



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office

 UK Government

Human Rights & Democracy

The 2021 Foreign, Commonwealth &
Development Office Report





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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

December 2022



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E02754626

ISBN 978-1-5286-3402-1 12/22

Printed on paper containing 40% recycled fibre content minimum.

Printed in the UK by HH Associates Ltd. on behalf of the Controller of His Majesty's Stationery Office.

Cover image:

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

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took place in the Federal Member State of Puntland – the first direct, one-person, one-vote elections in Somalia since 1969, with gains for women's representation and voter turnout. UK support included drafting of the Voter Registration Act, the purchase of biometric voter registration equipment and civil society observer missions.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV), including conflict-related sexual violence, educational disadvantage and limited political participation were among the challenges faced by women and girls, compounded by the global pandemic. Multiple actors, particularly Al Shabaab, continued to perpetrate high levels of sexual and gender-based violence, abduction and recruitment of children into armed conflict. Stigma and the use of traditional justice mechanisms meant that many GBV cases went unreported. Female Genital Mutilation remained widespread with 99% of women aged 15-49 experiencing it.^[140] Somalia also remains one of the deadliest conflict areas for children.^[141] Key pieces of legislation such as the Sexual Offences Bill and the Child Rights Bill stalled owing to the electoral crisis.

Working with UNICEF, the UK provided funding to support 520 GBV survivors with medical care, legal support, safe shelter and psychological first aid. The UK-funded Girls and Boys Empowerment Fora provided space for discussions on barriers to gender equality. Additionally, the UK's Adolescent Girls Education in Somalia project raised awareness of educational rights for children with disabilities, engaging with community and religious leaders and schools to dispel misinformation on disabilities.

The project directly supported 927 girls with disabilities to attend school.

Somalia ranked 161 out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders 2021 World Press Freedom Index.^[142] Harassment, arrests and terrorist attacks targeting journalists across Somalia remained endemic. The UK provided media training to journalists, including to 19 Somali journalists on raising awareness of climate issues ahead of the UN Climate Change Conference COP26.

The UK worked with the Somali authorities to reduce incidents of abuse and exploitation by Somali security forces. UK funding promoted respect for human rights in the Somali Police Force by mainstreaming human rights in training and supporting development of codes of conduct. The UK also invested in support to communities to improve access to justice services. This included a pilot project that brought together female community leaders, security officials and clan elders to improve awareness and women's access to justice. Seventy-three percent of participating security officials reported a better understanding of the needs of women, men and children in the justice system.

South Sudan

Although the 2018 Peace Agreement remains in place, parties to the agreement and other groups continued to perpetrate human rights abuses and violations in 2021. These included arbitrary killings and arrests, abductions, torture, conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), forced military conscription, and looting and destruction of civilian property. South Sudan also suffered from a

humanitarian and food insecurity crisis affecting millions of people.

The South Sudanese government committed to defending freedom of expression; however, during 2021 there was widespread repression of free speech and the right to peaceful assembly.^[143] Protests in August led to harassment of journalists and media organisations, arrests of civil society representatives, and threats to use live ammunition.^[144] In response, the UK lobbied the South Sudanese government and delivered a public Troika (UK, US, Norway) statement in September. Following these actions, all individuals who had been arbitrarily detained were released. Despite our lobbying, there was no progress on the investigation into the killing of journalist Christopher Allen in 2017. The UK continued funding media organisations to support the work and protection of journalists more broadly.

There were significant levels of sub-national conflict, with reported abuses and violations, including killings. All parties to the conflict continued to recruit children as soldiers.^[145] Significant sub-national conflict took place in Jonglei. Here, UK-funded mediation between armed actors and community leaders helped reduce conflict, supported affected communities and enabled the return of abducted women and children. In Western Equatoria, the outbreak of sub-national conflict drove a spike in serious human rights abuses. Dozens of civilians were killed, homes were looted and burned, and fighting displaced 80,000 people.^[146] The UK will continue to work with the South Sudanese government, and other actors including community leaders and armed groups, to urge them to

[140] https://data.unicef.org/resources/data_explorer/unicef_f/?ag=UNICEF&df=GLOBAL_DATAFLOW&ver=1.0&dq=SOM.PT_F_15-49_FGM.&startPeriod=1970&endPeriod=2022

[141] 2021 Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict

[142] <https://rsf.org/en/somalia>

[143] <https://twitter.com/MFASouthSudan/status/1419379653899325446>

[144] <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/09/south-sudan-end-new-wave-of-repression-against-peaceful-protests/>

[145] <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=27523&LangID=E>

[146] <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/12/south-sudan-survivors-describe-killings-mass-displacement-and-terror-amid-fighting-in-western-equatoria/>

address the causes of the conflict in Western Equatoria and other areas of South Sudan.

