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FCO – UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Human Rights and Democracy: the 2017 Foreign and Commonwealth Office report

Foreword by Minister for Human Rights Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon

Promoting and defending human rights is a fundamental part of the UK's foreign policy. Every day, all over the world, British ministers, diplomats and officials champion gender equality, LGBT rights, freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression.

We campaign for the abolition of the death penalty, an end to torture, and the eradication of modern slavery and human trafficking. Traditional diplomacy, both directly with individual countries and through multilateral institutions like the UN is instrumental to persuade, cajole and apply pressure; and we use our Magna Carta Fund to fund support for local champions of human rights and to draw attention to the importance of affording everyone the same rights and protections.

This Annual Report is an essential guide to the British government's work and to the global human rights landscape over the year.

In 2017, we witnessed one of the worst humanitarian crises in decades as hundreds of thousands of Rohingya.

Muslims fled their homes in the face of violence by the Burmese military. In Syria, the 7-year conflict continued to expose the Syrian civilians to the immoral actions of a dictator whose disregard for their human rights extended to the use of chemical weapons.

Our report documents these and many other human rights violations and abuses.

It sometimes seems that the efforts of governments and human rights defenders to combat assaults on human rights have little impact, especially in the immediate or short-term. However, it is important to remember that it requires sustained and consistent effort, often over many decades, to make progress, and that it is the work of many players: governments, civil society, human rights defenders.

We must each play our part, we must remain committed for the long term and we must strengthen our collaboration. That is how progress is achieved. This report is a record of some of the ways we contributed in 2017 to this noble aim.

At the multilateral level, the UK remained a strong advocate of human rights. We co-sponsored a number of resolutions at the UN Human Rights Council and the General Assembly Third Committee, including resolutions on youth, the safety of journalists, freedom of religion or belief and human rights defenders.

We renewed our efforts to support human rights defenders by revising our internal guidance and reissuing it to all our Embassies and High Commissions. I was pleased to underline UK support for the vital role of human rights defenders by taking part in Amnesty International's Human Rights Day event in December 2017, which was dedicated to human rights defenders.

Our own Human Rights Day commemoration in 2017 was dedicated to the protection and promotion of freedom of religion or belief. As a person of faith, this important issue resonates particularly powerfully with me. I know how fortunate I am to practise my faith free from fear or discrimination, in a society that enshrines that right in law for people of all faiths and none. It is a right which everyone, everywhere should enjoy. I was therefore delighted to host our Human Rights Day event in partnership with Christian Solidarity Worldwide, and I stepped up my engagement with faith leaders through a series of roundtable meetings on a range of foreign policy issues.

The government is also demonstrating global leadership in the fight against modern slavery. The FCO made a significant contribution in 2017, alongside colleagues from the Home Office and the Department for International Development. Collectively, the world needs to raise its game if we are to eradicate all forms of modern slavery, forced labour and human trafficking by 2030, the objective unanimously adopted in the UN Sustainable Development Goals in 2015. The Prime Minister launched a Call to Action on the issue at the UN General Assembly in September, and we are working hard to encourage as many countries as possible to give it their endorsement. By the end of 2017, over 40 countries had done so, and I am pleased to say that number has now risen to over 60.

2018 marks the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by the UN General Assembly on 10 December 1948 in response to the appalling atrocities inflicted on countless millions during the preceding decade. The Declaration represents a universal commitment to protect the rights of every individual. Some may question its efficacy in the face of overwhelming evidence of continued human rights violations, but this is to misunderstand the Declaration's purpose. No-one in 1948 expected all human rights violations to end there and then, just as no-one expects crime to disappear just because it is outlawed. The point of the UDHR, and the international covenants and treaties which have subsequently given legal effect to its vision, is to ensure that we constantly strive to protect and promote rights, at all times and for all people.

Discussion of human rights was very much part of the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in London in April. Participants discussed themes such as the fight against modern slavery, LGBT rights, the right to education, and making democracy more inclusive. The UK announced financial support for a range of projects designed to underpin and promote human rights and democracy. These included up to £3 million to build human rights capacity with a focus on small states, £7.5 million to tackle child labour and online sexual exploitation, £5.6 million on the rights of women and LGBT people, and a £4 million programme to drive more inclusive and accountable democracy. Finally, the Government committed £212 million through DFID's Girls' Education Challenge to help around 1 million girls in developing countries across the Commonwealth to receive a quality education.

The struggle to protect, promote and strengthen human rights is real and constant. It is often daunting, but we take heart from past achievements and from the fact that so many of us are committed to championing human rights, for the long term. We in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and in government more widely, will continue to work with civil society, private sector, faith leaders, and individual citizens to make a difference. We will remain vigilant and steadfast in calling out injustice, and in defending and advancing the rights to which all human beings, without distinction, are entitled.

Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon Prime Minister's Special Representative of Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Minister of State and the UN at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office.

Chapter 1: Human Rights and Democracy Priority Themes

Democracy and Democratic Freedoms

Respect for universal human rights and democratic freedoms underpins the UK's foreign policy. We work towards the goal of a world in which all people are free to live in open, safe and fair societies, where state authorities respect and defend human rights. We believe that democracy and the freedoms upon which it is founded provide the fairest form of government and are the best way to ensure universal enjoyment of human rights.

In 2017, democratic governance and freedoms grew in several countries but declined in many others. The respected NGO Freedom House recorded¹ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:1>) a decline in global freedom for the 12th consecutive year and a net decline in civil liberties and political rights in 71 countries.

Free and fair elections are the cornerstone of democracy. The right of individuals and groups to organise and contest elections, peacefully competing with other parties for the right to govern, is under threat in many countries. In Venezuela and Turkmenistan for example, independent observers regarded the elections which took place as irregular or unfair, with meaningful opposition silenced. In Cambodia, the arrest of opposition leader Kem Sokha and the dissolution of the main opposition party left little hope for credible democratic elections in 2018.

The FCO is committed to working to reverse the global trend of declining democracy. The FCO's overseas network of Embassies and High Commissions plays an important role in that work, by engagement with host governments and the promotion of democracy through multilateral institutions. In Tunisia, we have consistently lobbied the government to establish independent judicial and democratic institutions, including a Constitutional Court, and to hold local elections. In 2017, the government committed to holding the first ever local elections in May 2018 – a symbolic stepping-stone in the country's democratic transition – and to the establishment of a Constitutional Court. There is much still to be done to complete the democratic transition, and we are supporting this in a number of ways, including through programme funding to promote the implementation of the Constitution's democratic and human rights guarantees. In October, the UK Delegation to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) chaired a meeting of the OSCE Human Dimension Committee on 'Challenges to Democracy', with speakers from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Golos Movement (a Russian NGO), the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, and representatives of the Azerbaijan government.

The Community of Democracies

The UK's commitment to working with our international partners to promote and secure democracy informed our decisions to join the Governing Council of the Community of Democracies (CoD) in 2016, and its Executive Committee in September 2017. The CoD is a group of like-minded countries whose

common goal is to “bring together governments, civil society and private sector actors that share common values to push forward the democratic agenda globally”. As part of our engagement with the CoD, the UK joined its Working Group for Protecting and Enabling Civil Society. One of the Working Group's tools is the so-called ‘Call for Action’, which it employs in instances where there is evidence of a government seeking to take steps which would constrain the freedom of civil society.

A Call for Action is effectively an alarm which is sounded to alert interested parties – CoD partner countries, NGOs, and others – of the impending threat. In 2017, the UK supported the Working Group's Call for Action on Cambodia, when the government had threatened to shut down the Cambodian Center for Human Rights. Cambodian media subsequently reported that the Call for Action had drawn attention to the proposed restrictive legislation (the Law on Associations and NGOs). The Call for Action, added to other external pressure, helped save the Center from closure.

Westminster Foundation for Democracy

The Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) is an executive Non-Departmental Public Body established in 1992 and funded mainly by the FCO (which is the sponsoring Department) and the Department for International Development (DFID). It 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 human rights.

WFD supports the UK's security and prosperity objectives by strengthening democratic systems in developing and transition countries around the world. It works in partnership with UK political parties and the Parliaments and Assemblies in Westminster, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, to increase the effectiveness and accountability of their counterparts overseas. It also provides electoral assistance to help ensure credible and inclusive elections. In 2017, WFD's overseas operation consisted of offices in 27 countries and programmes in over 40. Some examples are set out below.

In Indonesia, work continued to mainstream human rights in the legislative process of the House of Representatives. WFD helped the Indonesian parliament research, examine and debate the Counter Terrorism and Narcotics bills to ensure alignment to international human rights principles. In Sri Lanka, WFD continued to support post civil-war reconciliation and constitutional reform initiatives.

In Nigeria, WFD launched a new programme in partnership with civil society organisations to increase political participation and representation of young people, women, and people with disabilities.

In March, the WFD Research Programme convened a conference in Kenya for civil society, parliamentary and governmental organisations. The objective of the conference was to respond to growing threats to the role of civil society in East Africa. Participating organisations agreed to coordinate national responses and take action in the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) to protect civil society at the regional level.

In the Middle East and North Africa, WFD's support to the Coalition of Arab Women MPs to Combat Violence Against Women helped secure reforms at both national and regional level. These included the repeal of legislation in Jordan and Lebanon which protected rapists by allowing them to marry their victims and escape prison, and the formal submission to the Arab League of a draft ‘Convention to Combat Violence Against Women’. When adopted, the Convention will be another mechanism to protect women in the region from violence.

In Colombia, WFD organised a series of workshops bringing together Colombian legislators with representatives from Northern Irish political parties, faith groups and civil society organisations to discuss reconciliation initiatives and the protection of human rights.

Throughout 2017, WFD continued to support cross-national networks of activists and political parties to increase the representation and influence of women in politics. These included the Central and Eastern Europe Gender Network for Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans (supported by the Labour Party International Democracy Programme) and ‘Rae'dat’ (supported by the Scottish National Party WFD programme).

Civil Society

Freedom of Expression

Freedom of Expression is a fundamental human right which underpins and enables many of the rights and freedoms which we would expect to see in any functioning democratic society. However, 2017 saw stark reminders that this important human right was under attack in many parts of the world, and that globally the degree of freedom of expression was deteriorating. In the Philippines – ranked among the deadliest countries in the world for journalists and land rights defenders, we continued to call on the government to promote a safe and enabling environment for the work of all human rights defenders. In Turkmenistan, independent human rights NGOs were unable to operate.

The threats to press freedom continued in 2017 as journalists continued to suffer intimidation and attacks. Reporters Without Borders reported² (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:2>) that 65 journalists and media assistants

were killed in the course of their work during 2017. In Vietnam, the authorities continued to imprison many bloggers and human rights defenders, often imposing long sentences. In Thailand, legislation was used to restrict the media and free speech. In Malaysia, authorities continued to restrict voices opposed to the government, including opposition figures, human rights activists, journalists and social media users. In Turkey, many journalists remained in jail, civil society representatives faced prosecution, and the State of Emergency was repeatedly extended. The UK reaffirmed its commitment to addressing the challenges to media freedom; in November, the then Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, stressed the importance of a free media for creating vibrant, informed societies and for supporting a “safer, more prosperous and progressive world”, and announced funding for projects in countries where media freedom is under significant pressure.

The right to freedom of expression as exercised through traditional methods must also be protected online. Freedom House reported³ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:3>) 2017 as seeing a seventh consecutive annual decline in internet freedom. Through the Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy, we supported Access Now's #KeepItOn project, which highlights the use of unwarranted internet shutdowns and aims to prevent censorship, human rights abuses, state violence, and the undermining of democratic governance. In 2017, the #KeepItOn project monitored and responded to internet shutdowns in Kenya⁴ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:4>), the Democratic Republic of Congo⁵ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:5>) and Cameroon⁶ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:6>). In the case of Kenya, the project's strong and proactive efforts to keep the internet available throughout the period of Kenya's presidential election led to a clear pledge⁷ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:7>) by a major regulator not to shut down the internet. This enabled Kenyan citizens to benefit from the continued free flow of information, freedom of expression, and of journalistic reporting online⁸ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:8>) throughout the election. The UK is a member of the Freedom Online Coalition, a group of 30 countries which promotes internet freedom.

Human Rights Defenders

In line with its commitment to the values of democracy and respect for human rights, the UK supports the right of human rights defenders to carry out their activities and voice their opinions, in order to defend human rights peacefully. They hold governments to account and highlight instances of human rights abuses or discrimination, with the aim of securing human rights for affected populations. At the Human Rights Day reception which Amnesty International hosted in December, the Minister for Human Rights, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon said “...by supporting human rights defenders especially many tragically facing prejudice and oppression in their front line work it is important our government, wherever we have representation in the world, becomes the voice for those human rights defenders”.

The respected NGO Frontline Defenders calculated⁹ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:9>) that 312 human rights defenders were killed in 2017, 67% of whom were defenders of land or environmental rights. Many others were harassed, intimidated, subjected to violence or detained. These shocking figures only served to strengthen our resolve to find ways to support human rights defenders and show solidarity with them. In December, the then Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, equipped the FCO's diplomatic network with newly updated Guidelines on Working with Human Rights Defenders. The updated Guidelines, developed in consultation with civil society, provide practical advice for Embassies and High Commissions to help them assist and support human rights defenders.

FCO staff undertake a number of activities to support human rights defenders. This could be through trial observation, quiet diplomacy with host governments, or public diplomacy. For example, in Azerbaijan, Embassy officials monitored the court proceedings of those facing politically motivated charges. In Afghanistan, we continued to fund protection and security training for human rights defenders operating in high risk and remote areas. In Turkey, we lobbied at the highest level to seek the release from pre-trial detention of local Amnesty International and other human rights defenders on terror-related charges.

Complementing our bilateral work through activity at the multilateral level, the UK in November co-sponsored United Nations General Assembly resolution 72/247 on human rights defenders. We will continue to work with co-sponsoring partners to promote the resolution's aims and principles in 2018, which marks the 20th anniversary of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

In 2017, the FCO continued its collaboration with the Centre for Applied Human Rights (CAHR) at the University of York. CAHR runs a Protective Fellowship Scheme for human rights defenders at risk, hosting up to ten defenders per year. In 2017, the FCO Human Rights Policy Unit hosted the defenders during their advocacy trip to London and introduced them to the relevant country desk officers. This had a double benefit: desk officers learned more about the current risks facing human rights defenders, and the defenders were able to build closer relationships with the FCO, in the UK as well as in their home country. Such relationships help make human rights defenders more secure in the difficult environments where they work.

Restrictions on Civil Society Space

2017 saw a number of countries introducing legislation which restricted the activity of civil society, stifling challenge and free speech. For example, state authorities in Vietnam continued to use long and bureaucratic approval processes to delay and in some cases reject NGO projects considered sensitive. In Egypt, President Sisi ratified the NGO law, which, if enforced, will significantly restrict NGOs’ ability to register, access funding or operate freely. The authorities in Russia continued to place civil society organisations under restrictive measures such as the ‘Foreign Agents’ and ‘Undesirable Organisations’ laws, and political freedoms in Russia became increasingly constrained. In Turkey, the continuing State of Emergency with its many restrictions, in place since the failed coup in 2016, makes it difficult for civil society to operate effectively. We have called on Turkey to suspend it.

Faced with this reality, we took action in many countries. The then Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, issued a statement of concern about moves to restrict political and civil society life in Egypt. The FCO used the Magna Carta Fund to build the capacity of civil society groups in Malaysia, including youth and women’s groups. In the Philippines we continued to call on the government to promote a safe and enabling environment for the work of human rights defenders. In Thailand, the Embassy hosted events for civil society groups, funded projects protecting civic space, and attended trials and hearings of human rights defenders giving publicity and national attention to their cases. In Russia, we significantly increased funding available to support civil society, at a time when NGOs and charities faced growing pressure. We funded a broad portfolio of projects to support human rights, civil society and democracy.

Girls’ Education

With over 130 million girls out of school globally, the then Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, has described enhancing girls’ education as a moral imperative; he has put gender equality at the heart of UK foreign policy in 2017, with a particular focus on providing girls with 12 years of quality education which not only respects their human rights, but also helps make their societies more peaceful, stable and prosperous.

The Gender Equality Unit began work with DFID, Department for Education, Government Equalities Office and other government departments to develop a global girls’ education campaign focused on securing 12 years of quality education for girls, including opportunities to advance this at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in London in April 2018.

We want to break down the barriers preventing girls from gaining 12 years of quality education, improving the quality of teaching, supporting the reform of education systems and helping the most marginalised girls to learn.

Gender Equality

The FCO’s first Special Envoy for Gender Equality, Joanna Roper, was appointed in February and a dedicated Gender Equality Unit (GEU) created in October. During her visit to Canada in September, the Prime Minister, Theresa May, agreed with the Canadian Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, that they would champion gender equality globally. This would include joining forces to work on gender and trade, addressing the gender pay gap, and ending violence against women and girls. The UK and Canada would also work together to promote the global implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, including in Iraq, Syria and Ukraine.

The Special Envoy discussed gender equality challenges and solutions with senior international counterparts, such as the EU Special Representative and the Australian Ambassador on Women, Peace and Security, and visited a number of countries including the Occupied Palestinian Territories/ Israel, Egypt, Turkey, Iraq, Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands, US and Canada. The Special Envoy supported the role of women and youth at the third London Conference on Somalia, attended the Commission on the Status of Women, the UN General Assembly, the G7 Gender ministerial meeting and the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

The UK continued to play a key role on the UN Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC), which leads the international response on the issues of child soldiers and child protection. This included pressing those countries listed in the UN Secretary-General’s annual report on CAAC to agree concrete action plans with the UN.

The UK government remained strongly committed to supporting the rights of children caught up in conflict, believing that children are entitled to education and safety. Education is more important than ever during such crises as it helps provide children with a degree of normality and stability. The UK government was therefore fully aware that it is vital to protect schools from attack during times of armed conflict and we continued to look at new ways in which we could further enhance our commitment to ensure schools were maintained as places for education. This review resulted in the UK Government endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration in April 2018.

Women, Peace and Security

As the global leader on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), we hold the pen on WPS at the UN Security Council, and are the second largest donor to the UN Women, Peace and Humanitarian Fund through which we have supported over 30 women's organisations in Jordan, Burundi, Colombia and the Pacific. In Burundi, this funding enabled female mediators to instigate community dialogues in 13,000 local disputes in 2016 and 2017. We were a leading supporter of the UNFPA in Syria, providing £29 million since 2013 to address sexual and gender-based violence. Last year, through the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund alone we spent over £200 million on promoting gender equality worldwide.

In 2017, the UK Government developed the fourth UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security for 2018 to 2022 (NAP) which was launched in January 2018. This sets out how we will meet UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 commitments and deliver better protection and empowerment of women in conflict contexts overseas. Consultation with experts from academia and civil society informed the Government's work on the NAP, as did consultations with civil society in Afghanistan, Burma, Somalia and Syria. The UK also funded an independent evaluation of the 2014 to 2017 NAP. The revised NAP takes account of feedback from the previous Action Plans, building it around seven strategic outcomes and nine focus countries.

The UK continued to work to amplify women's voices, to increase their participation in conflict resolution, and to support their educational, economic and political empowerment. A Wilton Park event in December on women in mediation brought together mediation experts, many of them women, to build and share knowledge. We promoted the participation of women in political processes and mediation roles in Syria, Somalia, Colombia and Yemen. UK support also provided services for women who suffered sexual and gender-based violence in Syria, and strengthened the role of women in the security forces in Somalia.

Through DFID, we provided access to education for over 175,000 girls in Syria, and doubled the number of women members of the volunteer humanitarian organisation, the White Helmets, officially known as the Syria Civil Defence, to 147. The Ministry of Defence supported the National Army Officer Academy in Afghanistan in training officer cadets, including 100 women. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we ensured that development and humanitarian programmes addressed the needs of women. The UK, with Canada and Bangladesh, launched the WPS Chiefs of Defence Network at the UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial in Vancouver, in November. Chaired by the UK in its inaugural year, the network aims to improve integration of gender perspectives and the participation of women in armed forces and peacekeeping.

The Minister for Human Rights, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, led efforts to do more on gender and preventing/countering violent extremism, including hosting roundtables to discuss the issue with gender experts and with faith leaders.

Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative

2017 was the 5th anniversary of the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI)¹⁰ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:10>), which we marked in March with an event at the FCO attended by its co-founders, Lord Hague and Angelina Jolie. Through the PSVI, we continued to work to end survivor stigma, to secure justice and accountability and prevent sexual violence happening in the first place. In June, the Prime Minister, Theresa May, appointed Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon as her new Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, succeeding Baroness Anelay. In his first 6 months, the Minister engaged with key partners, in particular, the UN Secretary General's Special Representative for Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten, on issues ranging from stigma in Bosnia to evidence-gathering on crimes committed in Burma.

The 2nd edition of the International Protocol on the Investigation and Documentation of Sexual Violence in Conflict was published in March. It includes additional chapters on documenting conflict-related sexual violence against children and against male victims, further guidance on trauma, and a focus on analysing evidence and establishing patterns of violation.

Lord Ahmad launched the 'Principles for Global Action: preventing and addressing stigma associated with conflict-related sexual violence' at the UN General Assembly in September. A series of workshops on ending stigma were held in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burundi, the Central African Republic, Colombia, Kosovo, Mali, Nepal, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Uganda. The workshops produced action plans on how to address the issue.

Members of the PSVI Team of Experts¹¹ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:11>) conducted a number of tasks, including providing training to the EU Training Mission in Mali and to peacekeepers in Malaysia, conducting a review of the International Protocol on the Investigation and Documentation of Sexual Violence in Conflict, and assessing capacity needs on investigation and documentation of sexual violence in Bangladesh. The latter was in response to the crisis caused by the large-scale migration of Rohingya people escaping persecution and violence in Burma and crossing into Bangladesh. Following its work in Bangladesh, the FCO and DFID took forward the recommendations of the Team of Experts. The UK has been one of the largest bilateral donors to the Rohingya crisis, contributing £59 million in support. Minister for Asia and the Pacific, Mark Field, called for an independent international investigation into reports of human rights violations when he met Burma's Defence Minister in November 2017.

The then Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, has also raised the issue of sexual and gender-based violence with the authorities in the Rakhine. At the UN Security Council session in December, Lord Ahmad, conveyed the seriousness of the crisis and made clear that the situation continues to merit close attention. UK PSVI funding supported over 25 projects in 14 countries in 2017.

Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

The UK supported the UN Secretary-General's (UNSG) new victim-centred strategy and zero tolerance approach to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA). The Prime Minister, Theresa May, joined the UNSG's Circle of Leadership, which brings together Heads of State and Government who have agreed to lend their personal engagement and demonstrate solidarity with the Secretary-General in support of victims; and, where possible, implement steps to end impunity and hold perpetrators to account. The UK signed the UNSG's Voluntary Compact on SEA, which set out the mutual responsibilities of the UN and its member states. We provided £1 million to help build the capacity of the UN to vet and train peacekeepers, and to improve investigations and co-ordination across the UN.

We expanded our focus to include SEA committed by and within the development and humanitarian sectors, including the UN's multilateral agencies. The International Development Secretary and Lord Ahmad hosted a roundtable at UNGA in September 2017 with senior UN officials and heads of key agencies to explore approaches to strengthening safeguarding measures. We included measures to address SEA in MOUs and results framework agreements with the agencies which we fund and in strategic dialogues with them.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) Rights

The protection and promotion of the rights of LGBT people is a priority for the UK government. We are opposed to all forms of discrimination. The chance to live with dignity, free from violence or discrimination, should not depend on a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. The Minister for Human Rights, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, delivered a speech on the right for all people to live without prejudice, violence and discrimination at the launch of the new UK Alliance for Global Equality in London in July.

One of the core objectives of the FCO's Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy is increased respect for equality and non-discrimination for all members of society. In 2017, over £900,000 was allocated to projects focused on LGBT rights, aimed at: improving institutional protection against discrimination including through removing or amending discriminatory laws, policies and practices; reducing hate speech, violence or harassment based on discrimination; and increasing the participation of minority groups in political and public life, including in positions of leadership and influence.

The UK works through international organisations, including the UN, EU, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe and the Commonwealth, to promote tolerance and non-discrimination against LGBT people and to address discriminatory laws. Lord Ahmad set out the UK's commitment to LGBT rights at a UN LGBT Core Group event during the UN General Assembly in September 2017. He also announced additional UK funding to the UN's 'Free and Equal' campaign aimed at raising awareness and respect for LGBT equality.

The UK, a founding member of the Equal Rights Coalition (ERC), joined the ERC's Executive Committee in 2017 to shape and support the ERC's efforts to help secure global LGBT equality. On 6 June, during the 35th session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, the ERC delivered a statement welcoming the first report of the newly appointed UN Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (IE SOGI), Professor Vitit Muntarbhorn. The ERC's statement highlighted this important event and set out the work of the Coalition.

2017 marked the 50th anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of consensual same-sex relations in England and Wales. We continue to urge those 75 jurisdictions which still criminalise same-sex relations to take steps towards decriminalisation, and encourage all countries to ensure that they have legislation which protects LGBT people. The FCO network raises concerns regarding the protections of LGBT rights with host countries. The UK was one of the first countries to express concern at reports of the detention and torture of up to 100 homosexual men in Chechnya, Russia, where at least three were killed in April. The then Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, pressed Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on this in Moscow on 22 December. In May, the UK, alongside EU partners, the US and Canada, made representations to the Government of Indonesia in protest at the caning of two homosexual individuals in Aceh province. In October, Uruguay elected its first transgender senator.

As well as diplomatic lobbying, we support the efforts of civil society organisations to change laws and social attitudes by supporting human rights defenders during gay Pride and anti-discrimination events, often in countries where such events provoke hostility and violence. In June, we were instrumental in forming the group 'Diplomats for Equality' at the Vienna Pride, which brought together over 80 representatives from over 30 missions. At the OSCE's Human Dimension Committee in June, the UK introduced the issue of Pride marches for discussion in the context of Freedom of Peaceful Assembly. In July, the then Foreign Secretary delivered a speech at the launch of Stonewall's Top Global Employers Programme in London, setting out the importance of LGBT inclusion and reinforcing the role of

business in promoting LGBT equality. The then Foreign Secretary was clear that tackling discrimination is not only the right thing to do, but also the smart thing to do for societies and economies. In Thailand, the Embassy's work in supporting the LGBT community and local human rights defenders was cited by the respected NGO Stonewall as an example of best practice in 2017.

The UK Government continues to offer consular marriage services to same- sex couples (one of whom must be a UK national). In 2017, our consular network offered a consular same-sex service in 28 countries, and performed over 150 same-sex marriages. In 2017, the UK welcomed the introduction of legislation in Australia and Germany allowing same-sex marriage.

Modern Slavery

The Prime Minister, Theresa May, has identified modern slavery as one of the greatest human rights challenges of our time. There were an estimated 40.3 million victims of modern slavery worldwide in 2016, according to the Global Estimates on Modern Slavery¹² (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:12>) released in September 2017 by the ILO and Walk Free Foundation in partnership with the International Organization for Migration. Modern slavery exists in every society. It respects neither borders nor jurisdictions. Its victims are subject to the most appalling mistreatment and exploitation. At international level, the crimes we understand as modern slavery are set out in the universally agreed Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8.7, which calls for “immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including the recruitment and use of child soldiers.” The term ‘modern slavery’ provides a useful and powerful advocacy tool, which in the UK refers to several offences in the Modern Slavery Act 2015: “slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour” and “human trafficking”.

The UK is committed to the eradication of all forms of modern slavery and human trafficking by 2030, in accordance with the UN Sustainable Development Goal 8.7. Strengthening the response to modern slavery is a domestic and foreign policy priority for the UK government. The Prime Minister chairs a Modern Slavery Task Force – the first of its kind, established in 2016 – to drive forward domestic and international action in this important area. The Modern Slavery Act is internationally recognised as a ground-breaking piece of legislation – particularly in its requirement for large private sector companies to report on steps they are taking to ensure that there is no modern slavery in their supply chains. The UK shared its experience of the Act in 2017, encouraging countries to develop their own legislation to tackle modern slavery and improve victim support.

A crime which has no respect for borders clearly needs a truly international response. The UK has a multifaceted strategy to help generate such a response. The strategy focuses on countries from which we receive high numbers of victims and on individual countries which are among those with the highest prevalence of modern slavery and where we believe the UK is well placed to make a difference. The UK is also pressing for global prioritisation of this issue. To this end, we mobilised our entire FCO network of posts in 2017. We also continued to drive for progress at multilateral fora, ensuring that modern slavery remained on the agenda of the G7, G20, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Commonwealth, UN General Assembly and UN Human Rights Council.

In July 2017, the Minister for Human Rights, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, instructed all UK sovereign posts to contribute to the agenda in a manner in keeping with the local context and proportionate to available resources. Posts built modern slavery into their Business Plans, identifying where they could make an impact. To give some examples: the UK funded research into the effective handling of human trafficking data in Indonesia, Philippines, Cambodia and Thailand to promote data-driven policy-making. The UK worked closely with partners to protect those at risk from online child sexual exploitation in the Philippines, including building capabilities for detecting, disrupting and prosecuting offenders. The UK and China strengthened engagement on modern slavery, including work to encourage due diligence in supply chains. The UK welcomed and supported increased attention by domestic and international media on modern slavery, which served to galvanise international support to address the scandal of public slave markets in Libya, for example. In Peru, the UK provided specialised training to prosecutors and police officers dealing with human trafficking victims. In Venezuela, the UK funded a modern slavery diagnostic study, and promoted the creation of a multidisciplinary working group on modern slavery. During Lord Ahmad's visit to Ghana, he explored a new commitment to making progress on an Action Plan to eliminate human trafficking with the Minister for Gender. The 2017 UK Annual Report on Modern Slavery¹³ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:13>) provides further detail on how the UK has responded to this issue.

In September, the Prime Minister launched the Call to Action to End Forced Labour, Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking at a high-level UK- hosted event during the UN General Assembly. The UN Secretary-General also attended. From strengthening legislation and criminal justice efforts to victim support, and from community engagement to addressing transparency in supply chains, this statement of political intent brings together actions for governments to take on both a national and international level. Its message is clear: we will not tolerate these crimes in our societies. By the end of 2017, over 40 countries had endorsed the Prime Minister's Call to Action. The Call to Action brings together a growing group of countries, committed to combating these barbaric crimes. Our aim is increased political commitment and a more determined, impactful global response to the issue.

Modern slavery will continue to be a major focus for the UK in 2018. Through the Magna Carta Fund, the FCO will fund projects where our Embassies and High Commissions have identified opportunities to make a real impact on the lives of those affected. The FCO will continue to work closely with our partners across government and internationally to ensure that the UK targets its interventions as effectively as possible. The UK will double its aid spending on fighting modern slavery to £150 million, enabling more work in collaboration with source, transit and destination countries. The UK is aiming to generate greater international consciousness, political will and capacity-building activity through its bilateral and multilateral engagements. Our aim is for the UK's global intervention to be seen as a pivotal moment, triggering a step-change in momentum towards achieving SDG 8.7 by 2030.

Human Rights and the Private Sector

Business and Human Rights

The UK is committed to the UN Guiding Principles (UNGPs) on business and human rights, which we see as the authoritative global standard for preventing and addressing the risk of adverse human rights impacts linked with business. The UK encourages all countries to develop measures, including National Action Plans, to implement the UNGPs. In line with the Transparency in Supply Chains provision in the Modern Slavery Act, the UK continued to work with businesses to encourage better due diligence to eradicate unacceptable practices. In October, the then Home Secretary, Amber Rudd, convened a forum at Lancaster House with leaders in businesses with global supply chains which focused on sharing best practice and on helping to boost the quality of transparency reporting. The FCO has also led the UK government's response to the Joint Committee on Human Rights' report on the implementation of the UK Government's National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights.

In the financial year 2017 to 18, through the Magna Carta Fund, we funded 2 Business and Human Rights Projects. Firstly, we supported the Institute for Human Rights and Business, in its capacity as the secretariat for the Mega-Sporting Events Platform for Human Rights working to ensure that the world of sport is in full alignment with the UNGPs. Secondly, we funded Huridocs and the Migrant Forum in Asia which support grassroots labour activists with training and technology to document rights violations.

Through DFID's £30 million flagship Responsible Business programme, support has also been given to a number of organisations promoting human rights in global business operations, including Shift, the Ethical Trading Initiative, Humanity United and the UN Global Compact.

Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights

The Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights (VPs) provide guidance on responsible business practice to extractive companies operating in high-risk and conflict-affected areas. The UK will be taking the chair for twelve months from March 2018, demonstrating our continuing commitment to the development and implementation of the VPs.

We have supported our policy objectives with £200,000 of FCO programme funds, managed via the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) Security and Human Rights Implementation Mechanism. Projects supported include training public security forces in Kenya, and widening the implementation of the VPs in Peru.

Further detail on the UK's VPs work in the past 12 months and objectives for our chairmanship can be found in our 2017 VPs Annual report.

Private Security Companies

Legitimate Private Security Companies (PSCs) working to high standards play a critical role in the protection of businesses, NGOs and diplomatic missions operating in complex environments. However, the nature of PSCs' work makes it essential that they have processes in place to manage the risk of their operations leading to human rights abuses.

The UK is a signatory to the Montreux Document on private military and security companies, which describes the application of international law to the activities of private military and security companies when they are operating in an armed conflict zone and sets out best practice. The UK supports the implementation of the Montreux Document via the International Code of Conduct for Private Security providers, which sets out a commonly agreed set of principles for PSCs, and establishes a foundation to translate those principles into related standards, governance and oversight mechanisms. The UK is also represented on the Board of the International Code of Conduct Association (ICoCA). We advocate the benefits of PSCs pursuing certification to recognised international standards, including via ICoCA membership. By working in partnership with companies and civil society via ICoCA, we are supporting the development of monitoring and grievance processes which both help to mitigate the risk of human rights abuses and provide access to remedy if required.

We work closely with the UK PSC sector via the Security in Complex Environments Group (SCEG) to ensure that stakeholders are engaged with the Government's policy on PSCs. SCEG provides a valuable forum to discuss issues in the private security industry and to strengthen further the application of standards.

Responsible Sourcing

Mining of high-value-added minerals including tin, tantalum, tungsten and gold (3TG minerals) and diamonds can provide a valuable source of income for local communities. However, proceeds can be diverted by armed groups and used to fund conflict and human rights abuses. In 2017, the UK continued to address both issues through The Kimberley Process (KP) Certification Scheme for trade in rough diamonds, and by encouraging better corporate due diligence on supply chains for 3TG minerals.

The Government Diamond Office (GDO) based in the FCO, and the UK Border Force, are responsible for implementing the KP and preventing illicit rough diamonds entering or leaving the UK. In 2017, the GDO provided expert advice to the UK rough diamond industry, audited all UK companies who traded in rough diamonds, and issued certificates for rough diamond exports worth US\$88.3 million.

The UK encourages relevant UK importers of 3TG minerals to carry out full and transparent due diligence based on the OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains of Minerals from Conflict-Affected and High-Risk Areas. The UK was fully engaged in the passing of the EU Conflict Minerals Regulation in 2017, which aims to stop the import of conflict minerals into the EU. We are represented on the Governing Board of the European Partnership for the Responsible Sourcing of Minerals (EPRM), a supporting measure to the EU Regulation and OECD Due Diligence Guidance. In 2017, through the EPRM, we supported projects in Democratic Republic of the Congo, Colombia and Indonesia. Further details are available on the EPRM website¹⁴ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:14>). We also contributed £100,000 to support the implementation of the OECD Due Diligence Guidance in Colombia.

The Open Government Partnership

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) was established in 2011 to provide an international platform for domestic reformers committed to making their governments open, accountable, and responsive to citizens. In 2017, the UK (a founding member) concluded its turn on the Steering Committee, having successfully supported the transition to a new Steering Committee comprised of Chile, Croatia, France, Georgia, Indonesia, Italy, Mexico, Romania, South Africa and South Korea. The partnership continued to grow. In 2017 it accepted membership from 15 sub-national governments, which are bound by the same processes as national governments. They are required to work with civil society to develop and implement open government reforms through National Action Plans (NAPs). Realising the commitments in these plans requires cooperation between government and the citizen. On joining the OGP, governments at every level commit to protecting the right of not-for-profit and civil society organisations to enjoy freedom of expression, association, and opinion.

The OGP has sought greater protection for civil society organisations working in difficult circumstances. In 2017, the OGP's Steering Committee formally ended Turkey's membership after a year of inactive status as Turkey had failed to take action towards commitments made in 2015 to work with civil society. Another reason was Turkey's failure to deliver on its National Action Plan. In addition, Tanzania voluntarily withdrew from the OGP in favour of focussing on membership of the African Peer Review Mechanism.

As well as providing core funding to the OGP, the UK directly supported projects in twelve countries during 2017. This included providing advice to Macedonia on implementing commitments in its NAP (we provided advice and deployed an expert to support the development of Macedonia's Open Data Portal). In support of our OGP work and specifically for International Open Data Day, we funded projects in Ukraine, Ghana, Romania, Latvia, South Africa, Guatemala, and Albania. We have targeted work with civil society and governments in member states, including Slovakia and Croatia, either to develop their action plans or to achieve specific objectives.

In December, the UK restated its commitment to working with civil society and government to provide the leadership to protect and enhance the necessary civic space for transformative reforms.

Freedom of Religion or Belief

In 2017, promoting and defending freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) remained a high priority for the UK. In February, the Prime Minister, Theresa May, reiterated the government's commitment to “stand up for the freedom of people of all religions to practice their beliefs in peace and safety”. The Minister for Human Rights, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, made FoRB a personal priority and began to develop a strategy to galvanise the work of our diplomatic network.

The right to FoRB came under increasing pressure. Discrimination and persecution of minorities was seen in many forms and diverse parts of the world. For example, in Burma, the religious identity of the Rohingya people has long been a factor behind the discrimination they suffer at the hands of the state, and was arguably a motivating factor behind the violence they suffered at the hands of the Burmese military in 2017. Minorities in Pakistan continued to suffer persecution and discrimination, and blasphemy legislation continued to be abused by the justice system. Persecution of the Baha'i in Iran and Yemen was particularly acute, and followers of that faith also faced discrimination elsewhere.

In many countries, through patient, quiet diplomacy or through public statements, the UK worked to reinforce the importance of the universal right to FoRB. For example, in Iraq, we worked to build consensus around the importance of freedom of religion or belief, and of its promotion and protection, in the process of reconstruction of the country following the conflict with Daesh.

Throughout 2017, engagement with faith leaders and NGOs increased. Lord Ahmad launched a series of roundtables to enhance dialogue with faith leaders and civil society experts, in order to draw on their experience. Meetings in 2017 discussed Burma and the role of women in tackling violent extremism.

Promoting FoRB in multilateral fora remained an important element of the UK's work. Lord Ahmad highlighted the importance of defending the right to FoRB when he addressed the Human Rights Council in September. At the UN General Assembly in December, the UK worked successfully to help maintain consensus on the adoption of the EU-sponsored resolution on 'Freedom of Religion or Belief', and the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation-sponsored resolution on 'Combating Religious Intolerance'.

During 2017, we continued to raise cases of persecution in individual countries, in particular:

- in China, there were further reports of the demolition of churches and the removal of crosses. 2017 saw the introduction of new restrictions targeting Muslim Uyghurs in Xinjiang. We continued to raise our concerns through the UK-China Human Rights Dialogue, whose latest session was held in Beijing in June
- in Nepal, the Embassy hosted a breakfast meeting with faith leaders to mark 'International Religious Freedom Day', and to explore different faith groups' perspectives on how the international community might help promote FoRB. The event reminded the Nepalese government to uphold its international obligations in this area
- in July, the Supreme Court in Russia upheld a ruling to label the Jehovah's Witnesses as an 'extremist organisation', effectively criminalising peaceful worship by 175,000 Russian citizens. Lord Ahmad issued a statement on 18 July condemning this decision, and called on the Russian government to uphold its international commitments to religious freedom. Embassy officials and those from the FCO in London continue to hold regular meetings with representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses, and Embassy officials coordinated attendance at each hearing with our international partners
- the High Commission in Nigeria organised a live panel discussion on religious tolerance on one of Nigeria's biggest TV networks, for an audience of over 15 million
- the ongoing conflict in Syria increased tensions between the different religious groups in the country leading to heightened intolerance, particularly in Daesh-controlled areas, and increased sectarian violence. We continued to support non-governmental efforts to promote dialogue between different ethnic and sectarian groups in Syria, in the search for progress towards a political settlement. We have been clear that any such settlement must include protection for religious rights and freedoms, including for religious minorities; and
- in Bangladesh, the traditional culture of tolerance has faced challenges from local-level discrimination and violence against minority communities. Against this backdrop, during his visit to Bangladesh, Lord Ahmad visited the Ahmadiyya Mosque in Dhaka and made a call for religious tolerance. The High Commission maintains contact with religious groups and leaders, and is preparing a strategy to address intolerance against religious minorities

Throughout 2017, we continued to support a number of FoRB projects through the FCO's Magna Carta Fund. These included a project to support secondary school teachers in Iraq, Lebanon and Morocco to educate their students about tolerance and FoRB. An indication of the impact of this project came when the Kurdish Regional Government asked for it to be shared with every child in the region. The FCO works closely with DFID to raise concerns on FoRB with partner governments. During 2017, DFID also sharpened its focus on FoRB, by announcing a UK Aid Connect programme to address key development challenges in building FoRB.

