, enhancing the professionalism of journalists, strengthening the capacity of civil society, and supporting the rule of law including through further transparency and anti-corruption measures.

Venezuela

Democracy and the rule of law in Venezuela weakened further in 2018. This affected civil and political rights, including freedom of expression, and reduced civil society space. In addition, the economic crisis is estimated to have halved the size of Venezuela's economy between 2014 and 2018. Hyperinflation and ongoing shortages of food, medicines, and medical supplies reduced the ability of Venezuelans to meet their most basic needs.

According to the NGO Caritas Venezuela⁵⁷, 63% of children examined in 2018 suffered from malnutrition, and the Global Acute Malnutrition Index, which measures the percentage of children under the age of 5 with acute to severe malnutrition, stood in September at 9.6%. There were also reports of malnourished pregnant women. Medical and pharmaceutical associations reported an increased number of cases of malaria, diphtheria, and measles, and a lack of available treatment.

Violence remained a serious problem; the local NGO Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia⁵⁸ estimated that there were over 23,000 violent deaths in Venezuela in 2018 (around 81.4 per 100,000 population).

In February, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) said that she would launch a preliminary examination into the situation in Venezuela. Separately, in May, a panel of independent international experts appointed by the Secretary-General of the Organisation of American States found that "reasonable grounds exist to believe that crimes against humanity have been committed in Venezuela dating back to ... 2014". The panel identified a "widespread and systematic pattern of abuse targeting an identified segment of the civilian population", and recommended that the Secretary-General submit the report and the evidence collected to the Office of the Prosecutor of the ICC.

In June, the UN OHCHR issued a report documenting "human rights violations committed by State authorities since August 2017, including the use of excessive force in non-protest-related security operations, new instances of arbitrary detentions, torture, and ill-treatment", as well as cases of extrajudicial killings and lack of access to justice for victims and their families. The OHCHR requested "full and unfettered access to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the human rights situation". The UK supported the proposal of a visit by the OHCHR, including during Venezuela's Universal Periodic Review at the Human Rights Council (HRC).

In September, the HRC adopted a groundbreaking resolution on Venezuela, instigated by Latin American and Caribbean members. The resolution noted that "hundreds of thousands" of Venezuelans had been "forced to leave their country as a result of, inter alia, a political, economic, social, and humanitarian crisis that seriously affects their human rights"; and expressed "its deepest concern at the serious human rights violations" in the country.

The dispute between the Venezuelan government and the opposition-led National Assembly deepened. The National Constituent Assembly continued to overrule the democratically elected National Assembly, and called a presidential election, which took place in May. The UK stated that the election had been “deeply flawed”, as did the EU and other international partners.

In November, a joint report⁵⁹ issued by the United Nations Refugee Agency and the International Organisation for Migration, said that the number of refugees and migrants from Venezuela worldwide had reached 3 million. Of these, almost 2 and a half million were in Latin American and Caribbean countries, posing serious challenges to their governments. The Venezuelan migrant crisis is said to be one of the largest in the hemisphere’s history.

A new law against hatred, approved by the National Constituent Assembly in 2017, imposed further restrictions on media outlets, political parties, and ordinary citizens. For example, 2 firemen were imprisoned and then released on parole for mocking President Maduro on Twitter. The NGO Reporters Without Borders ranked Venezuela 143rd out of 180 countries in its 2018 World Press Freedom Index. The NGO Freedom House continued to rate the internet in Venezuela as ‘not free’. There were credible local NGO and media reports of the national telecommunications authorities actively blocking specific media sites, and forbidding internet service providers from hosting these sites. The Venezuelan Press Workers’ Union reported that 115 media outlets had closed between 2013 and 2018 (41 print media, 65 radio stations, and 9 television channels).

The UK supported projects to deliver improvements on its human rights priorities in Venezuela. These included projects to strengthen democracy, to protect civil society space by fostering freedom of expression and building capacity for local human rights defenders, and to promote gender equality by tackling violence against women and promoting female business leadership, as well as a groundbreaking regional modern slavery project which benefited eight countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

In 2019, the UK will continue to focus on advancing democracy, protecting human rights defenders, and combatting modern slavery, and will increase our work on protecting freedom of expression, given the complex Venezuelan backdrop of political, social, economic, humanitarian, and security-related challenges.