Parties to the 2018 Peace Agreement and other armed groups committed CSRV, including rape, gang-rape, forced nudity and humiliation.^[147]

A UK-funded gender adviser in South Sudan's ceasefire monitoring body provided detailed reporting on CRSV in 2021. The UK also linked progress made by South Sudan's armed forces on their CRSV action plan as a benchmark for any future lifting of the UN Arms Embargo on South Sudan.

Despite welcome commitment from the South Sudanese government to tackle impunity for human rights violations, the Hybrid Court, intended to try the most serious crimes, was not established. The death penalty remained, an issue heightened by weak checks and balances within the justice system. 56 individuals were extra-judicially executed in Warrap and Lakes State as part of security crackdowns.^[148] Individuals, arbitrarily detained in secret prisons, were also subjected to degrading treatment, including torture.^[149]

Gender Based Violence (GBV) survivors struggled to access support and justice. The UK supported UN programmes to improve the effectiveness of South Sudan's GBV Court, access to legal aid, and support to the passage of an Anti-GBV Bill. The UK continued our six-year, £25 million programme with the International Medical Corps to provide support to GBV survivors. The UK also funded 2,154 instances of GBV care through the Health-Pooled Fund between April and December 2021.

Corruption and illicit flows continued to divert funds from citizens whilst fuelling human rights abuses and violations. In April, pursuant to the Global Anti-Corruption Sanctions Regulations 2021, the UK imposed a travel ban and asset freeze on Sudanese businessman Ashraf

Seed Ahmed Hussein Ali ('Al Cardinal'), for his involvement in the misappropriation of South Sudanese state assets.

The humanitarian situation deteriorated further with 8.3 million people in need of humanitarian assistance and famine-like conditions identified in parts of the country. South Sudan remained one of the most dangerous operating environments for humanitarian workers, with 25 humanitarian workers killed in 2021, out of 123 globally.^[150] Conflict, bureaucratic impediments and widespread flooding reduced access to those in need. Attacks and detention of humanitarian workers, theft or destruction of assets and operational interference worsened the situation. In Pibor and Renk humanitarian activities had to be suspended whilst threats were addressed.

The UK worked with other donors, UN agencies, NGOs and the Red Cross movement to provide life-saving assistance and protection to civilians. The UK also implemented a revised protection, inclusion and access strategy to support the South Sudanese government as they help citizens and protect humanitarian workers.

The UK will continue to seek progress on human rights in South Sudan, underpinned by our efforts to support full implementation of the 2018 Peace Agreement. The UK will continue to support freedom of expression and encourage the South Sudanese government to uphold its commitments during the constitution-making process and in the run up to potential elections. The UK will also continue to support survivors of GBV and address the drivers of conflict through peacebuilding interventions.

Sri Lanka

The overall human rights situation continued to deteriorate in 2021.

There was increased surveillance, harassment and intimidation of civil society, continued marginalisation of minority communities, several deaths in police custody, a number of lengthy detentions without charge, and further setbacks on post-conflict accountability.

Human rights groups, journalists and families of the disappeared reported increasing surveillance, harassment and intimidation by Sri Lankan security forces. In September, the UN's High Commissioner for Human Rights updated the Human Rights Council (HRC) that this intimidation had broadened to include students, academics, medical professionals and religious leaders critical of government policies. She highlighted concerns that new regulations under the Prevention of Terrorism Act were being drafted that could further restrict civic space, and allow for greater scrutiny of minority groups. A number of peaceful demonstrations were met with excessive use of force by the police, and the arrest or detention of protestors.

Marginalisation of minority groups continued. In February, the government lifted its ban on mandatory cremations for those deceased due to COVID-19 – a measure that impacted Muslim and some Christian minorities – but there were continued restrictions on where burials could take place. In April, the government approved a draft ban on face coverings such as the burqa and niqab. In February and April, the government proscribed a number of Tamil and Muslim groups under terrorism legislation, including groups de-proscribed under the previous government, and some local religious and welfare organisations.

Restrictions on Tamil commemorative spaces continued, with Tamil war memorials targeted by security forces. In October, the President appointed a new 'One Country One Law' taskforce led by controversial

[147] <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/situation-south-sudan-report-secretary-general-s20211015-enar>

[148] <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=27523&LangID=E>

[149] <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=27523&LangID=E>

[150] <https://aidworkersecurity.org>