Looking forward to 2018, a key focus of our work will be to use our newly developed strategy to mobilise the diplomatic network. This will include building on our existing network of parliamentarians, faith leaders and academia through ongoing collaboration. Our bilateral interventions will also remain an important part of our work as we seek to prioritise a number of countries for our FoRB work. Finally, we will build on strengthening and amplifying the work of our diplomatic network to further their efforts to promote FoRB across the globe.

Post-Holocaust Issues

The FCO, along with other government departments, continued to play a leading role in promoting Holocaust education and remembrance. In January, the FCO co-hosted a Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration event with the embassy of Israel. Among the high profile speakers were Professor Yehuda Bauer, Academic Adviser to Yad Vashem, and Holocaust survivor, Dorit Oliver-Wolff. The event provided an opportunity for the London diplomatic community to reflect on the Holocaust Memorial Day theme 'How can life go on?', and the on-going issue of antisemitism.

Sir Eric Pickles, UK Envoy for Post- Holocaust Issues, continued to lead the Government’s international work on post-Holocaust Issues, supported by the FCO. As part of his work with international partners, Sir Eric visited a number of countries, including Luxembourg, Poland, Serbia, Switzerland and the US.

As a founding and active member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (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. Also in 2017, we welcomed the decision by Australia to move from observer to liaison status at IHRA.

Another important area of our post-Holocaust activity was to continue support for the work of the International Tracing Service (ITS), as a member of its International Commission. ITS continued to make progress in making more records accessible digitally, allowing victims of the Holocaust and their family members to undertake research more easily. In addition, as part of our own commitment to remembrance and transparency, the UK Government released over 4,000 files on Nazi persecution to the National Archives.

Our work to combat antisemitism also remained a high priority during 2017. Sir Eric Pickles led the way in encouraging other states to consider adopting the working definition of antisemitism, agreed by IHRA in 2016, for their domestic use. We welcomed the decisions by Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Israel and Romania to adopt the working definition, as well as by the Scottish Government and the City of London. In 2018, we shall continue to reach out and build on others’ growing interest in this issue.

Death Penalty and Torture Prevention

It is the long-standing policy of the UK to oppose the death penalty in all circumstances as a matter of principle, because 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 plays a leading role in pressing for reduced use of the death penalty overseas, through multilateral institutions including the UN, and through targeted bilateral interventions in priority countries. We aim to increase the number of abolitionist countries, including through ratifications of the Second Optional Protocol of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

We encourage retentionist countries to:

- reduce the range of crimes carrying the death penalty
- move towards a moratorium
- reduce the use of the death penalty against juvenile and vulnerable offenders
- encourage greater transparency about use of the death penalty in line with international standards, for example the relevant UN safeguards.

According to the 2017 report from Amnesty International, more than half (51%) of all recorded executions were carried out in Iran, which together with Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Pakistan carried out 84% of the global total. China also continued to execute in the thousands.

In 2017, the FCO continued to press for death penalty reforms through its network of diplomatic missions, its partnerships with experts in international NGOs, and collaboration with those seeking reform in countries which retain the death penalty. There was some progress in 2017. The Supreme Court in Kenya and the Constitutional Court in Guatemala both declared the death penalty to be unconstitutional. Pakistan also made a positive step towards reviewing its death penalty in relation to 31 crimes, with a view to limiting the scope of its use. In Malaysia, we welcomed the passing of an amendment to the Dangerous Drugs Act, which removes the mandatory death penalty. This allows greater judicial discretion in sentencing. The FCO continues to raise concerns over the use of the death penalty in the US.

Using the Magna Carta Fund, the FCO continued in 2017 to support projects dedicated to abolishing the death penalty. For example, in Malawi we supported NGOs on a re-sentencing project which saw 154 individuals originally sentenced to the mandatory death penalty resentenced, of whom 112 were immediately released and none of whom were executed.

The FCO continued to fund projects in 2017 aimed at establishing a global culture of torture prevention. The UK’s own experience is that two steps are necessary to prevent torture from occurring: a clear political will to end the practice, and the establishment of a National Preventative Mechanism (NPM). The pathway to establishing an NPM is laid out in the UN’s Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT). The UK calls on all states to ratify and implement the OPCAT. FCO programme spending on torture prevention focuses on this goal. In 2017, Indonesia took steps to prepare for ratification of OPCAT, including the introduction and implementation of detention safeguards. In Rwanda, an NGO assisted the government with establishing a legislative basis for the establishment of a NPM. On 21 September, Madagascar ratified OPCAT. We will continue to work with international experts to support states to prevent torture and to improve standards of detention.

Overseas Security Justice Assistance

The FCO has worked 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.

In countries where the UK Government is regularly engaged in security and justice assistance, the relevant diplomatic mission now maintains a 'Stage 1' in-country assessment and provides it to all interested departments or agencies to help them in their analysis and to provide consistency in the OSJA process. Diplomatic missions which produce 'Stage 1' assessments draw together expertise from colleagues from all relevant parent government departments, and use a wide range of available evidence, to ensure that these assessments are as comprehensive, expert, and up-to-date as possible.

In 2017, the FCO continued to work with other government departments and agencies to encourage full use of the OSJA Guidance and to appoint focal points in relevant departments and agencies for its implementation. This network shares best practice and facilitates consistent implementation of the guidance. A senior officials' group was convened to share feedback and lessons learned and to clarify roles and responsibilities for effective implementation. The FCO supported organisations across government with relevant training.

An estimate of the number of OSJA cases from across government during financial year 2017 to 2018 is as follows:

Number of OSJA cases for FY 2017 to 2018

Europe	80
Central Asia	28
Americas	45
Middle East and North Africa	179
Sub Saharan Africa	114
South Asia	50
Asia Pacific	84

Export Controls

UK export licensing processes are key to ensuring responsible UK defence and security exports. In 2017, the Department for International Trade issued over 13,000 licenses. All export licences are assessed on a case-by-case basis against the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria (the 'Consolidated Criteria'). The FCO will not recommend that the Department for International Trade issues a licence if to do so would be inconsistent with our international obligations, including 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, or for aggression against another country, or for asserting a territorial claim by force.

Migration

We estimate that more than 171,000 attempted to migrate informally across the Mediterranean in 2017, a reduction of over 50% from 2016. Just over 3,000 died or went missing. 90% embarked from Libya. Just under 120,000 arrived in Italy. The number of migrants crossing into Greece from Turkey fell by over 80% compared with 2016, to just under 30,000.

Achieving well managed migration requires coordinated interventions at all stages of the migrants' journey – a 'whole of route' approach. We therefore prioritise interventions in countries of origin, transit and destination, in order to reduce the drivers of irregular migration which can put lives at risk.

The UK has allocated over £175 million in humanitarian response to the Mediterranean migration crisis since October 2015. This includes a new £75 million programme, which will aim to reduce deaths and suffering along the migration route from West Africa through the Sahel to Libya. The programme will provide critical humanitarian assistance and protection, assist those along the way who may wish to return home, provide information of the dangers ahead, and offer vulnerable people meaningful alternatives to the perilous journeys towards Libya and Europe.

The UK is focusing on pursuing the criminal gangs which facilitate movement of large numbers of migrants into Europe and which expose them to abuse and exploitation. The multi-agency Organised Immigration Crime Taskforce operates in 17 source, transit and destination countries across Europe and Africa, building capacity and helping disrupt criminal networks.

In 2017, the UK continued to deploy a Royal Navy vessel in support of Operation SOPHIA, the EU's counter-migrant smuggling operation in the Mediterranean, and contributed to training and strengthening the capacity of the Libyan naval coastguard. Since May 2015, UK naval vessels have

saved over 12,500 lives and destroyed over 170 smuggling boats. In the same period, Border Force assets supporting EU search and rescue missions in the Central Mediterranean and Aegean (FRONTEX Operations Triton and Poseidon) have saved over 16,000 lives.

The UK continued to provide support to Turkey and Greece to implement the EU-Turkey Statement of March 2016, including through provision of specialist staff to the EU Commission and the European Asylum Support Office in Greece, which has helped significantly reduce illegal migration through Turkey.

The UK has a long history of providing protection to those who need it. In the 12 months to September, over 6,000 people were provided with protection and support under our resettlement schemes. We have committed to resettling 20,000 refugees fleeing the Syrian conflict under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme by 2020. This is in addition to our commitment to resettle up to 3,000 children at risk, and their families, from the Middle East and North Africa under our Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme, also by 2020.

The UK believes that improving the management of migration requires a concerted and coordinated international response. Our objective is an effective international framework to ensure that migration is safe, orderly, and balances the rights and responsibilities of states and migrants. To this end, the UK has participated in UN-led consultations towards a Global Compact on Migration and a Global Compact on Refugees. Negotiations will conclude in 2018.

Department for International Development: Work on Economic and Social Rights

The Department for International Development (DFID) is committed to enabling people overseas to enjoy the rights and freedoms defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and core treaties of international human rights law. As set out in the UK Aid Strategy, our aid is focused on the most fragile and conflict-affected countries, where human rights abuses are often most acute. It is in these places particularly that girls and women, LGBT people, people with disabilities and older persons, and members of other disadvantaged groups experience multiple barriers, including social discrimination, unfair laws and violence.

UK programmes funded by DFID support the protection and promotion of human rights across a range of areas such as women and girls, women's economic empowerment, LGBT people, rights of people with disabilities, rights of older persons, health, education, nutrition, water and sanitation, land, and social protection in the fight against poverty.

The following section summarises some of the main achievements in 2017 in those fields and current priorities for DFID.

Women and Girls' Rights

The FCO is working closely with DFID on this priority issue. Reproductive rights are central to women and girls' empowerment. In 2017, the UK hosted the Family Planning Summit, which reaffirmed a global commitment to voluntary, rights-based family planning. At the Summit, 36 countries made new commitments or expanded existing ones. The UK committed to spend £1.1 billion in this area over five years. This will support contraceptive use by nearly 20 million people, and will prevent more than an estimated three million abortions – many of which would have been performed in dangerous circumstances or conditions.

To support quality education for marginalised girls, DFID's flagship Girls' Education Challenge focuses on getting girls into school and learning. The first phase, which ended in 2017, directly supported over a million disadvantaged girls, through 37 projects in 18 countries.

The UK is committed to tackling all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG), both at home and overseas. Two UK funded programmes have contributed to 23 countries now having National Action Plans which address child, early and forced marriage and/or female genital mutilation. The UK's flagship 'What Works to Prevent Violence' programme has been undertaking innovative interventions and is now producing ground breaking evidence that will be used to tackle VAWG.

In 2017, the UK also supported programmes to increase women's political empowerment. For example, DFID's work with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy provided technical assistance to parliaments and political parties around the world, to include more women, youth, people with disabilities and members of other marginalised groups in parliamentary and political processes. In Somalia, the UK's Accountability Programme was successful in increasing the representation of women in parliament to 24% in 2017, a 10% rise from the 2012 electoral cycle.

Women's Economic Empowerment

In 2017, the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment concluded its work, bringing together global leaders from business, civil society and government. The UK was a strong supporter of the initiative. The High Level Panel's second report, launched at the Commission on the Status of Women in March, set out a stakeholder action plan for women's economic empowerment. The UK is now implementing the Panel's recommendations, both internationally and domestically.

Domestically, in April, the UK introduced mandatory reporting of gender pay gaps and bonuses for voluntary and private sector employers in the UK with more than 250 workers, covering almost half the total workforce.

Internationally in 2018, through its new Work and Opportunities for Women programme, DFID will cooperate with businesses to help up to 300,000 women in developing countries get jobs with higher incomes and better working conditions.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Rights

Protecting and promoting LGBT rights is essential to meet DFID's vision of a world where no one is left behind. This is central to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and a secure and prosperous world by 2030. 'DFID's Approach to LGBT rights', a policy document launched in 2017, set out the elements for achieving this goal: building a solid evidence base to underpin DFID's work; strengthening voices from the Global South; developing new partnerships; and ensuring that LGBT issues are addressed in all DFID programmes. The inclusion of LGBT people was one of the eight priority thematic areas highlighted for support through DFID's UK Aid Connect programme launched in 2017.

Rights of People with Disabilities

One billion of the world's population are estimated to have a disability, of whom 80% live in developing countries. People with disabilities are often among the most discriminated against in society, suffering appalling levels of violence and indignity.

In 2017, the Secretary of State for International Development, Penny Mordaunt, reaffirmed the UK's commitment to achieving progress for people with disabilities, stating that DFID would put the inclusion of people with disabilities at the heart of its work.

In 2017, the UK continued to support programmes for people with disabilities in developing countries. Examples include DFID's Girls' Education Programme, which ended in 2017, having helped over 46,000 girls with disabilities to access education in countries including Kenya and Uganda; the Disability Catalyst Programme, which promoted grassroots advocacy in countries including Bangladesh, Rwanda and Malawi; and the Amplify Challenge programme which sought innovative solutions to tackle the barriers faced by people with disabilities in countries such as Nepal and Zambia.

In July 2018, the UK will co-host a Global Disability Summit, in partnership with the International Disability Alliance and the Kenyan government. The objective of the Summit is to strengthen global efforts to achieve greater social inclusion of people with disabilities particularly in the poorest countries in the world. The UK Government wants the Summit to be the starting point for major change on this neglected issue.

Rights of Older Persons

Many older people have no reliable source of income and are much more likely to have disabilities. Our work on ageing forms an important part of the UK's work on disability inclusion and is integral to our approach to the UN's programme on inclusion, 'Leave No One Behind'. In this context, the DFID supported Social Cash Transfer programme will help 700,000 households in Zambia to access cash grants by the end of 2018. The majority of these households are headed by older people or people with disabilities who are also looking after children.

Right 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. We directly support 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 supports 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 continues to be a world leader in tackling Neglected Tropical Diseases, and in April we announced the investment of £360 million for this area. In 2017, the UK funded over 144 million treatments and 60,000 surgeries, to reduce or avoid disability, including blindness.

Right to Education

Access to education is a human right. Education unlocks individual potential and benefits society as a whole, powering sustainable development. However, 387 million of the world's children (56%) are not on course to learn to read by the end of their attendance at primary school.

Between 2015 and 2017, the UK helped 7.1 million children in developing countries enjoy a decent education. In 2018, we will set out the UK's approach to helping children learn in some of the world's poorest and fragile, conflict-affected countries including through a new DFID education policy setting out how the UK will prioritise good teaching and system reform, to improve the quality of education, along with additional support to poor and marginalised children, including those affected by conflict and those with disabilities.

Nutrition, Water, Sanitation and Land

Malnutrition is a major challenge to human development and to economic growth in developing countries. It affects one in three people. Women, adolescent girls, and young children are disproportionately affected.

The UK Government plans to reach 50 million people in developing countries with nutrition interventions by 2020. Between 2015 and 2017 we reached 26.3 million children under 5, adolescent girls and women of childbearing age. These efforts were focused on the first 1,000 days of the life of a child from conception to its second birthday, because interventions over this period have been shown to have the greatest impact on reducing stunting and improving cognitive development.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 calls for universal access to safe water and sanitation. The associated SDG baseline report showed that in 2015, 39% of the world's population lacked access to a safe water supply. In the financial year ending March 2017, the UK helped 15.9 million people gain sustainable access to water and sanitation, and on current plans we will have helped nearly 130 million people gain access between 2011 and 2020.

The UK continues to promote the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security. In 2017, a £68 million land registration programme supported by the UK in Ethiopia ensured women's individual or joint land rights and vulnerable groups' land rights were officially recognised in new land certificates. DFID's flagship programme on land governance, LEGEND¹⁵ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:15>), has been extended by a further £18 million to protect people's property rights and facilitate investment. For example, our partner Namati is empowering communities in Sierra Leone and Myanmar to negotiate with companies which want to access their land so they create long-term benefits for the community and a sustained return for the company.

Social Protection

In 2017, progress continued on reducing poverty globally, but extreme poverty remained high. Extreme poverty continued to be increasingly concentrated, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and in fragile and conflict-affected states. Social protection is critical to helping the poorest and most vulnerable to meet their basic needs, achieve important human development goals, and have more control over their lives.

Despite rapid expansion in the past 15 years, social protection coverage remained very low. The UK continued to work with partner governments to increase the reach, quality and sustainability of social protection systems. In 2017, the UK invested in social protection in 21 countries, both by supporting cash transfers and by helping build functional systems. In this area in 2018, the UK will focus in particular on gender issues, humanitarian contexts, and building sustainable social protection systems.

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, and continued to encourage them to agree to the extension of UN human rights Conventions which the UK has ratified, but to do so only when they are ready to apply them.

The UK Government believes that those living in the Overseas Territories have a right to expect the same high standards on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) rights as in the UK, and we are committed to working closely with the Territories on these issues. The Falkland Islands Government legalised same-sex marriage in April, and same-sex marriage has been legal on St Helena and Tristan da Cunha since December and August respectively. In May 2017 the Bermuda Supreme Court declared that same sex couples should be entitled to marry. The Domestic Partnerships Act, which will come into effect on 1 June 2018 removes the entitlement for same sex couples to marry, and will replace it with a provision for domestic partnerships for both same sex and opposite sex couples. Same sex marriages which have taken place in Bermuda before 31 May 2018 will remain valid. The UK regrets that Bermuda has chosen to remove the entitlement for same sex couples to marry, but respects that the Act has been democratically passed by the Parliament of Bermuda, paying careful attention to its constitutional and international obligations

Our relationship with the Overseas Territories is based on partnership and respect for their right to democratic self-government, and where same-sex relationships are not currently recognised, we will continue in 2018 to engage with both governments and civil society to drive their own legislative change forward.

The UK Government continued to work with the Governments of the Overseas Territories to help them fulfil their commitment to ensure the highest standards for the protection of children and the promotion of children's welfare. The Overseas Territories have developed, or are developing, National Response Plans on child safeguarding, and the UK government continues to providing technical support, including child safeguarding training for police, teachers and social workers, and assistance to enhance safeguarding systems and legal frameworks.

Chapter 2: The Rules-Based International System

Human Rights at the UN

The UN is the leading 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. The UK strongly supports the work of the HRC and of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in promoting and protecting human rights worldwide. We support, too, the UN's Human Rights Up Front initiative to improve its ability to prevent and respond to violations and abuses. Other important UN fora include the UN General Assembly Third Committee, the UN Security Council and the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

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).

In 2017, the UK maintained financial support for UN human rights work, providing approximately £5.5 million in voluntary funding on top of our UN Regular Budget contribution. This included un-earmarked funding (£2.5 million), and money for specific projects, including on conflict prevention, and on combating sexual- and gender-based violence.

During 2017, 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 co-sponsored a number of resolutions in UN fora including on girls' education, violence against women, and discrimination against women, all of which reinforced women's rights in these key areas.

Human Rights Council

The UK's current term on the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) ends in December 2019. We will continue to use our voice to help strengthen the Council, to support countries which are working to improve their human rights record, and to hold to account states which commit serious and systematic violations. All HRC members must live up to their membership responsibilities, upholding the highest standards of human rights; the UK will continue to encourage countries running for membership of the HRC to set out campaign pledges, and participate in election hustings. The UK supports efforts to strengthen the HRC. To this end, the then Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, co-hosted an event at UNGA with US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley and Dutch Foreign Minister Bert Koenders. The UK is part of a cross-regional group formed in Geneva following the UNGA event, which is working to identify measures to make the Council more effective, including ways to streamline the programme of work. The UK also co-hosted a large- scale retreat for former and current HRC members in Geneva in December.

