



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office

 UK Government

Human Rights & Democracy

The 2021 Foreign, Commonwealth &
Development Office Report





Human Rights & Democracy

The 2021 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office Report

Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Foreign,
Commonwealth & Development Affairs by Command of His Majesty

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Cover image:

A woman kneels in prayer. Freedom of religion or belief for all remains a long-standing priority for the UK Government.

unions, student groups and NGOs were forced to disband, accused of national security crimes, while some others took the decision to close pre-emptively. This included the organisations responsible for organising protest marches and the annual commemoration of the Tiananmen Square massacre. Amnesty International closed its Hong Kong office, citing the National Security Law.

The UK took further robust action in response to human rights concerns in China. In respect of Xinjiang, the UK announced measures in January to help ensure no UK organisations are complicit in the human rights violations in Xinjiang through their supply chains. In March, the UK imposed asset freezes and travel bans on senior Chinese government officials and one entity responsible for human rights violations in the region. This action was taken alongside the US, Canada and the EU.

The then Prime Minister and then Foreign Secretary raised their concerns directly with their Chinese counterparts. In June and October, global UK diplomatic efforts helped to secure the support of over 40 countries for statements at the UN on Xinjiang, Hong Kong and Tibet. In response to the National Security Law in Hong Kong, the UK launched its visa for British Nationals (Overseas) in January 2021.

More broadly, the UK continued to fund projects to strengthen human rights in China, working with NGOs and institutions both inside and outside the country. Diplomats also conducted visits to Xinjiang and other ethnic minority areas and tried to attend trials of HRDs. The UK Government announced that no ministers or officials would attend the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics to demonstrate our concerns about human rights.

The UK and its partners will continue to play a leading role in holding China to account on issues of concern,

including Hong Kong and Xinjiang. The UK will also continue to support efforts to establish greater transparency about the human rights situation in Xinjiang, including by funding research and pressing China to allow urgent and unfettered access to Xinjiang for independent observers, including the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. The UK will also work to ensure a robust international response to the long-awaited report on Xinjiang by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

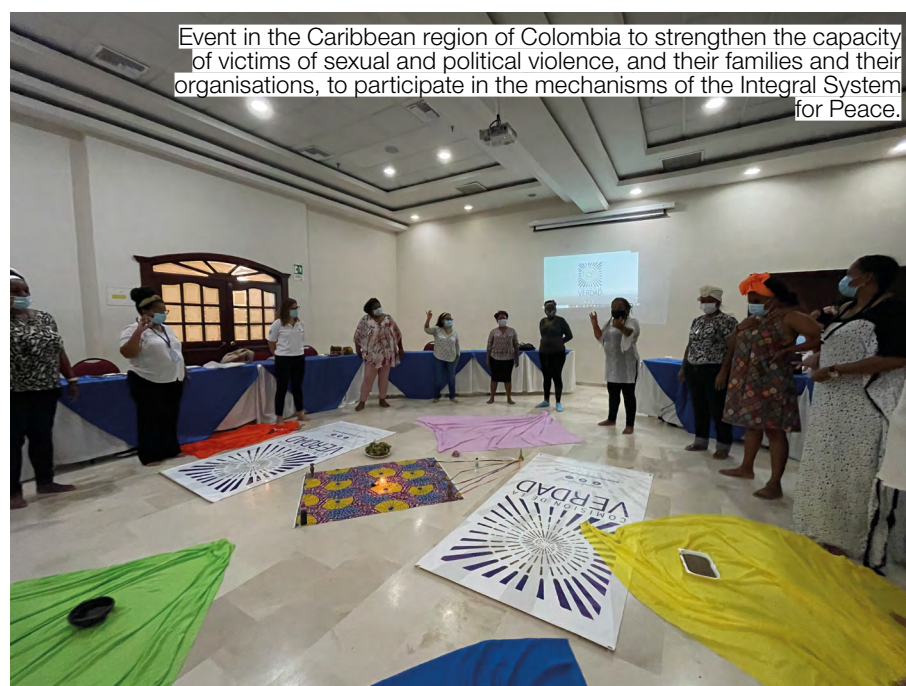
Colombia

Five years after the Colombian state signed a landmark peace agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the protection of human rights continued to be hampered by successive governments' struggle to increase security and improve state presence in conflict-affected areas. Illegal armed groups continued to threaten, attack and murder former FARC-combatants, human rights defenders (HRDs) and social leaders. The excessive use of force by some members of the police, as well as allegations of sexual violence and

press censorship were also of particular concern in 2021.

Illegal armed groups continued to fight for control of coca cultivation, drug trafficking, illegal mining and other illicit activities in areas formerly occupied by the FARC, which remain without permanent government presence. The economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the humanitarian crisis in neighbouring Venezuela, further increased opportunities for illegal armed groups to commit human rights abuses. Within this context, former FARC combatants, HRDs and social leaders, including environment leaders and those from indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, continued to be at risk.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) verified 100 HRDs were killed in 2021, linked to their work defending human rights.^[86] Violence was particularly concentrated in areas with high levels of multidimensional poverty, where the state had little presence. The security situation for former FARC combatants also remains a concern. Of the 300 former FARC combatants killed since the signing



Event in the Caribbean region of Colombia to strengthen the capacity of victims of sexual and political violence, and their families and their organisations, to participate in the mechanisms of the Integral System for Peace.