Yemen

The human rights situation worsened in Yemen in 2018. Since 2015, the conflict in the country has had a devastating effect on the lives of Yemenis. In March, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) stated that there had been 6,100 verified civilian deaths since March 2015, with the actual numbers of casualties likely to be far higher. In June, the UN reported that there are over 2 million internally displaced persons.

2018 saw attacks on freedom of religion or belief, attacks on freedom of speech, the violations of women’s human rights, the recruitment of child soldiers, and arbitrary detentions. Multiple parties across the country committed a wide range of human rights abuses and violations.

The right to freedom of religion or belief was widely denied in Yemen. Members of the Baha’i faith were persecuted and imprisoned. There were cases of arbitrary detentions and the abuse of detainees, including of Hamed bin Haydara, who was given a death sentence in January. The UK condemned this mistreatment, and urged the release of the detainees. We raised the importance of freedom of religion or belief with the parties to the conflict, including the Houthis. The UK supported a resolution at the September session of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) which called for the immediate release of all Baha’i detainees.

As part of our continued commitment to improving the overall human rights situation, the UK supported both resolutions on Yemen passed at the September session of the UN Human Rights Council. The resolution led by the Netherlands renewed the mandate of the UN Group of Eminent, International and Regional Experts and invited the group to monitor the human rights situation in Yemen and report back to the HRC in September 2019.

UN and NGO reports highlighted the continued recruitment of child soldiers by a number of armed groups in Yemen. The OHCHR regularly reported that children as young as ten were manning Houthi checkpoints. The UNICEF resident representative said that the organisation had verified 2,369 cases of child recruitment between March 2015 and January 2018. The UK continues to monitor the situation with concern.

Yemen ranks last out of 144 countries on the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Index.⁶⁰ The incidence of gender-based violence has risen by 70% since the start of the conflict in 2015. Women and girls bear a disproportionate share of the misery caused by protracted displacement. The UK provides emergency cash assistance for vulnerable displaced women and female-headed-households, to enable them to access Sexual and Gender-Based Violence services, medical assistance, and psychosocial support. UK programme funding supported a UN project to increase Yemeni women’s inclusion in the peace process.

Arbitrary disappearances and the use of torture were widely reported across Yemen. Human Rights Watch reported that the Houthis subjected prisoners to torture, including cases in which prisoners were hung from walls with their arms shackled behind them. Credible reporting by Amnesty International alleged the use of secret prisons in areas under the Saudi-led coalition’s control, as well as enforced disappearance and torture. There was no reliable process for inquiry into detainees held at these facilities. The UK raised human rights abuses with the legitimate Government of Yemen, but progress proved limited.

Freedom of speech was constrained across the country. According to the report by the UN Group of Eminent Experts published in August 2018, journalists and human rights defenders faced threats and abuse, as well as detention. In June, journalist Anwar al Rakan died following his release from Houthi detention as a result of his ill-treatment. The UK spoke out publicly about the need to respect journalists’ independence and the right of freedom of expression.

The death penalty is used in Yemen. In August, there was reporting of three public executions in Sana’a for an alleged violent crime. Consensual sexual relations between people of the same sex remain illegal in Yemen and are subject under the law to the death penalty in some cases.

In 2019, the UK will continue to lead international efforts to work towards an end to the conflict. While the conflict persists, we will continue to urge all parties to protect civilians and respect international law. We will work with the UN OHCHR to increase the capacity of Yemeni institutions to investigate human rights violations and abuses, and to prevent them from occurring.

The UK government provided £170 million in aid for Yemen in 2018, meeting the immediate food need of 4 million Yemenis and bringing the total UK bilateral support to Yemen to £570 million since 2015. In 2019, we will use UK programme funding to support additional activity to increase the role of women in local governance and peacebuilding.