Country issues

The UK raised Burma five times at the UN Security Council (UNSC) in 2017. The UK/France-led presidential statement on 6 November was the first UNSC product on Burma for 10 years. The UK also raised human rights concerns about Burma in every Human Rights Council (HRC) session in 2017. We supported the HRC resolution in March which initiated the despatch of a UN Fact-Finding Mission to establish the facts and circumstances of alleged human rights violations and abuses in Burma, in particular in Rakhine State; and decided to extend its mandate to September 2018. We also supported an HRC Special Session on 5 December on the situation of the Rohingya, at which the Council adopted a resolution which ensured continued HRC attention on Burma, and which at UK request included strong language on sexual violence.

The UK continued to lead action in the HRC on Syria and to form part of the core group for the UN General Assembly (UNGA) Third Committee resolution. The March session of the HRC resolution renewed the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry on Syria. The September HRC resolution established a high-level panel, to take place in March 2018. In the UNSC, we repeatedly raised concerns about violations of human rights and of international humanitarian law.

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 which in 2017 for the first time included a reference to the human rights of dual nationals. 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.

In March, the Human Rights Council 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 2-state solution is the only sustainable path for delivering justice and human rights for both Israelis and Palestinians, and voted in favour of resolutions on self-determination and human rights in the OPTs. The UK supports an effective Human Rights Council as a central element of the rules-based international system. However, the existence of a dedicated agenda item (‘Item 7’) which singles out Israel and stimulates a disproportionate number of resolutions against it does little to advance the achievement of a negotiated 2-state solution. The UK therefore voted against the Syrian Golan resolution, and abstained on the accountability and settlements resolutions.

The EU and Japan jointly led a resolution on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) at the HRC and UNGA Third Committee. The HRC resolution renewed the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the DPRK, and called for the strengthening of the field office of the UN OHCHR in Seoul in order that it might contribute to a comprehensive approach towards accountability. In December, the UK supported calls for the fourth UNSC meeting on human rights in the DPRK.

At the June session of the HRC, the UK supported a Ukrainian-led resolution on human rights violations in Crimea and eastern Ukraine. The resolution mandated quarterly briefings of the HRC until June 2019. At the Third Committee, the UK was in the core group supporting a resolution tabled by Ukraine on human rights in Crimea. The resolutions continued to hold Russia to account for its illegal annexation.

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 resolution also called on OHCHR to conduct investigations and for relevant mandate holders to visit Libya.

On Yemen, the September session of the HRC passed a consensus resolution which went considerably further than the 2016 resolution, establishing a Group of Eminent, International and Regional experts to monitor and report on the human rights situation.

The UK was instrumental in ensuring that the HRC renewed the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi. The resolution passed with overwhelming support, including from Botswana and Rwanda, coming on top of an African Group-led resolution where Burundi publicly pledged to cooperate with OHCHR.

The HRC passed two resolutions on the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The first, in June, requested the High Commissioner for Human Rights to despatch a team of international experts to investigate alleged human rights violations and abuses in the Kasai provinces. In September, the HRC requested the High Commissioner to continue to provide updates on the country as a whole to each HRC session in 2018. Despite this, DRC was elected to serve on the HRC from 2018 until 2020. The UK will continue to urge all HRC members to live up to their obligations to promote and protect human rights worldwide and cooperate fully with OHCHR.

Supporting reconciliation and reform in Sri Lanka remained a priority in 2017. In March, the UK co-sponsored a resolution with the Government of Sri Lanka, extending its commitment to engage with OHCHR and the holders of special procedures mandates in the promotion and protection of human rights in Sri Lanka for a further two years.

Thematic issues

The June session of the HRC adopted resolutions on ending female genital mutilation; child, early and forced marriage; discrimination against women; and violence against women and girls. At the Third Committee, we helped secure (for the first time) a strong reference to comprehensive sexuality education in the resolution on youth. We were disappointed that similar language in resolutions on the girl child, the rights of the child, and the rights of women and girls with disabilities was diluted by amendments, but overall the global debate on adolescent health moved forward.

The UK also supported efforts to increase transparency at the NGO Committee in New York, where some NGOs with a human rights focus have had to wait years for a decision. In April, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) approved a UK-sponsored decision to grant Christian Solidarity Worldwide UN accreditation after years of deferrals by the NGO Committee. At the HRC, the UK was active in defeating amendments against resolutions on human rights defenders, and the Third Committee adopted a resolution calling on member states to mark the 20th anniversary of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

The UK again worked successfully to help secure consensus on the two religion-related resolutions at the HRC and 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 continued to engage constructively in international discussions on ageing, including at the annual session of the Open Ended Working Group on Ageing. The UK actively maintains that the whole spectrum of internationally recognised human rights standards and principles apply to older persons, as they do to all individuals without distinction.

Universal Periodic Review

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, began in 2017; the UK underwent its own examination in May. As a strong supporter of the UPR process, the UK participated in all reviews in 2017. During Pakistan's Review in November, the UK focused on protecting and promoting freedom of religion or belief, highlighting the misuse of the blasphemy laws, and advocating the establishment of an independent National Commission for Minorities. We will continue to promote best practice as the third cycle continues in 2018.

Treaty Monitoring Bodies and Special Procedures

The UK was examined under the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in August. The UK's report and the Committee's concluding observations are available on the UN OHCHR website.

The UK extends a standing invitation to any UN Special Rapporteur who wants to undertake an official visit. In 2017, the UK received the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and hazardous waste substances, Baskut Tuncak.

UN Security Council

As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, the UK is committed to supporting the three pillars of the UN's work. These are: maintaining international peace and security; fostering development; and protecting and promoting human rights. In 2017, 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', in 2017 the UK supported UN institutions in their efforts to prevent conflict and to help countries emerging from violence progress towards sustainable peace. The UK also supported the UN Secretary-General's initiatives to reform and refresh the UN. This will enable the UN to deal with complex future challenges using its range of capabilities flexibly, creatively and efficiently.

Responsibility to Protect, and Mass Atrocity Prevention

In 2017, the UK continued its support for mass atrocity prevention and for the principle of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). Through engagement with other UN member states, the UK continued to drive international policy, and provided funding for the UN's Joint Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and Responsibility to Protect, and for the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. This funding helped to strengthen international understanding of R2P, and to raise awareness of countries at risk and of support programmes in regions at risk.

Peacebuilding

In 2017, the UK continued to support peacebuilding through the UN, in line with our National Security Strategy priorities. As well as encouraging a more coordinated UN approach to peacebuilding, by strengthening its peacebuilding architecture and its political, humanitarian, security and development tools, we have continued to promote the rule of law, good governance and human rights as fundamental building blocks for sustaining peace.

The UN's Special Political Missions (SPMs) are important instruments for delivering peacebuilding effect, as is the Peacebuilding Fund. Many SPMs are mandated to monitor and protect human rights. By taking a strategic approach to the SPMs – evaluating and improving their mandates, staffing and resources – we have helped to improve their delivery in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Somalia.

Peacekeeping

UN peacekeeping missions play a vital role in supporting the transition from conflict to peace in some of the most fragile regions in the world. The destabilising effects of such conflicts, particularly the violence and displacement which they produce, often leave civilian populations vulnerable to human rights violations and abuses. Peacekeeping missions contribute to reducing that threat.

As a member of the UN Security Council, the UK seeks to ensure that all missions are mandated to protect civilians where relevant to the situation. All new UN peacekeeping missions since 1999 have had protection of civilians in their mandate, and for some it is the primary goal.

In 2017, we continued to promote peacekeeping reform through our focus on the ‘3Ps’ (better mission Planning; more and better Pledges of personnel and equipment; and stronger mission Performance). We pursued this through UN Security Council negotiations to get mission mandates right, advocacy, and funding from the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund programme to improve UN structures and policies. We also provided direct support to missions and troop/police contributors.

The UK fully supports the zero tolerance policy championed by the UN Secretary-General (UNSG) towards sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA). The UK has made it a priority to tackle the abhorrent actions of individuals who prey on the vulnerability of the populations whom they ought to serve. We commend the UNSG's decision to repatriate military units when there is credible evidence of widespread and systemic SEA by that unit.

Commonwealth

Preparation for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. The UK's membership of the Commonwealth continued to be an important means of strengthening and promoting democracy, human rights, good governance and the rule of law, underscoring the values and principles set out in the Commonwealth Charter. In 2017, the UK continued to work with Commonwealth member states, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth's networks of accredited organisations, to strengthen cooperation on a range of human rights issues, and to make preparations in advance of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in April 2018.

At the UN General Assembly in September, the Prime Minister announced the overarching themes for the summit, ‘Towards a Common Future’, and four sub-themes: a Fairer Future, a more Secure Future, a more Sustainable Future and a more Prosperous Future. The agenda for a Fairer Future recognised the Commonwealth's proud history of action to promote democratic principles.

The UK believes that by upholding the values of the Charter, Commonwealth member states can ensure a fairer future for all Commonwealth citizens, which is the essential basis for justice and sustainable development.

Democracy

The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) continued to serve as the custodian of the Commonwealth's fundamental political values. On 17 March, CMAG met in London, and members briefed His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales on the latest developments in the Commonwealth. During the CMAG meeting in New York in September, Commonwealth Secretary General, Patricia Scotland, updated the group on work to support member states to strengthen democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. The Secretary General reported on Commonwealth Observer Group deployments to national elections held in the Bahamas, Lesotho, Papua New Guinea and Kenya.

During 2017, in line with membership criteria and process agreed in 2007, the Commonwealth Secretariat worked with the Government of Gambia ahead of Gambia's readmission to the Commonwealth. The Secretariat noted several human rights developments including the release of 171 political prisoners, and consultations on an envisaged Truth, Reconciliation and Reparation Commission to address the human rights violations of the past and to foster national healing. The UK warmly welcomed this progress.

Inclusion

On 1 June, the Commonwealth approved the accreditation of The Commonwealth Equality Network (TCEN), the first LGBT-focused organisation to be officially accredited by the Commonwealth. This represented a further step to make concrete the Commonwealth Charter's opposition to “all forms of discrimination, whether rooted in gender, race, colour, creed, political belief or other grounds”. During 2017, the FCO provided financial support to TCEN to support its ongoing advocacy work.

In the margins of the 28th session of the Universal Periodic Review in Geneva in November, the Commonwealth Secretariat, DFID and the Embassy co-hosted an event to share best practice on implementation of the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities and on challenging the stigma and discrimination faced by people living with disability. The event looked forward to advancing the rights of people with disabilities at CHOGM and the Global Disability Summit in 2018.

In 2017, the UK continued to provide financial support to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission in its role as Chair of the Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions. The Forum plays an important role in enhancing respect for human rights by member countries, allowing their Human Rights Institutions to share expertise and best practice. The UK also planned for the continuation of support to the Forum during the UK's period as Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth between 2018 and 2020.

Europe

The European Union

In 2017, the UK continued to work in partnership with the EU institutions and member states to promote and protect human rights and democracy around the world. The EU played a leading role in UN human rights fora and led on a number of resolutions, including on DPRK and Burma. The UK contributed significantly to the EU's drafting and negotiation of these and other priority resolutions. The EU also succeeded in highlighting the continuing human rights abuses and violations in Burundi and in forging consensus on the rights of the child. The UK played a notable leadership role in securing EU action in response to the persecution of LGBT people in Chechnya, leading to coordinated calls on the Government of Russia to investigate.

EU policy was guided by the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy¹⁶ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:16>) adopted in 2015. In 2017, a mid-term review of the plan found that it had served its purpose as a policy and planning instrument: it had defined clear areas of focus, and provided flexibility to respond to new challenges, in particular the shrinking space for civil society and increased threats to human rights defenders.

In October, the EU published its latest Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World¹⁷ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:17>). Following calls from the UK and others, the European External Action Service (EEAS) focused the Annual Report more on the impact of its human rights work rather than just setting out a description of actions undertaken. The report detailed the human rights work undertaken in 2016 by the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, Stavros Lambrinidis, and the network of 139 EU Delegations around the world.

Council of Europe

The UK used its membership of the Council of Europe (CoE), and status as ‘Grand Payeur’ (the six major contributors to the CoE), to advance its human rights objectives in Europe and played an active role in many of the key issues affecting the institution. Following a decision by the CoE Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) to place Turkey on full monitoring procedures in April 2017, FCO ministers emphasised the importance of the Turkey-CoE relationship and leveraged the UK's own relationship with Turkey to encourage a stabilisation of its relationship with the CoE. Although Turkey announced in November 2017 a decision to rescind its ‘Grand Payeur’ status, Turkey remained engaged with the CoE. On 30 June, Russia announced that it was withholding the second tranche payment (€22 million) to the CoE budget for 2017 in response to the self-imposed exile of its parliamentary delegation: the Russian delegation had not presented its credentials since PACE imposed sanctions on the Russian delegation in 2014 in the wake of Russia's actions in Crimea and eastern Ukraine. The UK continued to urge Russia to fulfil its financial obligations in the CoE.

Secretary General Jagland visited Russia and Turkey to discuss human rights concerns in those countries. The Minister for Europe and the Americas, Sir Alan Duncan, discussed these situations with the Secretary General in November.

The Committee of Ministers (CoM), the CoE's principal decision-making body, discusses issues of a political nature and holds member states to account on human rights, democracy and the rule of law. In June, the CoM adopted a decision by PACE to investigate allegations of corruption within the Assembly. The UK led support for the investigation.

The CoM's responsibilities also include the supervision of implementation of European Court of Human Rights judgments.

2017 saw a further reduction in the number of cases against the UK which went to a judgment by the Court, and in the number of violations the Court found that the UK had committed. In December, the CoM noted with satisfaction the UK's proposals to address the Hirst group of judgments against the UK (relating to prisoners), paving the way for eventual closure of the issue.

In December, the CoM agreed the use of ECHR Article 46(4) against Azerbaijan in the case of Ilgar Mammadov. The provision entitles the CoM to refer to the Court the question whether a Party has failed to fulfil its obligation by not implementing a judgment and could lead, if the Court agrees, to one of a range of measures being taken by CoM against the State. The UK supported use of the provision (the first time the referral process had been triggered) but stressed that engagement remained the best solution.

While there was a fall in the overall backlog of cases, the Court had 56,262 cases pending at the end of 2017. The Government made clear that the UK would support the Danish Chairmanship of the CoE (November 2017 to May 2018) in seeking further reform of the Court, building on the Brighton declaration of 2012. The aim is to improve the Court's efficiency in order to address the large backlog of pending applications, and to ensure that the Court can focus on the most important cases before it.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) provides a central forum for dialogue between its 57 participating States. It oversees a body of commitments in the areas of human rights and democracy, as well as security, economic and environmental issues.

In 2017, the UK Ambassador was invited to chair the Human Dimension Committee (HDC), the OSCE's human rights forum. As chair, the UK ensured discussion within the OSCE of a range of human rights issues, including media freedom, combating intolerance and discrimination, modern slavery, freedom of religion or belief, gender equality and challenges to democracy. As well as monthly thematic meetings on human rights, the UK chaired negotiations on potential new OSCE human dimension commitments at the Vienna ministerial meeting in December.

Despite considerable effort, for a 3rd year running, OSCE states were unable to reach consensus on new human dimension decisions. However, the UK was instrumental in securing the adoption of two ministerial decisions on combating trafficking in human beings; and a majority of participating states issued a joint statement on human rights.

The Minister for Human Rights, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, attended the July Vienna informal ministerial meeting, where he spoke on the importance of respecting human rights while countering extremism, and met the acting heads of Representative on Freedom of the Media, and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). The Minister for Europe and the Americas, Sir Alan Duncan, attended the Vienna ministerial meeting in December, where he used his plenary intervention to demonstrate UK support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and for the OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine. The minister also reiterated the UK's commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms throughout the OSCE region.

Beyond the HDC, the UK delivered four national statements and 3 statements on behalf of the EU at Europe's biggest human rights conference, the OSCE's Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) in Warsaw in September. The UK also organised two well-received events at HDIM, on equal political participation and, with Poland, on modern slavery.

Throughout 2017, the UK worked closely with like-minded states to ensure that human rights violations were addressed at the weekly OSCE Permanent Council, and to secure strong candidates to head up the OSCE's institutions.

The UK was invited to chair the HDC for a second year in 2018.

International Criminal Justice

The UK actively maintains that those who commit atrocities should be held to account for their crimes. As such, 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 seeks to help victims and their communities come to terms with the past, contribute to lasting peace and security, and deter those who might otherwise commit such violations in the future.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) has jurisdiction over the most serious crimes of international concern: genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. The UK Government believes that the ICC plays an important role in pursuing accountability, when national authorities are either unable or unwilling to do so. We provide both political and financial support to the Court, contributing £8.9 million in 2017. By the end of 2017, the Court had issued 31 arrest warrants, handed down verdicts in 6 cases, and convicted nine individuals. It is currently considering cases from across Africa, the Middle East, Europe, South East Asia, and South America.

In 2017, the Court made reparations awards to the victims of Thomas Lubanga Dyilo and Germain Katanga, both convicted of war crimes in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi, convicted of destroying cultural heritage sites in Timbuktu in Mali. The UK also contributed £400,000 to the Court's Trust Fund for Victims to support counselling for rape victims, the provision of prosthetics, and work to de-stigmatise child soldiers in Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) closed at the end of 2017. In its 24 years of operation, the Tribunal indicted 161 individuals for serious violations of international humanitarian law, and provided a comprehensive historical record of the atrocities committed during the conflicts in the Western Balkans. One of its last acts was the conviction and sentencing of former Bosnian Serb military leader Ratko Mladi to life imprisonment for the Srebrenica genocide and other serious crimes during the 1992-5 conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Any outstanding work of the ICTY passed to the Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals (MICT), which had also assumed the residual functions of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in 2016.

In addition to the MICT and ICTY, the UK provided practical and financial support to the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, which were established to prosecute crimes committed by the Khmer Rouge regime in the 1970s, to the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, and to the Residual Special Court for Sierra Leone. Our contributions to these tribunals totalled £5.8 million in 2017.

The UK has also been at the forefront of international efforts to gather and analyse evidence of atrocities committed in the Middle East. In 2017, we contributed £200,000 to the UN International Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) to support the preparation of legal cases for serious crimes committed in the conflict in Syria. As part of the then Foreign Secretary's 'Bring Daesh to Justice' campaign, the UK led efforts to adopt a UN Security Council resolution establishing an Investigative Team to collect, preserve and store evidence of Daesh crimes starting in Iraq, and have contributed an initial £1 million towards its eventual operation.

Sanctions

Sanctions, such as arms embargoes, asset freezes and travel bans, are one of the tools which the UK uses, in coordination with multilateral bodies, to promote human rights and democracy. Sanctions are used as part of a broader political and diplomatic strategy, and aim to engender a change in behaviour, constrain the target's ability to continue unwanted behaviour, or signal disapproval of the target's 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. The UK is actively involved in regular reviews of EU sanctions. 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 2017, through the UN, we worked to maintain sanctions against the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in response to continuing human rights abuses and obstruction of the electoral process. We saw the positive impact of maintaining these sanctions in the publication of the electoral calendar for 2018. However, we continued to signal our concern about the ongoing violence and political unrest throughout DRC during the year, and sanctions will remain until elections have taken place. In the UN regime for the Central African Republic, the UK led the negotiations which ensured that the mandate responded to incitement to violence seen particularly along ethnic lines. We also used these negotiations to address sexual and gender based violence.

In the EU, we helped ensure that sanctions against Burundi were maintained for another year. Although the political crisis was not resolved, the pressure from sanctions contributed to increased engagement from the government in the political process. The UK also played a leading role in 2017 in the adoption of EU sanctions on Venezuela, in response to serious human rights violations and the country's continued slide towards authoritarian rule.

Currently the UK's legal framework for sanctions is derived from EU law. In order to prepare for leaving the EU, in October the Government introduced the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Bill in Parliament. The Bill would create the legal framework for the UK to impose sanctions where appropriate, including in the interests of international peace and security, but does not specify how we would use these powers in relation to specific countries or threats. That will be determined later when we introduce the secondary legislation needed to establish individual sanctions regimes. The Bill would also allow for the Government to continue to create anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing regulations. The Bill is expected to be granted Royal Assent in 2018.

