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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 three-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

[33] <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/ColBurundi/Pages/ColBurundiReportHRC39.aspx>

[34] <http://ligue-iteka.bi/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/DECLARATION-70-ANS-DUDH.pdf>

[35] <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/ColBurundi/Pages/ColBurundiReportHRC39.aspx>

[36] <https://www.globalslaveryindex.org/2018/findings/regional-analysis/africa/>

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 two 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 benefitted 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 two high-profile transfers of CAR nationals to the International Criminal Court in The Hague. Those accused are being tried for serious

[37] <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-funds-training-on-human-rights-for-burundian-police-force>

[38] <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G18/247/50/PDF/G1824750.pdf?OpenElement>

[39] http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2018_human_development_statistical_update.pdf

[40] <https://www.globalslaveryindex.org/2018/findings/regional-analysis/africa>