[86] https://www.hchr.org.co/wp/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/03-03-2022A_HRC_49_19_AdvanceUneditedVersion.pdf

of the Peace Agreement, 43 were killed in 2021.^[87]

Through the UK's Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF), the UK continued its commitment to strengthening the capacity of the Transitional Justice mechanisms. This included programmes related to the participation of victims, the design of Truth Commission strategies, and access to justice.

The CSSF provided support to strengthen OHCHR's capacities and resources to promote state actions to protect, prevent and investigate killings and provide technical advice to HRDs. Through the UN's Multi-Partner Trust Fund, the UK and other donors worked with the Colombian government and civil society to improve self-protection and human rights defence programmes.

Under the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI), the UK continued to help Colombia address its legacy of conflict-related sexual violence. In 2021, the UK supported survivors of sexual violence in Colombia through programmes covering psychosocial and legal support and guidance to access justice. This included support to male and LGBT+ survivors to overcome the specific barriers they face in their pursuit of justice and accountability. The UK also funded programmes strengthening the implementation of The Hague Principles on Sexual Violence in Colombia.

Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon, the Minister for Human Rights, and Rita French, the UK's International Ambassador for Human Rights, visited Colombia (virtually) in February 2021. The Ambassador met the UN Resident Coordinator, Ministry of Justice, Transitional Justice Court, civil society and HRDs. She raised key concerns around the killing of HRDs, media freedom, PSVI and transitional justice.

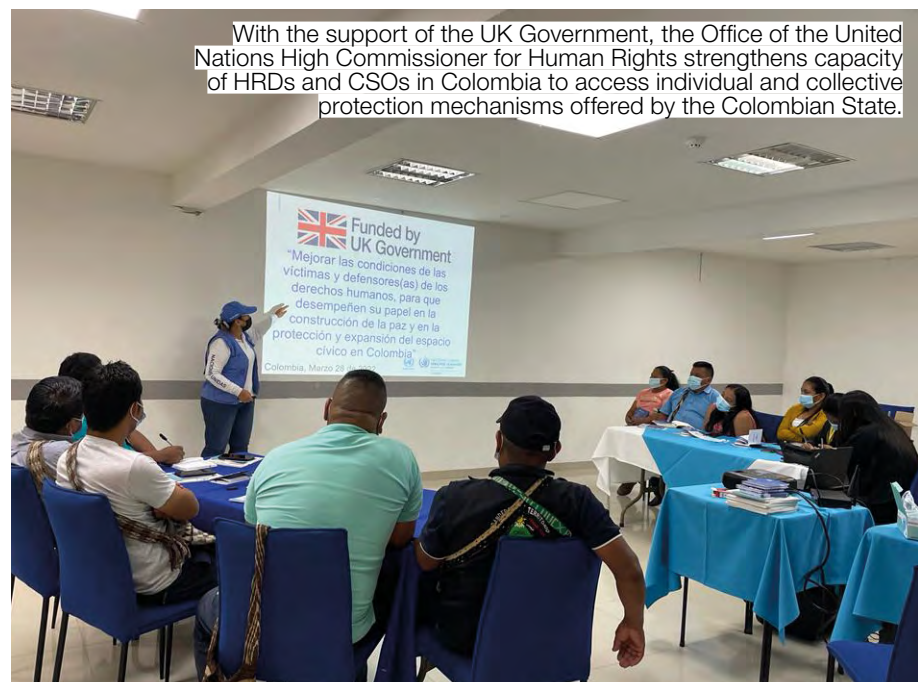
In April, following the announcement of a tax reform bill, tens of thousands

of people across the country joined, mostly peaceful, protests during a national strike. Over the following months the protests expanded to encompass wider discontent with government policies on health, education and wider social issues. Some protests led to violent clashes between the public security forces and protesters, and alleged violations by public security forces. At least 46 people died during the protests,^[88] amid widespread reports of human rights violations. The UK welcomed the Colombian government's commitment to investigate human rights violations. UK support to the OHCHR and to the Organization of American States' Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia (MAPP OAS) helped these institutions to monitor protests, as well as facilitate dialogue in the cities most affected by the protests.

In 2021, Colombia fell four places in the Reporters without Borders Media Freedom Index, ranking 134 out of 180 countries.^[89] The threat and fear of violence, including police intimidation, leading to self-censorship, was cited as a reason for the decline.

In November, the then FCDO Minister for the Americas, Wendy Morton, joined President Duque and the UN Secretary-General to mark the fifth anniversary of the peace agreement. Whilst recognising progress in terms of delivery of reintegration, transitional justice and Territorially Focused Development Plans (PDET in Spanish), challenges remain. During her visit, Minister Morton spoke to activists and institutional representatives of the transitional justice mechanisms in Colombia covering HRDs, media freedom and PSVI.