Chapter 3: FCO Human Rights Programme

Frontline UK diplomatic work is supported by FCO programme funds, such as the Magna Carta Fund and the Rules Based International System Fund, and by cross-government programme funds, such as the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund.

Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy

The Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy continued to strengthen the FCO's commitment to our principles on human rights and democracy by supporting project work on the ground and within multilateral organisations. The Fund's main focus is to support projects and activity in the 30 Human Rights Priority Countries identified in this Report.

The Magna Carta Fund allocated approximately £10.6 million in the financial year 2017 to 2018 and supported Carta fund supports projects 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, LGBT rights, and the rule of law.

The Magna Carta Fund operated in over 60 countries. In financial year 2017 to 2018, the Fund was mainly allocated to the second and final year of multiyear projects. One example of a project in its second year was a project, conducted in partnership with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy and local partners, seeking to deliver change on the issue of violence against women and girls in the Middle East and North Africa. The project supported the Coalition of Arab Women MPs and aimed to increase public debate, promote potential new legislation, improve political leadership, and enhance regional cooperation, to uphold the rights of women and girls.

In November, WFD supported a regional conference in Tunis on violence against women and girls. It brought together representatives from a number of Arab countries including Morocco, Jordan, Tunisia, Iraq and Lebanon. Experts presented best practice on issues such as access to women's shelters, harassment in the workplace, and the specific forms of violence perpetrated against women with disabilities. The conference facilitated continued consultation on the draft Arab Convention to Combat Violence against Women. The Convention is the first of its kind to be ratified and reviewed by national parliaments during the drafting stage, and participants in the conference shared their feedback.

Another example of a project entering its 2nd year was in India, where our aim was to increase access to justice, and protect the rights of female victims of violence. Partnering with Sheffield Hallam University, the project brought senior police officers from India to the UK for training on how the UK police respond to incidents of violence and how they secure justice for victims. As a result of this and other activities, the police in Madhya Pradesh are opening 51 one-stop crisis centres to support female victims of violence.

Sometimes the project work is conducted through international organisations. Through our Mission in Geneva, the Magna Carta Fund supported a project helping civil society organisations access and participate in the Universal Periodic Review process of the UN Human Rights Council. It has helped civil society actors in key countries publish reports on the local human rights situation, which then serve as evidence to support calls for action. The project also brought civil society actors from key countries to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, to speak about their respective human rights objectives, and to inform state actors on how the international community can give assistance.

The Rules Based International System Fund

The rules-based international system (RBIS) is founded on relationships between states and through international institutions and frameworks which share rules and agreements on behaviour and standards. The RBIS Fund is an important complement to the Magna Carta Fund. In 2017 to 2018, the RBIS allocated £8,629,246 to projects and organisations which directly and indirectly supported human rights and

- 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; and
- working with business to deliver stability in conflict zones.

The RBIS Fund supported at least 55 projects in financial year 2017 to 2018. Like the Magna Carta Fund, the RBIS Fund is deployed across the world. One example of a project in its 2nd year in 2017 to 2018 was a project focusing on tackling sexual violence and stigmatisation in Colombia. This offered psychosocial support, empowering women and young people to report and document cases using the International Protocol on the Investigation and Documentation of Sexual Violence in Conflict, and to press for increased access to justice for victims. The project has enabled women to exert greater influence and leadership in their communities as agents of change, fighting to eliminate this abhorrent crime and the social stigma which so often accompanies it.

The RBIS Fund is also used to support international justice, and the FCO's Security and Justice Team, together with our Embassy in Phnom Penh, provided continued financial support to the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC). Established in 2003 following an agreement between the Cambodian government and the UN, the ECCC has helped deliver justice to millions of victims of the Khmer Rouge regime and hold the most responsible perpetrators to account, securing the conviction of some of the regime's most senior figures. It also played a vital role in allowing space for reconciliation in Cambodian society. The Tribunal's impressive outreach programme has involved over 400,000 Cambodians. Although the crimes were committed a long time ago, ECCC investigations, trials and appeals still continue and require support from both Cambodia and the international community.

Chapter 4: Consular – Human Rights and Assistance

Introduction

Consular assistance is at the heart of what the FCO does – the advice and practical support provided by UK officials to support British nationals overseas when something goes wrong. Our staff make an assessment of an individual's vulnerability and needs, based on who they are, where they are, and the situation they are facing. We then aim to offer assistance which helps meet these needs.

Human rights work is integrated with consular priorities. In 2018, the UK will continue to provide professional, non-judgmental assistance to British nationals overseas, irrespective of gender, race, age, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, religion or belief. We will continue to lobby against the death penalty, provide support to those in detention, support victims and potential victims of forced marriage, and raise allegations of torture and mistreatment where appropriate.

Death Penalty

At the end of 2017, 15 British nationals faced the death penalty worldwide and 47 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. When a British national is exposed to the death penalty, we intervene at whatever stage and level is deemed most effective, from the moment a death sentence becomes a possibility, in order to prevent the execution of any British national. We work closely with legal teams employed by British nationals facing the death penalty, and are supported in this endeavour by two respected NGOs: Reprieve, and the Death Penalty Project (DPP). In 2018, we will continue to intervene in death penalty cases as and where necessary.

Torture and Mistreatment

The UK takes all allegations or concerns of torture and mistreatment extremely seriously. Consular staff are required to take urgent action if they receive an allegation or suspect that a British national (including dual nationals) has been subjected to torture or mistreatment. We will try to ensure that the British national involved is safe. With the British national's permission, we can raise the allegation with the local authorities, requesting a full, transparent and independent investigation, in line with international standards. When responding to an allegation, consular staff will avoid any action which might increase the risk to the detainee concerned.

In addition to action on individual cases, we raise concerns about the prevalence of mistreatment and torture allegations with state authorities. In 2017, we strengthened awareness of torture and mistreatment among our staff by providing training and advice on standards and on appropriate action to take in high-risk countries. We hold periodic reviews of all such cases to identify regional trends, and develop strategies to engage and lobby the local authorities.

Overseas prisoners

We offer consular assistance to all British nationals and dual nationals in a third country, whether they are in police custody, awaiting trial, or serving a prison sentence. In certain exceptional circumstances, we can help dual nationals in the country of their second nationality and nationals of other EU and Commonwealth countries. However, not all countries recognise dual nationality. For example, several UK/Iranian dual nationals are currently detained in Iran. The Iranian government does not recognise dual nationality, and on this basis, in 2017 it denied access to UK consular officials. We were therefore unable to assess the wellbeing of the prisoners in question or confirm that they are receiving adequate legal advice and medical treatment. UK ministers and officials raised their concerns regarding these cases with the Iranian authorities on multiple occasions and will continue to do so.

We aim to contact British detainees as soon as possible after being informed about their arrest or detention. Depending on the individual, country and local circumstances, we will also seek to visit them as soon as possible. Our primary role is to monitor their welfare and to provide basic information about the local legal and penal system, including the availability of legal aid, together with a list of English-speaking lawyers and interpreters. We work in close partnership with the respected charity, Prisoners Abroad, to support British detainees overseas. Prisoners Abroad offers grants and vitamin supplements to improve the health and well-being of prisoners overseas, and provides resettlement assistance on return to the UK. We work with Prisoners Abroad on over 1,000 cases annually, particularly those involving vulnerable prisoners and detainees.

Forced Marriage

The UK remains a world leader in tackling forced marriage. The UK recognises forced marriage as a serious abuse of human rights which can include some or all of the following: child abuse, domestic abuse, and a form of violence against both women and men.

In 2017, the Forced Marriage Unit (FMU), a joint FCO and Home Office Unit, provided advice or support related to a possible forced marriage in almost 1,200 cases, involving over 60 countries. We delivered outreach events to a wide range of agencies, schools and communities. These aimed to raise awareness of forced marriage and to help professionals recognise the warning signs and take the right action to help protect children and adults from this abhorrent abuse. We also funded 5 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 2018, the FMU will continue to provide assistance to victims and potential victims; build frontline capability; and raise awareness of the issue across communities in the UK. We also aim to complement this work through engagement with like-minded countries.

Chapter 5: Human Rights Priority

Afghanistan

The greatest challenge in Afghanistan in 2017 was the continuing conflict. President Ghani and the Afghan government stated their commitment to improving the human rights situation, but progress remained slow against the difficult security backdrop. The most serious problems were inadequate protection of women's rights, the use of torture and ill-treatment in places of detention, and weak rule of law.

According to a report¹⁸ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:18>) by the UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA), 10,453 civilians were killed or injured as a result of the conflict in 2017. Although 6% fewer than in the same period in 2016, this remained a very serious casualty rate. Anti-government groups, predominantly the Taliban and Daesh, were responsible for the majority of the casualties. The UK continued to support the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, including by advising the Afghan Air Force and security ministries. We also supported efforts by the Afghan government and High Peace Council towards a peace process, including encouraging the development of a coherent and coordinated strategy.

In November, a UNAMA report¹⁹ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:19>) documented an increase in attacks against places of worship, religious leaders and worshippers. In 2016 to 2017, there were twice as many casualties as a result of such attacks than during the period 2009 to 2015. The then Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, issued a statement condemning a Daesh attack on a Shia cultural centre in Kabul on 28 December.

Despite overall progress on women's rights since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, women and girls remained subject to violence and discrimination, and lacked access to basic services. Female illiteracy rates run high at 71%²⁰ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:20>). However, there was strong commitment to making progress from President Ghani, the First Lady, Rula Ghani, and Chief Executive Officer, Abdullah Abdullah. In 2017, the UK focused on enhancing girls' education through DFID's Girls Education Challenge²¹ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:21>), which has helped over 300,000 girls attend primary school; on supporting victims of gender-based violence; and on promoting women's economic empowerment. We encouraged the Afghan government to implement its National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and to improve women's participation in efforts towards peace. Afghanistan remains a focus country in the UK's National Action Plan on WPS.

In a report from UNAMA in April²² (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:22>) entitled 'Treatment of Conflict-Related Detainees in Afghan custody', 39% of detainees interviewed gave credible accounts of having been tortured or ill-treated. Most cases allegedly took place in the custody of the National Directorate of Security or of the Afghan National Police. The UN Secretary General's Special Representative for Afghanistan expressed serious concern, but acknowledged "the genuine commitment and the efforts of the government to deal with this issue". The Afghan government announced a series of welcome measures, including lifting Afghanistan's reservation to the Convention Against Torture, signing its Optional Protocol, and establishing a National Preventative Mechanism.

Following a large terrorist attack in Kabul on 31 May, President Ghani ordered the execution of 11 Haqqani and Taliban prisoners. Together with the EU, the UK government expressed strong opposition to the use of the death penalty, and the executions did not take place. However, on 29 November, the Afghan state executed 5 men within minutes of their conviction for involvement in kidnapping. The UK joined the EU in protesting about these executions to the Afghan Foreign Ministry.

The UK welcomed the announcement by the Afghan Independent Election Commission that parliamentary and district elections would take place in 2018. We urged the Afghan government and election management bodies to expend all efforts to deliver credible, transparent and inclusive elections.

The Global Slavery Index²³ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:23>) estimated that 367,000 people were living in modern slavery in Afghanistan. The most common forms included labour exploitation, sexual exploitation and forced marriage, with young people and migrants at particular risk. The Afghan government made some efforts to tackle the problem. Through the National Crime Agency, the UK supported Afghanistan's capacity to identify and tackle trends in modern slavery. UK funding also supported internally displaced people and would-be migrants.

Afghanistan was ranked 169th of 176 countries cited in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index²⁴ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:24>). President Ghani remained committed to tackling corruption. The UK played an important role in establishing Afghanistan's Anti-Corruption Justice Centre (ACJC), which was launched in October 2016, to investigate, prosecute and adjudicate serious corruption cases. Since then

the ACJC has heard around 85 cases and recovered \$9 million. The Minister for Asia and the Pacific, Mark Field, discussed continued UK support for anti-corruption efforts with the Afghan Attorney General, Farid Hamidi, in Kabul in October.

In 2018, we will continue to support the Afghan government's efforts to improve the human rights situation, including in our priority areas of women's rights and girls' education, detention conditions, access to justice and protecting human rights defenders. We will do so bilaterally and with international partners. We look forward to working with Afghanistan as it takes its seat on the UN Human Rights Council from 1 January 2018. We will encourage the Afghan government to lead by example and fully implement its own human rights commitments.

Bahrain

There continued to be a mixed picture on human rights in Bahrain in 2017. The UK Government reiterated the need for the state to protect and defend universal human rights. Where we had concerns, we consistently raised them with the Government of Bahrain at the highest levels, both in private and public.

The UK Government raised some cases of concern directly with the Government of Bahrain, including the 2-year prison sentence handed down to Nabeel Rajab for allegedly disseminating false news, and the ongoing legal action against him. We also raised our concerns over the suspension of the newspaper Al Wasat. We continue to encourage Bahrain to ensure that freedom of expression and freedom of speech are fully protected for all its citizens.

Deprivation of nationality, where this renders an individual stateless, remains a matter of great concern to the UK. In 2017, Bahraini courts ordered the removal of Bahraini nationality from a number of individuals, the majority of whom were 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.

We also remain concerned about the continued handing down of death sentences by Bahraini courts. In January, 3 people, convicted of killing 2 police officers in 2014, were executed – the first executions to be carried out since 2010. The UK is firmly opposed to the death penalty and it is our long-standing policy to oppose capital sentences in all circumstances. We have reiterated this to the Government of Bahrain at the highest levels and they are fully aware of our position. The then Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, made representations to the Bahraini authorities about these cases and released a public statement on 15 January²⁵ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:25>).

In 2017, the Government of Bahrain introduced constitutional and legislative amendments which allowed for the reintroduction of military courts to hold trials of civilians for specific security-related crimes. The Bahraini National Institute of Human Rights (NIHR) has monitored these trials, and the Government of Bahrain has stated publicly²⁶ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:26>) that due process was observed in these cases, as required by the Bahraini Constitution.

The Minister for the Middle East, Alistair Burt, co-chaired the UK-Bahrain Joint Working Group in Manama in October, which focused on a number of areas, including the provision of UK expertise in support of Bahraini-led reform initiatives. This included UK capacity-building support to the Bahraini Council of Representatives, to strengthen its procedures and develop its role in ensuring accountability and transparency.

The UK also continued to support the development of human rights monitoring bodies in the country, which work to safeguard human rights, provide independent oversight of security personnel, monitor standards of detention, and investigate allegations of mistreatment. The NIHR, for instance, has taken steps to ensure that all Bahrainis can report alleged human rights violations and abuses, including through a new widely-advertised hotline. We welcome this development and encourage continued work in this area.

Bahrain underwent its third Universal Periodic Review at the UN Human Rights Council in 2017. The UK made a number of recommendations, which were accepted by the Government of Bahrain, which included continuing to make progress on its reform agenda, and implementing a national strategy to tackle the trafficking of women and girls and to ratify the 2014 ILO Protocol to the Forced Labour Convention. The UK will continue to work with Bahrain on these initiatives.

There was progress on certain human rights issues in 2017. The Bahraini parliament adopted new family law legislation designed to benefit women and children from all communities in Bahrain. It also passed new legislation on alternative sentencing, and has already started to implement provisions under this new legal framework. Bahrain also took proactive action to tackle modern slavery, including by endorsing the 'Call to Action to End Forced Labour, Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking', issued by the Prime Minister, Theresa May. Furthermore, Bahrain took positive steps in introducing a new Flexi-Permit employment system and new employment contracts which bring additional transparency to expatriate employment. This forms part of Bahrain's commitment to ensure a safe and equal workplace for all.

We also welcome Bahrain's commitment in 2017 to the We Protect Global Alliance to end child sexual exploitation online.

The UK will continue to support Bahraini-led reform in 2018 by providing a range of technical expertise aimed at promoting the rule of law and further developing human rights monitoring bodies. We believe that working with Bahrain offers the best opportunity to see the positive changes which the Government of Bahrain has committed to implementing.

People's Republic of Bangladesh

The human rights situation in Bangladesh saw no substantive improvement in 2017. Credible reports of enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings and torture by government agencies continued, as did government pressure on opposition parties, civil society and the media. No progress was made towards the abolition of the death penalty. More positively, there was no recurrence of large-scale terror attacks, while a successful visit by Pope Francis highlighted the country's religious diversity.

The UK Government praised the Bangladeshi government and people for having accepted and assisted over 688,000 Rohingya refugees who fled from Burma from August 2017 onwards. The UK also welcomed repeated government assurances that any returns of Rohingya refugees would be voluntary, safe, well-informed and dignified. The UK took an international lead in supporting the refugees and in mobilising international attention to the situation in Rakhine State.

Media and reports from civil society indicate an increase in the number of enforced disappearances, probably involving security forces. Human Rights Watch reported over 80 cases of secret detentions and enforced disappearances in 2017 with at least 17 people still missing. Many incidents from previous years also remain unresolved.

Law enforcement agencies are alleged to have carried out extrajudicial killings, which they sought to explain away as “cross-fire” deaths. Odikhar, a local human rights organisation, reported 154 such incidents in 2017. There has been no significant reduction in the incidence of torture and ill-treatment in custody. We repeatedly raised concerns about these issues with the Government of Bangladesh.

There has been no progress towards the abolition of the death penalty. 253 death sentences were reportedly issued in 2017, and 6 were carried out. We repeated our position that we oppose the death penalty in all circumstances, and have called for a moratorium on its use in Bangladesh.

Opposition political parties continued to raise allegations of politically motivated court cases against their members, including senior leaders, and of the government restricting their ability to campaign publicly. The resignation under pressure of the Chief Justice, Surendra Kumar Sinha, in November following a Supreme Court ruling against the government in a constitutional case, raised questions about the independence of the judiciary. There was no significant progress in eradicating corruption from the justice system. We supported programmes to improve access to justice, including for women and girls.

Bangladesh ranked 146th out of 180 countries cited in the 2017 World Press Freedom Index, a drop of 2 places compared with 2016. According to figures from Ain o Salish Kendra, a local human rights organisation, 54 journalists were charged in 2017 under Section 57 of the Information and Communication Telecommunications Act 2006, which criminalises the posting online of inflammatory or derogatory information against the state or individuals. The government is proposing legislation to replace Section 57, but human rights organisations have expressed serious concerns about the most recent draft. We are funding work to support journalists, including advising them on their rights and safety.

Pope Francis' visit in December highlighted Bangladesh's religious diversity. There was no repetition of the terrorist attacks of 2015 to 2016 against religious minorities, atheist bloggers or LGBT rights activists. However, local level discrimination and occasional violence against Hindu, Buddhist and Ahmadiyya communities continued. Homosexuality remained illegal in Bangladesh, and there was little public discussion of LGBT people's right not to suffer discrimination. LGBT people generally kept a low profile, for their own safety.

Bangladesh took steps to address problems relating to modern slavery, but progress was slow. Our work in this area focuses primarily on combating child labour, irregular migration and human trafficking and child marriage. We worked with international partners to help improve labour rights in the ready-made garment sector, and to ease freedom of association for workers in line with ILO conventions. Bangladesh has endorsed the Prime Minister's Call to Action to End Forced Labour, Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking and we will continue to work together to eradicate Modern Slavery in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has continued the progress which saw it become the top-ranked country for gender equality in South Asia in the 2017 Global Gender Gap Index. DFID-funded programmes assisted this by supporting the health, education and economic empowerment of women and girls and their access to security and justice services. Bangladesh has achieved gender parity for educational access in both primary and secondary education but factors like early marriage mean that girls have a greater drop-

out rate at secondary education. Only 52% of girls complete their education and female illiteracy rates remain high at²⁷ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:27>) 41%.

Despite improvements, child marriage remained widespread. The country still has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world with over half of women currently between the age of 20-24 having married before their 18th birthday; and almost one in five having married before their 15th birthday. The Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017 included welcome provisions on strengthening prevention and on prosecution of offenders. However, it also included a controversial clause allowing marriage under 18 under special circumstances – with parental consent and court permission. With other partners, we are helping the government to develop a set of rules to help implement the law to minimise the use of the special provision and prevent abuse.