Zimbabwe

The human rights situation in Zimbabwe worsened in 2018 compared with 2017, but was not as bad as during the last two election years (2013 and 2008). The human rights monitoring group Zimbabwe Peace Project recorded 2,354 human rights violations from January to December⁶¹, 20% more than recorded in total in 2017. A large number of the human rights violations were politically motivated, and occurred around the July elections. These included at least 6 deaths during post-election protests on 1 August. Further human rights violations included politically motivated intimidation, discrimination, harassment and assault, violent policing, arbitrary arrests, and torture. Despite this, there were notable improvements in freedom of speech and assembly compared to previous election years, although repressive legislation remained in place.

Political violence occurred in relation both to the ruling party, ZANU-PF, and to the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). This included intra-party violence and incidents of political victimisation, intimidation, and harassment. ZANU-PF was frequently involved in the partisan distribution of food aid.

Before the election on 30 July, there was relative freedom of assembly, and freedom to demonstrate. In the pre-election period, MDC presidential candidate Nelson Chamisa held 88 rallies without incident. However, the situation sharply deteriorated after the elections, with the security forces' heavy-handed response to protests on 1 August, and the systematic targeting of opposition supporters. In response, the government set up a Commission of Inquiry. The UK followed the proceedings of the commission closely. Its report was made public by President Mnangagwa on 18 December. In meetings with the Zimbabwean government, the UK made clear the importance of the government's response to the commission's findings and recommendations, particularly the conclusion that the use of force by the security services had been unjustified and disproportionate.

After the election, the police used the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) to ban protests by unions. In October, the Constitutional Court found Section 27 of POSA, which grants the police wide powers to ban demonstrations, to be unconstitutional. The government was given six months to amend the legislation, or appeal against the ruling.

Zimbabwe experienced high rates of gender-based violence. Almost 70% of Zimbabwean women have experienced gender-based violence in their lifetime, compared with 40% globally. There were reports of politically-motivated physical and sexual violence against women before and after the elections, involving both ZANU-PF and MDC supporters. Prominent women registered examples of hate speech against them in the run-up to the elections, but this was largely ignored by political leaders. Child marriage was banned in 2015 but UNICEF reports that approximately one in 3 Zimbabwean girls are married before their 18th birthday.

While there were improvements in access to general freedom of expression, media freedom continued to be stifled during the election period, with a biased state broadcaster and limited space for private and community-based media. The Media Institute of Southern Africa recorded 34 incidents of harassment, assault, and temporary detention of journalists by police and political actors, from both MDC and ZANU-PF. The UK supported civil society organisations working on media reform, and directly engaged with the Zimbabwean government to press for greater media freedom.

The UK funded a nationwide survey into attitudes to the death penalty. While a majority of Zimbabweans continue to support the death penalty, the survey found that 80% of those in favour were willing to accept abolition. Zimbabweans continue to be sentenced to death, although the last execution was in 2005. President Mnangagwa has publicly stated his opposition to the death penalty.

The deteriorating economic situation continued to impact on the ability of Zimbabweans to access healthcare. Many pharmacies began charging for medicines in US dollars, which are inaccessible for most people. Many local authorities failed to provide basic services, including safe drinking water and sanitation, which lead to outbreaks of cholera and typhoid in several urban centres.

LGBT people continued to face discrimination, family disownment, displacement from lodgings, unfair labour practices, blackmail, and bullying. However, there was a decrease in the use of anti-LGBT hate speech by political actors. Following the first ever conversation between members of the LGBT community and representatives from ZANU-PF, both sides made a commitment to continued dialogue.

The British Embassy met activists, pro-democracy campaigners, parliamentarians, and political leaders from across the political spectrum to encourage engagement, dialogue, and a more open society with respect for the rights of all Zimbabweans. The UK deployed an election observation mission and contributed to the EU election observation mission, the first in Zimbabwe since 2002.

The UK continues to support a multi-donor programme to improve access to justice, promote media freedom, support girls' education, and improve access to civil and political rights, including through public education. In 2019, the UK will continue to press the Government of Zimbabwe to uphold the rule of law and human rights, and to allow and encourage all Zimbabweans to exercise their democratic rights, under the protection of the 2013 Constitution and international human rights law.

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