In 2022, Colombia will undertake Congressional and Presidential elections. The UK will continue to support a political participation programme to help communities prepare to put forward candidates for the newly introduced 16 special seats for victims in Congress. The UK remains fully committed to supporting the transitional justice mechanisms, including the Truth Commission, whose mandate has been extended by nine months. Our support to the OHCHR and the MAPP OAS in monitoring the situation for HRDs and wider



With the support of the UK Government, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights strengthens capacity of HRDs and CSOs in Colombia to access individual and collective protection mechanisms offered by the Colombian State.

[87] <https://indepaz.org.co/lideres-sociales-y-defensores-de-derechos-humanos-asesinados-en-2021>

[88] <https://www.hchr.org.co/index.php/informes-y-documentos/documentos/10246-documento-lecciones-aprendidas-paro-nacional-colombia-2021-juliette-de-rivero-representante-de-la-alta-comisionada>

[89] <https://rsf.org/en/colombia>

security issues will also help protect those at risk.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

There was no improvement in the dire human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in 2021. The DPRK government continued to deny allegations of human rights violations and failed to address reports from the UN and NGOs on human rights violations in the country. The DPRK remained the subject of country specific human rights resolutions at the UN. Border closures and tight restrictions on internal movement introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 remained in place throughout 2021, severely affecting the distribution of support and aid and leading to the departure of all remaining UN agencies and NGOs from the country.

The DPRK remained top of Open Doors' annual ranking of the 50 countries in which Christians experience extreme persecution,^[90] and in penultimate place out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index.^[91] In principle, freedoms of speech, religion or belief, the press, association, and peaceful demonstration were guaranteed by the DPRK's Constitution. However, it is clear that in reality, North Koreans enjoyed none of these freedoms. Human rights violations remained widespread and systematic in the DPRK with perpetrators not held to account.

The DPRK authorities continued to refuse to cooperate with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) or with the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in North Korea, Tomás Ojea Quintana. The regime continued to refuse to act on the 2014 UN Commission of

Inquiry report, which had concluded that the wide-ranging and continuing human rights violations taking place in the DPRK may amount to "crimes against humanity". Reports by the UN Secretary General and the Special Rapporteur during 2021 added to the growing body of information and deep concern about human rights violations in the DPRK.

Throughout 2021 the UK raised and challenged the DPRK's human rights record in multilateral forums. In December, the UN Security Council (UNSC) discussed human rights violations in the DPRK as a threat to international peace and security. The UK joined like-minded partners in a press statement afterwards calling for the DPRK's human rights violations to be discussed by the UNSC in an open session. At the UN General Assembly in November, the UK reminded the DPRK that measures used to contain COVID-19 should be proportionate and should not be used unnecessarily to further restrict the freedom of citizens.

The UK co-sponsored resolutions on the human rights situation in the DPRK adopted by the UN General Assembly and the UN Human Rights Council (HRC). The resolutions recalled the DPRK's responsibility to protect its population from human rights violations, including gender-based violence, and urged the DPRK to cooperate fully with the UN Special Rapporteur by giving him unrestricted access to the country.

In July, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on North Korea published a report on its inquiry into human rights violations in the DPRK between 2014 and 2021 which gathered evidence of human rights violations and shared recommendations for action. In October, Korea Future Initiative published its second report documenting religious freedom violations in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea which contained disturbing accounts of human rights

violations against those who have attempted to practise their religion or belief.

The UK continued to use its bilateral relationship to engage with the DPRK government on its human rights record. With the temporary closure of the British Embassy Pyongyang continuing throughout 2021 due to COVID-19, and with border restrictions on entry to the country making it impossible to sustain its operations, our Ambassador to the DPRK engaged with the DPRK Embassy in London and with UN human rights actors on human rights issues.

The UK will continue to raise the human rights situation in the DPRK and use multilateral fora to urge the regime to cooperate fully with relevant UN human rights mandate holders and allow them immediate and unhindered access to the country. The UK will also keep under review the use of UK autonomous global human rights sanctions, following the designations made under the Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime in 2020. When conditions allow, the UK will seek to return our embassy staff to Pyongyang and explore new opportunities for greater engagement between the international community and the DPRK authorities on human rights.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

The human rights situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) remained deeply concerning in 2021. The UN Joint Human Rights Office documented 6,989 violations and abuses,^[92] including acts of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), restrictions on freedom of expression, arbitrary arrests and detentions, and extrajudicial killings.

Human rights violations and abuses continued to be concentrated in

[90] Serving Persecuted Christians Worldwide – Open Doors' World Watch List 2021 is now live – Open Doors UK & Ireland

[91] North Korea | RSF

[92] United Nations Joint Human Rights Office in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (UNJHRO) MONUSCO – OHCHR – Analysis of the human rights situation in 2021



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