Bangladesh also saw high levels of violence against women and girls. Over 80% of married Bangladeshi women report suffering abuse – physical, sexual, emotional or financial – from an intimate partner at least once during their marriage. Conditions in the Rohingya refugee camps raised particular risks of violence against women, many of whom had already suffered appalling violence in Rakhine State. Working with UN and other agencies, the UK ensured that the humanitarian response included help and support for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

In 2018, we will continue to engage closely with Bangladesh on the Rohingya issue; support progress towards gender equality, including on girls’ education where a focus will be to promote equity in access, retention and learning outcomes for the most marginalised girls; combat modern slavery; press the authorities on enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions; support freedom of expression and other democratic freedoms and stress the long-term importance to Bangladesh’s development of free, fair, inclusive and peaceful elections.

Burma

The human rights situation in Burma deteriorated sharply in 2017, with the crisis in Rakhine State dominating the 2nd half of the year. The UK continued to have serious concerns about human rights, including ethnic cleansing, restrictions on freedom of religion or belief, freedom of expression, and a lack of accountability for human rights violations and abuses. Clashes between the military and ethnic armed organisations continued in Kachin and Shan States. The authorities continued to restrict humanitarian access, and there were continued reports of human rights violations and abuses by state actors, including torture, sexual violence, and the use of civilians as human shields. There have been some positive steps: Burma ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in October and introduced minor reforms to laws regulating speech and assembly.

The situation in Rakhine State was the UK’s human rights priority in Burma in 2017. In the first 2 months of the year, military operations continued in northern Rakhine following violence in October 2016. At the peak of military operations in January, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that 22,000 Rohingya crossed the border into Bangladesh in 1 week.

Partly in response to the situation in Rakhine State, the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in March adopted a resolution, which the UK co- sponsored, extending the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on Burma for a further year. In light of serious concerns about human rights violations by military and security forces, and abuses by non-state actors, the HRC established an independent international Fact Finding Mission. Burma disassociated itself from the resolution. In December, the Burmese government denied UN Special Rapporteur Yanghee Lee access to the country and withdrew all cooperation for the duration of her tenure. Burma also denied access to the Fact Finding Mission.

In late August, an attack by members of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) on police posts triggered a massively disproportionate response by the Burmese military. This was against a historical backdrop of persecution and restrictions on citizenship and movement for the Rohingya within Burma. The ensuing violence against the Rohingya, committed by the military and by ethnic Rakhine, caused more than 688,000 to flee from Burma to Bangladesh. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, called this “a textbook example of ethnic cleansing.” The UK was the first country to respond with humanitarian support in Bangladesh, pledging £59 million to support the latest influx of refugees.

In December, the HRC held a Special Session on the situation of the human rights of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar. The UK co- sponsored a resolution condemning the “alleged systematic and gross violations of human rights and abuses” committed in Burma, in particular in Rakhine State, and called on the Government of Burma to cooperate fully with the Fact Finding Mission.

Human rights violations by state actors in Rakhine included murder, sexual violence, and systematic burning of Rohingya homes. A Médecins Sans Frontières report in mid-December estimated that at least 6,700 Rohingya were killed during the first month of violence. There were consistent reports of widespread and systematic use of sexual violence against Rohingya women and girls, including mass rape. The UK worked in Bangladesh to improve outreach and identification relating to gender-based violence, case management and support, and to ensure that reported incidents of gender-based

violence were referred to appropriate medical care. For example, the UK funded the UNFPA to support counselling and psychological support, and supported the International Organization for Migration to operate five mobile medical teams and five health posts.

In January 2017, U Ko Ni, a prominent rights and democracy activist, constitutional lawyer, and legal advisor for the ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) party, was assassinated. The trial of the 3 suspects arrested for his murder has lasted over a year. The authorities’ failure to apprehend the main suspect, a former military officer, raises questions about the state’s determination to safeguard human rights defenders and prevent impunity. The British Embassy followed events closely and will continue to do so in 2018.

In February, the government signed the Paris Principles on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups. This committed Burma to the protection of children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces and groups. In June, the military released 67 child soldiers. However, in August, the military prosecuted a former child soldier who spoke publicly about his experiences. In March, the ILO discussed the labour rights situation in Burma. The Labour Ministry asked for cooperation in eliminating child labour, and met experts and employers to discuss establishing a new minimum wage.

Journalists and civil society continued to raise concerns about restrictions to freedom of expression in Burma. Activists and journalists, including those who have criticised the NLD government or the military, were arrested, imprisoned and fined under section 66(d) of the 2013 Telecommunications Act, which provides for up to 3 years in prison for “extorting, coercing, restraining wrongfully, defaming, disturbing, causing undue influence or threatening any person using a telecommunications network.” Free Expression Myanmar released a report, which stated that there had been at least 95 criminal complaints made under the Act, most of them related to defamation online since the current government took office. In August, parliament amended the Act to permit judges to release people on bail, and reduce the maximum prison sentence to 2 years for a range of offences under section 66. Those who oppose the law say that the amendments did little to reduce the restrictions on free expression.

In December, two Reuters journalists, Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, were charged under the Official Secrets Acts after being accused of accepting “important secret papers” from 2 police officers. This, along with other arrests, created a climate of fear and uncertainty among journalists within Burma. The UK raised concerns with the Burmese authorities about the arrests and their effect on freedom of the media. In 2017, the UK regularly pressed the Burmese authorities to grant unrestricted access to northern Rakhine State for media and international observers. Within Burma, widespread prejudicial attitudes towards the Rohingya restricted free and independent coverage of the humanitarian crisis and of human rights violations.

According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners in Burma, as of December, 46 political prisoners are serving sentences in prison, with 190 awaiting trial: 52 in prison and 138 on bail. Addressing this issue will require systemic reform of the police and judiciary, as well as of the legal framework underpinning such arrests and charges.

The peace process made little progress in the 2nd half of 2017. The third national peace conference due to be held in December was postponed. Fighting between the Burmese military and ethnic armed groups intensified in Kachin and Shan States, and, in early November, fighting also broke out in southern Chin State. Tens of thousands of civilians were internally displaced.

We welcome the progress in achieving gender parity with regard to access to basic education. However, there are significant underlying problems which limit the improvements in education for women and girls, particularly in rural areas. DFID’s education programmes in Burma work to ensure equal access to a quality education for both boys and girls. In Burma DFID has allocated £37.5 million through the UK Partnership for Education.

Looking ahead to 2018, the UK stands ready to help the Government of Burma in implementing the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State. The UK also welcomes the establishment of an international advisory board. Any returns of refugees to Burma must be safe, voluntary and dignified and have independent monitoring by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Humanitarian support to refugees in Bangladesh, through DFID, totalled £59 million in 2017. In 2018, we will continue funding important projects on freedom of expression and preventing sexual violence, while expanding our work to help tackle hate speech and other underlying drivers of inter-communal tensions.

Burundi

There was no improvement in the human rights situation in Burundi in 2017. A pattern of arrests, arbitrary detentions, torture, enforced disappearances and killings, mainly targeting opposition and civil society and often carried out by state actors, became the norm. Both men and women have been subjected by the security forces to sexual violence as a means of torture in order to obtain information or confessions. This has included rape and mutilation of genital organs. The judiciary’s lack of independence allowed a culture of impunity to flourish, and enabled the authorities to impose heavy

sentences on those arrested, without regard to their lack of representation or to claims of torture. The brutal and sometimes clandestine nature of violations by security forces or by those supporting the government has created a deep and widespread climate of fear in Burundi.

The hostile atmosphere forced many members of Burundi's political opposition and independent media into exile, while those who remained continued to face harassment from the authorities and from those sympathetic to the ruling party. The state banned Burundi's oldest human rights organisation, *Ligue Iteka*, and closed down at least ten radio stations, further restricting civil society and media space. The government approved laws which further restricted the activities of international NGOs and charities. The ruling party's youth league, the *Imbonerakure*, became further emboldened by the culture of impunity and increasingly acted as a militia, enforcing the regime's policies. A viral video showed the *Imbonerakure* encouraging the rape of female relatives of members of the opposition. Incidents of hate speech continued, increasing the risk of fostering a climate of ethnic confrontation.

On 29 September 2017, Burundi was one of 13 States to vote against the UN Human Rights Council resolution banning the execution of people on the basis of their sexual orientation. The government views same sex relationships as being against Burundi culture and banned homosexuality in 2009. Under Burundi law, a person engaged in sexual relations with the same sex may be imprisoned for up to two years as well as incurring a fine. LGBT persons in Burundi continue to face threats of physical intimidation, arrest and discrimination.

The Burundian government's combative approach towards international human rights bodies saw them suspend cooperation with the UN OHCHR. Burundi continued its policy of non-cooperation in multilateral fora, refusing to engage with the UN Commission of Inquiry and denying its members entry to the country. After the Commission had found reasonable grounds to believe that crimes against humanity had been committed, the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in September renewed its work for a further year. The HRC also agreed an additional resolution which mandated the OHCHR to appoint three experts to investigate the human rights situation in 2018.

On 25 October, the pre-Trial Chamber of the International Criminal Court (ICC) authorised the ICC Prosecutor to open an investigation into alleged crimes against humanity committed in Burundi or by nationals of Burundi between 26 April 2015 and 26 October 2017. On 27 October, Burundi became the first country to withdraw from the ICC.

The UK's human rights objectives in Burundi in 2017 focused on gender equality, civil society and freedom of expression. The UK supported human rights monitoring activities and placed particular emphasis on the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence. The latter included support to women's associations to reduce the stigmatisation of survivors of sexual violence and to increase women's engagement with decision makers, and the development of early warning and investigation processes. Girls' education is also an area of concern given Burundi's high female illiteracy rate of 78% and the fact that 11% of girls are out of school. The UK supports the Global Partnership for Education via funding from DFID of which Burundi is one of 60 recipient countries²⁸ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:28>).

The UK also worked through the EU and UN to intensify international monitoring and reporting of human rights violations and abuses. We supported a UN Security Council resolution which reiterated support for the international efforts to find a peaceful political solution to the conflict, in line with the Arusha Accords. The UK also backed a rollover for the suspension of EU direct financial support to the Burundian administration, confining EU financial support to the population only.

In 2018, the UK will continue to focus on preventing human rights violations and abuses, especially in the build-up to the referendum on the proposed changes to Burundi's Constitution planned for May. The UK will continue to support regional and international efforts, led by the East African Community and former Tanzanian President Mkapa, to resolve the root causes of the political crisis and to find a peaceful political solution, in particular to prevent any risk of further destabilisation. The UK's human rights priorities will include working with the international community, in particular continuing to support the work of the HRC, the Commission of Inquiry and OHCHR, to bring an end to the violence, hold the perpetrators to account, and promote freedom of expression, respect for democratic freedoms and gender equality.

Central African Republic

The human rights situation in the Central African Republic (CAR) deteriorated further in 2017. Armed groups control large areas of the country, and the humanitarian situation worsened dramatically with a 50% increase in forced displacement. State and non-state actors continued to inflict a range of human rights violations and abuses, including mass killings, abductions, conflict-related sexual violence, and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. Around 63%²⁹ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:29>) of girls are not in primary school. Attacks on humanitarian workers, including attacks on health facilities and religious sites, made CAR “one of the most dangerous and difficult countries for humanitarian work”, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and hampered efforts to provide vital

community services. The UN Independent Expert on the human rights situation in CAR, Marie-Therese Keita Bocoum, warned that the country was experiencing an “unsustainable” situation amid the “spread of armed groups and increasing human rights violations”.

Clashes continued between armed groups, including ex-Seleka (Muslim) rebel factions, anti-balaka (Christian) and self-defence groups. There was a significant increase in reports of abuse, particularly of ethnic or religious minority communities. In his August report to the UN Security Council, former Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Stephen O'Brien, stated that “the early warning signs for genocide” were present in CAR. He gave an example of 2,000 Muslims trapped in a Catholic Church compound where they had fled after their homes had been burned down by mostly Christian militiamen.

The resurgence in violence since September 2016 triggered an increase in conflict-related sexual violence. According to a UN report, women, girls and boys continued to suffer rape, sexual slavery and sexual assault³⁰ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:30>). The UN Peacekeeping Mission in CAR (MINUSCA) documented 91 such cases between January and May. The majority of these cases were perpetrated by ex-Seleka or anti-balaka armed groups.

In June, the government signed a peace accord with 13 armed groups. The ‘San Egidio’ peace agreement called for an immediate end to hostilities and the recognition of legitimate authorities. However, the day after the ceasefire was agreed, renewed fighting occurred in the town of Bria, with reports suggesting that 100 civilians had been killed. The African Union subsequently agreed a new roadmap for Peace and National Reconciliation which aims to promote dialogue between the CAR government and the armed groups.

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 UN launched its Human Rights Mapping Report in May. The Report identified and documented human rights violations and abuses from 2003 to 2015, including extrajudicial executions, torture and inhuman treatment, rapes, burning of entire villages, recruitment of thousands of children by armed groups, and attacks on humanitarian actors and peacekeepers. The Report concluded that serious violations and abuses of human rights had been committed by state and non-state actors, some of which could amount to crimes under international law, including war crimes and/or crimes against humanity.

The lack of a functioning judicial system meant that little action was taken to address these human rights violations and abuses and to bring the perpetrators to justice. Progress was made towards establishing a Special Criminal Court (SCC), with a mandate to end impunity for crimes under international law. A Special Criminal Court Prosecutor is now in place, as are a number of international and national magistrates. However, insecurity in CAR has limited progress, in terms both of SCC personnel being able to exercise their functions and of victim and witness protection.

In 2017, MINUSCA continued to deal with allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) made against peacekeepers. The UK has called on countries contributing troops to UN peacekeeping missions to investigate all allegations thoroughly and to ensure that those found guilty are brought to justice. The UN has taken steps to address the problem: MINUSCA has carried out training and awareness-raising activities on child protection for peacekeepers, armed groups, civil society, the CAR gendarmerie and the national police, in collaboration with UNICEF. More than 600 troops were repatriated in 2017 in an effort to implement the UN Secretary-General's zero tolerance policy.

In 2018, the UK will continue its support for UN and EU efforts to improve the political and security situation in CAR and to provide humanitarian assistance. The EU Training Mission, which is delivering security sector reform, has completed training of 2 battalions of CAR armed forces and will train another by summer 2018. As part of its ongoing work, the Mission will help develop the CAR armed forces' educational system, including training on International Humanitarian Law, gender, religious and ethnic minorities' issues, and SEA.

China

In 2017, there was increased evidence of civil and political rights being infringed in China, and of space for civil society being tightened further. While China focused on its record of improving economic and social rights and promoting the right to development, new legislation was introduced which further reduced freedom of speech and assembly. The continuing detention and trials of human rights lawyers and activists, and apparent lack of due process and judicial transparency, remained key issues.

Two important court cases suggested a greater recognition of homosexuality in Chinese law. In Henan, a medical institution was ordered to issue a public apology and compensate a man who was forcibly ‘treated’ with conversion therapy; and the first official case of male on male rape was heard. On the other hand, there were moves by the authorities to extend the ban on depicting homosexuality on television to the online media.

In 2017, there were more cases of human rights defenders, activists and lawyers facing punishment or ill-treatment. Lawyer Gao Zhisheng disappeared in August, and his whereabouts remained unknown. At least 5 of the over 200 individuals detained in the summer of 2015 remained in custody. Wang Quanzhang continued to be held in pre-trial detention without access to his lawyer. There were credible reports that Li Chunfu and Xie Yanyi had been tortured. Li Heping received a 3-year suspended sentence in April and Jiang Tianyong was given a 2-year sentence in November. Both were convicted of inciting state subversion and had their confessions broadcast.

The authorities tightened their control of expression, association and assembly. The Foreign NGO Law limited the scope of activities for international and domestic NGOs, with only 305 NGOs managing to register by the end of the year. There were credible reports of the police disrupting a range of civil society activities and events. The Cyber Security Law (which came into effect on 1 June) and the National Intelligence Law (28 June) restricted freedom of expression by increasing the scope for censorship and surveillance. State authorities deleted hundreds of social media accounts. The respected international NGO, Freedom House, reported that China had the worst record in the world for internet freedom.

Human rights activist and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Liu Xiaobo died in custody in July, having been detained since 2008. His widow, Liu Xia, continued to face extrajudicial restrictions. Blogger Wu Gan was convicted of state subversion and in December was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment, having been held in detention for over 2 years.

The right to freedom of religion or belief continued to come under pressure in China. There were continued reports of the detention, harassment and persecution of religious groups – including Christians, Muslims, Buddhists and Falun Gong practitioners – and of the destruction of religious buildings. There were reports that Pastor Yang Hua was refused medical treatment while in detention.

The human rights situation in Tibet did not improve. Reports of severe restrictions and self-immolations continued. The pre-trial detention of Tibetan language advocate Tashi Wangchuk continued. 2017 marked 22 years since the disappearance of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima – the Dalai Lama's choice as Panchen Lama.

In Xinjiang, the authorities introduced intrusive security and surveillance measures and cultural restrictions targeted at the Uyghur Muslim population. Thousands of Uyghurs were held in re-education camps after returning from abroad.

China continued to use the death penalty and the number of people executed remained a 'state secret'. There were Chinese media reports of large show trials, followed by multiple executions. Amnesty International reported that China continued to execute more people annually than the rest of the world did put together.

The UK continued to monitor human rights in China, maintaining contact with human rights defenders and their families in China and the UK. We regularly raised our human rights concerns (including those mentioned in this report) with China through a wide variety of channels, including at the 24th round of the UK-China Human Rights Dialogue in Beijing in June. Ministers raised specific human rights concerns and cases in bilateral meetings and at public events, and issued statements. The UK was vocal in the UN and other multilateral fora and issued joint and unilateral statements. We attempted to observe trials and sentencing hearings in China, though we were consistently denied access.

On girls' education, the focus in China has been on women and girls' empowerment through the British Council's 'Inspiring Women China' programme working with schools, volunteers, and local communities to help raise the aspirations of younger generations, particularly girls. The UK's 'Be Yourself campaign' continues to raise awareness about gender equality; through credible voices, women's successes are celebrated, publicising individual experiences to provide inspiration for women all over China.

In 2018, we expect to see more pressure on Chinese citizens' rights with the introduction of a revised Constitution and new National Supervision Law. The authorities are likely to target activists and human rights defenders under recently introduced national security laws. We expect new regulations on religious affairs to limit further the right to freedom of religion or belief. The UK will continue to support projects in China in priority areas, including the abolition of the death penalty, criminal justice reform, strengthening civil society and rights of people belonging to minorities. We will raise human rights concerns regularly in public and in private. Where possible, we will work with the grain to promote change.

This reporting period marked 20 years since the handover of Hong Kong to China. We continue to defend the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration strongly in public statements and in meetings with the Chinese and Hong Kong authorities. Over 2017, our assessment has been that the 'One Country, Two Systems' framework is generally functioning well, but that important areas of the framework continue to come under increased pressure. This included: the denial of entry to Hong Kong of a UK national and human rights activist, Benedict Rogers; the number of high profile judicial cases related to the political system; reports of mainland security officials operating within the Special Administrative Region; and continuing concerns about the exercise of some of the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Joint Declaration and Basic Law. It remains the UK Government's view that, for Hong Kong's future success, it is essential that Hong Kong enjoys, and is seen to enjoy, the full measure of its high degree of

autonomy, rule of law, independence of the judiciary, and rights and freedoms as set out in the Joint Declaration and enshrined in the Basic Law, in keeping with the commitment to ‘One Country, Two Systems.’

A detailed analysis on Hong Kong is published separately in the government’s 6 Monthly Reports to Parliament³¹ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:31>).

Colombia

A year after the Colombian government’s peace agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), Colombia registered its lowest murder rate for 42 years. However, key human rights concerns remained, such as inadequate protection of human rights defenders (HRDs), gender-based violence, the human rights consequences of illegal economies (drugs and illegal mining), and modern slavery. Causes included a lack of state presence in some rural areas, delays to peace agreement implementation, and the destabilising influence of organised crime.

In areas where the FARC were formerly present, especially near the Pacific coast, illegal armed groups have fought for control of coca cultivation, drug trafficking, illegal mining and other illicit activities. As a result, there was an increase in conflict between the National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrilla group and other unidentified armed groups, often with reported links to former paramilitaries. In 2017, the UN reported 61 major displacement incidents, affecting more than 12,000 people, a 22% increase compared with 2016.

There were more than 15,000 cases of sexual violence reported to the National Victims’ Unit during Colombia’s armed conflict with the FARC³² (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:32>). However, it is reasonable to assume that many more cases went unrecorded, because of lack of access to justice in remote or insecure parts of the country. According to the commission³³ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:33>) responsible for verifying compliance with the Constitutional Court’s ruling on sexual violence, the impunity rate in sexual violence cases is 92%. Identifying the individual perpetrator has been the biggest challenge for the justice system, including for post-conflict Transitional Justice Mechanisms, which aim to encourage perpetrators to admit to crimes and offer reparation for victims. Sexual violence against minors also persisted.

Under the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI), we continued support for the documentation of cases of sexual violence, fostering access to justice, contributing to the participation of women and promoting initiatives to end stigma, including with the Colombian media. Our projects helped train 40 women to be spokespersons and another 200 journalists in preventing stigmatisation when reporting sexual violence cases. We also trained 550 women and men, including ex-combatants, indigenous people and afro-Colombians, about stigma, how to gain access to justice, awareness of gender-based violence and women’s rights. In addition, our partners used the International Protocol to document hundreds of sexual violence cases. We also worked with Schools to reach out to girls in vulnerable contexts and provide training in how to report cases of sexual violence.

Although access to education has improved in recent years, girls face a high risk of sexual violence. In 2017 UNICEF reported that 7 in 10 victims of sexual violence in Colombia were girls. In rural areas sexual violence is attributed to higher levels of criminality, and lack of basic infrastructure such as safe public transport. Girls in these areas are also more likely to drop out of school early because of the limited access to contraception and sex education.

Killings and threats against HRDs increased significantly during the year. The UN OHCHR confirmed in their annual report³⁴ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:34>) issued on 3 March 2018, the murder of 121 HRDs in 2017, compared with 61 in 2016. The rate of HRD murders increased in the second half of the year and between July and September one HRD was murdered every 60 hours. The impunity rate for these crimes is 87%, and only 6% result in prison sentences (all of them against the immediate perpetrators, not the intellectual authors of those crimes). While there is little evidence of systematic targeting of HRDs, those threatened or killed share common characteristics: leaders who challenge the presence of organised crime or illegal mining; land restitution claimants; leaders of victims’ groups; and those with a potential role in upcoming elections.

In 2017, the UK funded two projects to promote the protection of HRDs and community leaders in 15 regions of Colombia. This included providing HRDs with self-protection strategies, rights awareness, capacity building and advocacy strategies. The UK undertook significant advocacy activity, both bilaterally and alongside international partners, including the EU and UN. We also monitored the situation of vulnerable HRDs and raised specific cases with the relevant Colombian authorities. We have worked very closely with the Office of the Attorney General to strengthen existing coordination mechanisms with the Colombian police, and have provided technical assistance to improve their follow-up mechanisms when investigating emblematic cases. On balance, we judge that the Colombian state is taking the problem of violence against HRDs seriously, and is making genuine attempts to tackle it.

In some regions of the country, particularly on the Pacific Coast, illegal mining has severely affected the water and food supply and has increased the presence of illegal armed groups. We continue to support the Colombian government's implementation of its National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights. The UK encouraged companies to improve communication strategies with communities, reduce the negative impacts of their activities, and help mobilise local communities to stop illegal mining. The British Embassy also launched a business and peace strategy which gives companies advice on how they can actively contribute to building peace and protecting human rights.

In 2018, we will introduce modern slavery and girls' education as additional priorities for our human rights programme, which will include regional collaboration with the British Embassies in Venezuela and Brazil.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)

2017 saw no noticeable improvement in the dire human rights situation in DPRK, and a continued refusal from the DPRK to allow the independent investigation of human rights violations.

The DPRK's Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, religion, speech, the press, assembly, demonstration and association. In practice, none of these freedoms exists. The existence of LGBT people is simply denied. The Global Slavery Index estimates that more than a million North Koreans are victims of modern slavery, including forced labour. This amounts to over 4% of the population, the highest prevalence globally. Early 2017 saw the high-speed completion of numerous flagship construction projects. These required North Korean civilians and unpaid soldier-builders to labour manually for long hours, with few health and safety protections. Concerns were raised by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child about the use of child labour in such projects.

International incidents showed the regime's lack of respect for human rights and the rules-based international system. US citizen Otto Warmbier died in June following his sudden repatriation to the US in a coma, 1 year into a 15-year hard labour sentence following a show trial.

There was continued evidence of malnutrition countrywide. The poor state of health of a soldier from the Korean People's Army, who defected to South Korea over the Demilitarized Zone in November, showed the inadequate diet and healthcare received by civilians and military personnel alike.

The DPRK in May hosted the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Catalina Devandas Aguilar, the first visit by a UN human rights expert. The visit was tightly controlled, but it was a small sign of progress.

The DPRK's record was examined by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in September, and the DPRK's report on women's rights was examined by the UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in November. The CRC raised concerns about child labour, malnutrition, violence, political discrimination, and what it called “ideological indoctrination” in the DPRK education system. CEDAW expressed concerns about a broad range of violations affecting women, with stereotyping and discrimination starting at school and continuing throughout adulthood. Literacy in DPRK is universal, and the state provides for 12 years of free, compulsory education at primary and secondary levels. However, in practice, there are significant class, gender and urban-rural divides with farming and other mandatory services prioritised over school attendance, particularly for children over 14 years of age. While women account for 43.8% of people aged 16 or above who received a higher education, rates decrease sharply at university level, with vocational courses boosting female numbers recorded by official statistics. DPRK data from 2014 shows that only 1.9% of women aged 20-24 in rural areas are still in education.

DPRK authorities continued to deny allegations of human rights violations and refused to cooperate with the UN OHCHR and the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights in North Korea, Tomás Ojea Quintana. The DPRK maintained its rejection of the 2014 Commission of Inquiry report, which highlighted “wide ranging and ongoing crimes against humanity”. DPRK authorities continued to restrict countrywide access and availability of data to the international community, including to NGO representatives.

The BBC World Service launched its Korean language service in September. This is operationally and editorially independent of the UK Government. The Service transmits to both North and South Korea. It is unclear how accessible the Service is to the people of North Korea, who are forbidden from listening to non-state broadcasts.

During 2017, the UK continued to work through multilateral fora to challenge the DPRK's record on human rights. In March, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution to pursue the prosecution of North Korean leaders and officials responsible for crimes against humanity. In November, the UK supported a UN General Assembly Third Committee resolution, which called on the DPRK to respect the basic rights of its people. In December, the UN Security Council held formal discussions on DPRK human rights violations constituting a threat to international peace and security.

The UK played a prominent role in the UN Security Council decisions to impose tough new sanctions on the DPRK in 2017. These included a focus on the state-controlled employment of North Korean workers overseas who are sent abroad as commodities with the sole aim of generating funds for the DPRK Regime. Their working conditions, level of surveillance and restriction of movement are such that they are effectively victims of modern slavery. Through UNSCR 2397, adopted on 22 December 2017, all such workers will need to return to the DPRK within 24 months.

Bilateral FCO human rights and humanitarian aid projects in 2017 targeted the most vulnerable in DPRK society, and included support for the rights of the disabled, for girls’ education, and for child nutrition.

The UK continued to use its bilateral relationship to press the DPRK government on its unacceptable human rights performance. Throughout 2017, the Ambassador and Embassy officials raised human rights in meetings with DPRK officials in Pyongyang. FCO Ministers also used their meetings in London with DPRK Embassy officials to make clear our concerns.

In 2018, the UK will continue to voice our concerns and call for the DPRK to cooperate fully with the relevant international bodies, allowing them immediate and unhindered access in order to assess directly the human rights situation in the country.

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

The human rights situation in DRC continued to deteriorate in 2017. The UN Joint Human Rights Office (UNJHRO) recorded 6,495 abuses and violations in 2017, a 25% increase from 2016, which had itself seen a substantial increase from 2015. With President Kabila delaying elections until December 2018, there were a large number of reported human rights violations related to arbitrary arrests and imprisonments, extrajudicial executions by state agents, and attacks on freedom of speech and expression. State officials were identified as the main perpetrators, committing nearly two thirds of all human rights violations and abuses. The deterioration of the human rights situation in DRC has resulted from the increasingly unstable political crisis and violence in the Kasai provinces and eastern DRC.

The UK’s work in DRC focused on protecting the political space, peacebuilding and preventing sexual and gender-based violence. Instances of human rights violations relating to the restriction of democratic space, including freedom of assembly and expression, significantly increased in 2017, with a reported 1,375 violations. Nearly half of these occurred from October to December, correlating with an increase in political protests in the latter part of the year. There were a number of restrictions on freedom of expression, including the violent suppression of protests and political rallies, and service providers being ordered to shut down internet services. There were also a significant number of arbitrary arrests and imprisonments. The UK Government lobbied the DRC government to open up the political space, including by releasing political prisoners and by respecting the right to peaceful assembly, and publicly condemned government forces’ use of excessive violence.

2017 saw the emergence of a significant crisis in the three Kasai provinces with reports of disappearances, mass killings and torture. The UN found nearly 90 mass graves in the Kasais. The majority of the violations and abuses were carried out by government forces (FARDC) and pro-government groups. The UNJHRO reported that soldiers of the FARDC killed over 750 people. Local militia, including followers of the Kamwina Nsapu movement, also committed a number of human rights abuses. In February, footage emerged which seemed to show government forces shooting unarmed civilians. In March, two members of the UN Group of Experts investigating the situation in the Kasais were abducted and subsequently murdered: it is unclear who was responsible. The UK supported a resolution at the June session of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) calling for the creation of an international investigation into the allegations of human rights violations and abuses in the Kasai region. The appointed investigative team will provide an oral update at the HRC’s session in March 2018, followed by a comprehensive report to the HRC’s June 2018 session.

UNJHRO documented an increase of adult victims of conflict-related sexual violence in 2017, with at least 533 victims. The vast majority were victims of sexual violence perpetrated by combatants of armed groups and by armed militiamen. In 2017, the UK continued to support a more effective legal response to sexual violence in conflict in DRC. One significant success was the conviction in the Kavumu trial in December, when a group of militiamen received life sentences for sexual abuses against over 40 children in South Kivu. The UK is also working with international partners to complete a joint evaluation of the impact of sexual violence programming in DRC. This is designed to inform more effective interventions by both the DRC government and the international community in the future.

In 2017, armed groups in eastern DRC were responsible for human rights abuses such as mass killings, sexual violence and torture. The UK focused on long-term stability and peacebuilding in eastern DRC through our contributions to MONUSCO (UN Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the DRC), the work of DFID, and programmes supported by the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF). Through the CSSF, we supported respected Non-governmental Organisations Avocats Sans Frontières and Search for Common Ground to educate human rights defenders and promote conflict resolution. In May, the UK supported EU sanctions against nine individuals responsible for human rights violations and abuses and for obstructing the political process.

The female illiteracy rate in DRC is 29%³⁵ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:35>). DFID funded programmes on girls’ education to improve access and quality of education for more than one million children, including reducing school-based violence.

In 2018, the UK will continue to focus on protecting the political space during the electoral period. We will monitor events closely and will raise any concerns over arrests, detentions and disappearances of opposition and civil society figures with the DRC government. The UK will also continue its work on the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative and deliver a second phase of the girls’ education programme to support 75,000 girls. We will continue to encourage the DRC government, as an elected member of the HRC, to take active steps to improve respect for human rights. This includes encouraging active cooperation with the HRC investigation into the human rights violations and abuses in the Kasais.

Egypt

In 2017, the human rights situation in Egypt continued to deteriorate. There were restrictions on civil society and freedom of expression, discrimination against LGBT people, and widespread reports of torture, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions.

In 2017, the Egyptian authorities continued to clamp down on those who criticised them, further restricting the space for civil society. On 9 February, security forces closed down the Al Nadeem Centre for the Rehabilitation of Torture Victims, shortly after the release of their annual report detailing individual cases of torture and enforced disappearances in Egypt. On 24 May, President Sisi ratified an NGO law which, if enforced, will significantly restrict NGOs’ ability to register, access funding or operate freely. On 10 September, human rights lawyer Ibrahim Metwally was detained at Cairo airport while travelling to address the UN Working Group on enforced disappearances. He remains in pre-trial detention. The authorities prevented several human rights defenders from travelling and froze their assets.

The authorities further restricted freedom of expression. Egypt remained the world’s third-worst jailer of journalists, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. In 2017, the authorities started to block multiple websites. Some had been inciting violence, but the authorities also targeted legitimate news and NGO websites. Shortly after the NGO, Human Rights Watch, issued a report on torture in Egypt, its website was blocked. Another NGO, the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression, concluded that 400 websites had been blocked. Seemingly innocuous actions were targeted: the police arrested Egyptian singer Sherine Abdel Wahab after she made a negative comment about the River Nile at a concert.

According to credible reports, torture, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions continued throughout 2017. A report by the Al Nadeem Centre documented 1,042 cases of enforced disappearance and 191 incidents of torture. On 20 April, a video emerged of a man in camouflage uniform executing two detainees; Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International alleged Egyptian military involvement. The British Embassy was unable to confirm the veracity of this. In January, the Ministry of the Interior announced that law enforcement agents had killed ten terrorists in an exchange of gunfire during a raid. The men’s families claimed that they had already been forcibly disappeared. In September, Human Rights Watch published a report on the widespread use of torture, which they described as an “epidemic”.

State discrimination against LGBT people significantly increased in 2017. Following the waving of a rainbow flag at a concert in September, the state cracked down on LGBT people. Credible NGOs reported that at least 76 people were arrested within two months on ‘debauchery’ charges. Some have since been released. Reports emerged of the torture and mistreatment of these detainees, including forced anal examinations. There were also reports of police entrapment using online applications.

The use of the death penalty increased in 2017, particularly at the end of the year. The death penalty was widely applied following convictions under counter-terrorism laws. Death sentences were routinely passed on civilians in military courts. The authorities do not always publicise executions in Egypt, but on 26 December they made public the fact that 15 people had been executed after being convicted by a military court.

Attacks, mainly claimed by Daesh, against places of worship significantly increased in 2017. Hundreds of Coptic Christians fled North Sinai, where the authorities battled against an insurgency, after Daesh executed Coptic Christians and issued a further threat. In April, two terrorist attacks on churches killed over 40 people. In May, terrorists opened fire on a bus carrying Coptic Christians in Minya, killing 30 people. President Sisi announced a state of emergency which was subsequently extended. In November, terrorists attacked Al Rawda Mosque in north Sinai, killing over 300 people. President Sisi has regularly called for peaceful co-existence between religious communities, which the UK government welcomes.

President Sisi declared 2017 to be the “Year of the Egyptian Woman”. According to the 2017 census, 31% of women over the age of 10 are illiterate, compared to 21% of men.

During 2017, the UK Government consistently raised the deteriorating human rights situation with the Egyptian authorities. The then Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, raised human rights concerns with President Sisi during his visit to Cairo in February. In the same month, the then Minister for the Middle East and North Africa, Tobias Ellwood, issued a statement expressing concern about the closure of the Al Nadeem Centre. In June, the then Foreign Secretary issued a statement of concern about the NGO law, arrests of political activists and the blocking of news websites. The Minister for the Middle East and North Africa, Alistair Burt, raised restrictions on civil society with Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry and Interior Minister Magdy Abdel Ghaffar during his visit to Cairo in August. In November, we issued a joint statement of concern with Canada, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands regarding the ongoing detention of Ibrahim Metwally. We have consistently raised our concerns over human rights in Egypt at the UN Human Rights Council.

In 2018, we will continue to raise our human rights concerns with the Egyptian authorities in public and in private, including at the HRC. Our priorities will include civil society, freedom of expression, political detainees, extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances and torture. We will continue to support programmes and projects designed to improve the human rights situation in Egypt. President Sisi has made education a key priority for his presidency; in 2018, we will build on our education programme work, ensuring that it is gender sensitive, and look to identify targeted programmes to enhance girls' education.

Eritrea

The human rights situation in Eritrea showed no improvement in 2017. The main problems related to civil and political rights. The authorities restricted freedom of expression: Eritrea is a one-party state with no political opposition or independent media. Citizens continued to be subject to arbitrary extension of national service, a form of modern slavery. The right to freedom of religion or belief was violated. Citizens suffered arbitrary detention on religious grounds, with a lack of due process in subsequent criminal proceedings.

This contrasts with the progress which Eritrea made in 2017 on social, cultural and economic rights. The UK has supported the work of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with the government of Eritrea to address gender inequality in education and wellbeing. The UNDP assess that more girls are now in school compared with 15 years ago, and most regions have reached gender parity in primary education. Eritrea achieved antenatal care attendance of 98% of pregnant mothers, skilled delivery of 60% of births, and immunisation coverage of 95% of babies.

The UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Eritrea, Sheila Keetharuth, was continually denied access to the country by the government and was therefore unable to fulfil the mandate given by the UN Human Rights Council (HRC). However, we welcome the Government of Eritrea's continued cooperation with the UN OHCHR, including with representatives who visited Eritrea for the second year in succession, in October. Despite cooperating with this visit, the government gave no update regarding progress made on the 4- year implementation programme agreed with the UN Development Programme (UNDP) following Eritrea's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2014.

The UK continued to work bilaterally and with international partners in the EU and the UN to press Eritrea to improve its human rights record. The UK made statements in human rights dialogues on 14 June in the HRC in Geneva and at the UN General Assembly Third Committee meeting in New York on 27 October. On both occasions, the UK stressed the need to ensure that those engaged in the national military service system had a clearly defined limit to their period of service, and received financial compensation commensurate to their duties. We also reiterated calls for the Government of Eritrea to implement the Eritrean Constitution, to respect fully the right to freedom of religion or belief, and to release individuals held in arbitrary detention.

Severe constraints on media freedoms have resulted in the absence of independent media in the country. The diaspora radio station, Radio Erena, received an award from the London-based charity World One Media on 6 June, in recognition of the continued absence of a free press and media in Eritrea. The station provides an alternative voice through its cultural, social, political and entertainment programmes. A number of journalists and politicians remained in long-term detention. Among these is Dawit Isaac, who was awarded the UNESCO/ Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize in absentia on 31 March.

In late October, several senior Catholic and Muslim figures were arrested as the government sought to exert influence over religious schools and colleges. This led to protests on 31 October by between 100 and 200 students, parents and administrators from a Muslim school in Asmara, who were dispersed by gunfire from the Eritrean security forces. The UK will continue to monitor closely reports of the excessive use of force, of arbitrary arrests, including of minors, and of the lack of clear due process. FCO officials raised these issues in November with the Eritrean Ambassador to London.

On 26 June, the UK joined international partners in calling attention to the prolonged detention of Patriarch Abune Antonios, the former head of the Eritrean Orthodox Church. The Patriarch has been under house arrest since 2007. For the first time since his detention, he was allowed on 16 July to attend mass. However, he has not been seen in public since, and he appears to remain under house

arrest. The European Parliament, in a resolution on 6 July³⁶ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:36>), condemned human rights violations in Eritrea and in particular highlighted the cases of Dawit Isaac and Patriarch Antonios.

In 2018, the UK will continue to press the Government of Eritrea to improve its human rights record. Alongside international partners, the UK will seek to work constructively with Eritrea, encouraging engagement with the UPR process and OHCHR, and urging improved cooperation with the HRC and any Special Rapporteur appointed.

Iran

The Iranian state continued to violate human rights during 2017. The UK government's main concerns continued to be over frequent use of the death penalty, the right of women to fully participate in society, detentions of dual-nationals (covered in more detail in the consular section of this report) and violations of the right to freedom of expression and of the right to freedom of religion or belief. However, there were also some positive developments. The presidential election in May passed without major incident (although all women who registered as candidates were disqualified by the Guardian Council), and, towards the end of the year, a new anti-narcotics law was passed, which could have a major impact in reducing the frequency of application and use of the death penalty in relation to drug offences.

Not all executions in Iran are made public, so it is difficult to provide an exact figure for them, but NGOs' estimates suggest that there were between 450 and 500 executions in Iran in 2017. This is slightly lower than the figure for 2016, but still means that Iran ranks as one of the most prolific users of the death penalty in the world. This figure includes 24 public executions, a practice which usually involves death by hanging in a public square, and three executions of juvenile offenders, who were under 18 at the time of their arrests. Execution of juvenile offenders violates both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, both of which Iran has ratified.

It was estimated that at least 180 of the executions in 2017 were for drug-related crimes. In October 2017, the Iranian parliament ratified a new anti-narcotics law which does not provide for the use of capital punishment for the majority of drugs offences. This law could potentially reduce the number of people sentenced to death in Iran. It will apply retrospectively, which means it could affect as many as 5,000 prisoners on death row. The death penalty will still apply to the production and distribution of over 50kg of opium, 2kg of heroin and 3kg of methamphetamine, as well as for armed smugglers, ringleaders and financiers.

This positive news was tempered by the Iranian authorities' response to the protests in Iran at the end of 2017, and in particular by reports of deaths in custody, including from torture, of those detained for participating. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, issued a statement in January 2018 stressing that peaceful protests must not be criminalised and highlighted reports that more than 20 people, including an eleven-year-old boy, had died and hundreds had been arrested during the protests.

There were also wider issues with freedom of expression in Iran. The Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Iran, the late Asma Jahangir, reported that, as of June, there were at least 12 journalists as well as fourteen bloggers and social media activists in detention. Dissent was not widely tolerated and the government exerted some form of control over the majority of newspapers, TV and radio stations. Restrictions were also in place on the use of the internet. During the protests, and just before the Presidential elections in April, the authorities clamped down on the use of social media and, in some places, restricted all access to the internet.

The Iranian authorities continued to violate the right to freedom of religion or belief and discriminate against ethnic minorities. Many members of religious minorities faced restrictions and discrimination for peacefully manifesting their beliefs. Members of the Baha'i faith were once again subject to persecution. In the spring, following the murder of Farhang Amiri, his murderers received reduced sentences because their victim was a Baha'i. The authorities continued to pursue economic persecution of Baha'is, for example through shop closures, and by the denial of mainstream education to followers of the Baha'i faith.

In many areas across Iran women do not enjoy the same rights and privileges as men and continue to face discrimination. This ranges from mandatory wearing of the hijab, unequal rights in marriage, divorce and child custody to being unable to attend sporting events. At the end of 2017 there were protests against compulsory wearing of the hijab resulting in the arrest and imprisonment of several women.

Despite constitutional recognition, Christians were also increasingly harassed in Iran. In June, recent converts to Christianity, Pastor Yousef Nadarkhani, Mohammad Reza Omid, Mohammad Ali Mosayebzadeh, and Zaman Fadaei, were sentenced to 10 years in prison. The charges against them included hosting house churches, unlawful gathering, propaganda against the regime, and violating national security by promoting Christianity. There were also several reports of Catholic property being confiscated during 2017, in particular buildings belonging to the Latin Catholic Church.

Primary school enrolment rates in Iran exceed 99% for both boys and girls. However, around 20% of adult women are illiterate, compared with around 10% of men³⁷ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:37>).

In 2018, we will continue to hold Iran to account for its human rights record. We will support human rights resolutions on Iran at the UN General Assembly and the UN Human Rights Council, as we did in 2017 as co-sponsors, and will continue to support the position of the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Iran. We will also work with EU partners on the EU/Iran human rights dialogue and aim to establish our own regular bilateral dialogue with Iran on human rights issues.

Iraq

The principal human rights concerns in Iraq in 2017 were Daesh atrocities, the use of the death penalty, violations of the right to freedom of expression and of the right to freedom of religion or belief, and gender-based violence. Daesh was defeated territorially, but the Iraqi government must now stabilise liberated areas to the benefit of all Iraqis, ensuring that previous perceptions of inequality do not persist, and that violence does not resurface.

In 2017, the NGOs Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International continued to report allegations of Daesh atrocities, including abductions, sexual violence, torture, the use of human shields, and executions, particularly in Mosul. As more areas were liberated from Daesh, an increasing number of mass graves were discovered. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International also reported allegations of sectarian atrocities and human rights abuses and violations committed by elements of the Iraqi Security Forces, Popular Mobilisation Forces, Federal Police, and Kurdish Peshmerga. Those allegations included torture, forced disappearances, and the destruction of houses and of civilian property. The UK lobbied the Iraqi government to prioritise civilian protection, uphold the rule of law, and ensure that all forces acted in accordance with international human rights law and international humanitarian law. We welcomed the Iraqi government's commitment to conduct full and transparent investigations into all alleged abuses and violations, and called on them to make the results public.

Although official figures on use of the death penalty are not made public, Amnesty International reported that Iraq executed 21 people in January, 42 in September and 38 in December. Those executions were for terrorism offences or for alleged roles in mass killings. The number of people on death row was not clear, and the information was not released by the government. We continued to condemn and lobby against the death penalty, urging greater transparency and due process in line with international standards.

Violations of the right to freedom of expression remained a concern, particularly in the Kurdistan Region. We received reports of detained journalists and temporary closures of think-tanks and NGOs, with those perceived as critical of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) banned from covering government and official events. These reports worsened at the time of the Kurdistan Region's 25 September referendum on independence. The authorities prohibited broadcaster Nalia Radio and Television from reporting on several official events, and a lawsuit was filed against its owner for initiating a campaign against the timing of the referendum. In December, protests erupted in the Sulaimaniya and Halabja provinces of the Kurdistan Region, during which 46 cases of assaults and death threats against journalists and media outlet closures were recorded. The UK lobbied bilaterally and jointly with the rest of the international community to raise concerns over violations of freedom of expression, including delivering a demarche to the KRG.

Ensuring and protecting women's rights remained central to our work in 2017. In the Kurdistan Region, the KRG undertook several awareness campaigns, including on child marriage. However, the KRG's Directorate for Combating Violence against Women reported that gender-based violence in the Kurdistan Region remained high, in particular honour killings, burns and early marriages. The UK will continue to urge the Iraqi and Kurdistan Regional Governments to implement the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security effectively. We will also press for an increased and meaningful role for women in reconciliation processes and elections. The Iraqi National Education Strategy 2011-2020 recognises the importance of tackling gender disparity in education. The British Council, alongside the EU, is delivering a primary and secondary education programme in Iraq, reaching over 26,000 schools across all provinces. This project delivers national campaigns which encourage girls in rural areas to enrol in education, with a further focus on retention. The UK will continue to support the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government to enable more girls to receive a quality education.

Freedom of religion or belief is protected in the Iraqi Constitution and the Government of Iraq has made commitments to protect the rights of all Iraqis. Throughout 2017, we discussed the challenges to freedom of religion or belief with religious leaders in Iraq and in the UK. We continued to encourage them to speak out to condemn sectarian violence. We worked to build consensus around the importance of freedom of religion or belief in Iraq, and of its promotion and protection. For example, we continued to fund a project to promote legal and social protection for freedom of religion or belief in secondary schools, with the aim of strengthening the capacity of educators to create a culture of respect for this right among young people. In November, the Prime Minister, Theresa May, and the Iraqi Prime Minister, Haider al-Abadi, agreed on the important role which all Iraq's communities, including minorities, should play in the country's future.

In 2018, the UK will strive to ensure that Daesh is held accountable for its appalling human rights abuses. We are working with the Iraqi government and the UN to establish an Investigative Team, as mandated by UNSCR 2379, to gather and record evidence of Daesh's crimes. We will also express our concern about the use of the death penalty and advocate increased transparency around trials; and we will share our position with Iraqi ministers on the need for progress with regard to freedom of expression, gender-based violence, and freedom of religion or belief.

The State of Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories

Many human rights issues in 2017 stemmed from the Israeli Government's violation of international human rights and humanitarian law in the context of Israel's military occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza (Occupied Palestinian Territories, or OPTs). There were also continued human rights abuses by the Palestinian Authority and by the Hamas administration in Gaza. After a decline in violence in early 2017, there were spikes in hostilities during the 2nd half of the year. This was more noticeable following heightened security measures in July at the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif and after the US recognition in December of Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Incitement has continued to play a negative role, particularly on social media. There were persistent reports of the excessive use of force by the Israeli security forces.

The Hamas authorities in Gaza continued to commit serious human rights abuses. For example, 19 death sentences were issued and six executions carried out. There were also reports that Hamas and other Gaza-based militants were rearming and rebuilding attack tunnels. Approximately 30 rockets were fired from Gaza into Israel in 2017.

Israel continued its systematic policy of settlement expansion, with the advancement of over 10,000 housing units in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), some of which are located east of the separation barrier. On 6 February, the then Minister for the Middle East, Tobias Ellwood, issued a statement condemning the passing in the Knesset of the expropriation law, which provided for retroactive legalisation of outposts built on private Palestinian land. In March, the Israeli government approved the establishment of a new settlement deep in the West Bank, the first such decision for over 25 years, which the then Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, publicly condemned.

The number of acts of violence and vandalism against Palestinians by extremist settlers in the West Bank rose again in early 2017. This was despite increased law enforcement measures by the Israeli authorities.

Israeli demolitions of Palestinian houses and other structures continued in 2017. 403 structures were demolished (including 97 donor-funded structures), leading to the displacement of 653 people, including 360 children. The Minister for the Middle East, Alistair Burt, spoke in the House of Commons on 6 December about the negative effect of demolitions on Palestinian communities. The UK supports Palestinians whose homes face demolition or who face eviction in Area C of the West Bank through funding to legal aid.

We continued to seek improvements in the overall treatment of Palestinians in detention, with a particularly focus on minors (there were approximately 358 minors detained at the end of 2017). Reports of ill-treatment of minors in detention included the use of painful restraints and non-notification of legal rights. Ministers and officials have made repeated representations on this issue and will continue to do so. The Israeli authorities continued to decline offers of expert-to-expert advice from the Metropolitan Police. The UK funded a number of human rights projects on this issue, including providing legal aid to minors and capacity building to local lawyers. Overall, the number of Palestinians held in administrative detention by the Israel authorities decreased, with 437 at the end of the year.

In the OPTs, there was a narrowing of the space for civil society to operate, and increasing restrictions on freedom of expression, particularly resulting from the Palestinian Authority's adoption of a restrictive Cybercrime Law. LGBT rights remained restricted. Same-sex sexual activity is largely taboo in Palestinian society, though legal in the West Bank. Conversely, it is illegal in Gaza, where it carries a 10 year prison sentence.

Palestinian women are among the most educated in the region, but women's labour market participation rates are among the lowest in the world – fewer than 20% of women participate in the labour force.

Israel retained a strong civil society. There was, however, a steady increase in pressure against certain NGOs, particularly those critical of Israel's conduct in its occupation of the Palestinian Territories. This included critical rhetoric and restriction of their activities.

In 2017, Israel's Arab minority constituted about 20% of the population. Some 100,000 Arab Bedouin citizens live in unrecognised villages with limited access to government services and basic infrastructure. Many also face the threat of house demolitions.

In 2018, we will continue to work towards improving human rights by supporting renewed peace negotiations leading to a two-state solution with a safe and secure Israel existing alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state. We will continue to raise concerns with the Israeli government on instances

constituting a breach of international human rights and humanitarian law in the context of Israel's occupation of the OPTs, including demolitions, settlement construction, and the treatment of children in military detention. We will continue to oppose human rights abuses by the Palestinian Authority and by the Hamas administration in Gaza.

Libya

There were widespread violations and abuses of human rights in 2017 in Libya. This was a consequence of political divisions and the absence of functioning state institutions, which gave rise to a culture of impunity. The proliferation of unaccountable armed groups exacerbated the situation. This bleak picture was compounded by the ongoing humanitarian crisis, with over 400,000 people internally displaced and with serious disruptions in the provision of public services. A critical human rights issue was the abuse of migrants in detention, including credible reports of people being sold into slavery.

At the UN Human Rights Council in March, the UK co-sponsored a resolution on increasing accountability for human rights violations and abuses in Libya. The resolution called on the UN OHCHR to conduct investigations, and for relevant special procedures mandate holders to visit.

As highlighted in October by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights³⁸ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:38>), Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, armed groups continued to murder civilians and combatants or to hold them hostage. They arbitrarily detained thousands of people, and often subjected them to torture and other mistreatment. One of the worst incidents was the killing of over 100 soldiers after an extremist group attacked Brak al-Shati airbase on 18 May. There were also multiple reports of summary executions around Benghazi. In August, ambassadors to Libya of the UN Security Council P5 (UK, US, France, Russia and China) welcomed³⁹ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:39>) the International Criminal Court's issue of a warrant for the arrest of Mahmoud Al-Werfalli, a commander in the Libyan National Army, for suspected war crimes. In November, an armed group kidnapped and murdered Mohamed Eshtewi, the Mayor of Misrata.

Thousands of migrants continued to enter Libya with ease, facilitated by traffickers who were members of Libyan militias or colluding with them. Following reports of migrants being forced into slavery, the Minister for the Middle East and North Africa, Alistair Burt, raised our concerns with the Libyan Deputy Prime Minister, Ahmed Omar Maiteeq, on 1 December. The Libyan government has undertaken to conduct an investigation into this issue. The matter was raised in Parliament in a debate on 18 December in Westminster Hall, in which Alistair Burt set out the UK position. The British Ambassador to Libya has further underlined our concerns about these reports in discussions with the Libyan government. We will continue to monitor the situation closely. The UK is funding projects, bilaterally and via the EU, to provide critical humanitarian assistance and protection, facilitate voluntary returns, protect female migrants from abuse, and address the root causes of migration.

The UK provided humanitarian support to people displaced by the conflict, including supplies and technical support to medical centres, and support to migrants held in detention. We continued to encourage the Government of National Accord to prioritise respect for universal human rights and do more to protect the most vulnerable such as migrants and members of minority groups. During his visit to Libya in August, the then Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, emphasised the importance of offering humanitarian support to migrants.

Libya's long-term stability will be closely linked to the extent to which women are able to participate in public life and are both included in and represented by their government. Women and LGBT people continued to face discrimination. The Libyan authorities, and many traditional elements in Libyan society, view women's rights as a secondary priority. Although quotas for women have helped ensure a growing role for women in the political process, the increasing numbers have not translated proportionately into influence, in part because of cultural obstacles. Violence against women is underreported, but several high-profile incidents of rape provoked strong public reactions. Libya continues to be a focus country in the UK's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. The UK government is funding a £2.75 million programme to support women's participation in peace-making and rebuilding Libya through capacity- building training for over 20 Libyan civil society organisations.

The UK is working with the Ministry of Education on areas such as national curriculum reform and teacher training.

Insecurity and the predominance of illiberal currents had a chilling effect on freedom of expression, association, assembly, and religion or belief. For example, Salafist and Jihadist armed groups destroyed Sufi shrines across the country. Libya's national minorities continued to suffer persecution and political exclusion on religious and ethnic grounds. Human rights defenders, journalists and civil society organisations also regularly faced intimidation and violence from armed groups as well as unlawful detention.

The UK sought to raise international awareness of unlawful restrictions of the Libyan people's fundamental freedoms, including in our joint Human Rights Day Statement⁴⁰ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:40>).

office-report#fn:40) on 10 December with other embassies to Libya. Through the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, we funded programmes in Libya to support peace mediation and local level stability, women's rights, civil society and freedom of speech.

In 2018, the UK will continue to support UN-led efforts towards a sustainable political settlement under the framework of the Libyan Political Agreement, and to advocate for an improvement in the human rights situation in Libya. A stable, unified, inclusive government is the best way to improve the security conditions, the economic fortunes and human rights situation for millions of Libyans. It will also improve our ability to bring an end to the impunity of armed groups and ungoverned spaces which are inextricably linked to the gravely concerning human rights situation, including people trafficking as part of modern slavery.

Republic of Maldives

The human rights situation in Maldives continued to deteriorate throughout 2017, with the ongoing erosion of political and civic freedoms and an increase in the intimidation of human rights defenders and journalists.

There was an increase in violent threats and intimidation against human rights defenders and NGOs, in particular against those advocating for freedom of religion or belief. Human rights activist and blogger, Yameen Rasheed, was murdered in April, after receiving numerous online threats. The UK, EU and the UN OHCHR made statements condemning the murder and calling on the Government of Maldives to take action to defend the right of all people to express their views freely. In November, the police launched an investigation into another prominent human rights defender, Shahindha Ismail, after accusations that she was advocating for freedom of religion.

State authorities put independent media and civil society under sustained pressure. In the first actions taken under the 2016 Defamation and Freedom of Speech Act, an independent television station, Raajje TV, was repeatedly fined for allegedly defaming the president by broadcasting live coverage of speeches made at opposition rallies. Among other cases, the police summoned several Maldivian bloggers resident overseas and threatened them with trials in absentia if they failed to return to Maldives.

There was further evidence of a lack of judicial independence with cases brought against the opposition. In March, a vote of no-confidence in the Speaker of the Majlis was marked by irregularities and manipulation of due process. In July, the authorities shut down the Majlis and removed several opposition MPs attempting to vote on a further impeachment motion against the Speaker. The authorities subsequently stripped 12 parliamentarians of their seats. By-elections for those seats have yet to be held, in contravention of the constitution. The opposition subsequently boycotted the Majlis, but major pieces of legislation were nevertheless passed by the Majlis.

The police arrested leading opposition parliamentarians Gasim Ibrahim and Faris Maumoon on numerous charges, in April and July respectively. In August, a court sentenced Gasim Ibrahim to 3 years' imprisonment for bribery, despite procedural irregularities, while Faris Maumoon remained in prison on remand, awaiting trial. Other opposition parliamentarians also faced harassment, arrest and detention. The police raided opposition party offices. In May, the Supreme Court gave itself the authority to restrict parliament's powers to dismiss ministers, judges and other members of independent institutions, with all votes of no-confidence and impeachment proceedings subject to Supreme Court review.

Concerns over the politicisation of independent public bodies continued. In September, the Department of Judicial Administration suspended 56 lawyers for signing a letter to the Supreme Court calling for judicial reform. Some of the suspensions were subsequently lifted. In November, President Abdulla Yameen sacked the chair of the National Integrity Commission (NIC), which oversees law enforcement bodies, after he threatened to take action against the police for obstructing the NIC's investigations. In December, the Government of Maldives banned locally elected representatives from meeting representatives of international organisations and diplomats without central government permission.

In a positive development, significant efforts by the Government of Maldives to tackle modern slavery led the US State Department to remove Maldives from its Trafficking in Persons watch list. Traffickers were convicted under the Maldives' anti-trafficking law for the first time since Maldivian ratification (in September 2016) of the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children.

The Government of Maldives has continued to state its intention to reintroduce the death penalty after a moratorium of more than 60 years, and it was reported that work on an execution facility has been completed. The then Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, wrote to President Yameen in August to raise concerns and to encourage a continued moratorium. The UK opposes the use of the death penalty in all circumstances as a matter of principle, and will continue to urge the Maldivian government to reverse its decision to reintroduce the death penalty.

The UK continued to fund civil society projects focusing on gender equality, human rights, and building civil society's election monitoring capacity. In February, the then Minister for Asia and the Pacific, Alok Sharma, met Maldivian Foreign Minister Mohamed Asim at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva, and reiterated the UK's concerns over a range of governance and human rights concerns in Maldives. In March, the UK expressed concern and called for transparent parliamentary procedures following the vote of no-confidence in the Speaker of the Majlis.

The Government of Maldives has announced a ‘no child left behind’ policy, and that the country is the first nation in the region to provide 12 years of compulsory education and 14 years of free schooling for all students. In 2017 the UNFPA's Thematic Analysis on Youth in the Maldives noted that there is gender parity in enrolment and completion of primary and secondary education. At tertiary level fewer than one percent of women who achieved an educational certificate go on to attain a bachelor's degree or above, and only 32% of women are in formal employment, compared with 68% of men.

In June, 35 countries signed a UK-sponsored Joint Statement on Maldives ⁴¹ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:41>) at the UN HRC. The Statement drew attention to the increasing curtailment of freedom of expression and the growing intimidation and violence towards human rights defenders, including by those promoting violent extremism. It also stressed the importance of allowing legitimate political opposition and ensuring judicial independence. In October, the European Parliament adopted a resolution which criticised violations of human rights and actions contrary to democracy and the rule of law in Maldives.

In 2018, the UK government will continue to support human rights defenders, and will work with our international partners to press the Government of Maldives to restore democratic freedoms including free and fair presidential elections scheduled for 2018. The UK will continue through public and private messaging to make clear to the Government of Maldives our concerns over the erosion of democracy and human rights.

Pakistan

The main human rights issues in Pakistan in 2017 were restrictions on freedom of expression, intolerance towards and discrimination against religious and other minorities, violations of the rights of women and children, the prevalence of modern slavery, and the use of the death penalty. Pakistan strengthened laws aimed at protecting the rights of members of religious minorities, female voters and vulnerable children, and at the provincial level took steps to tackle child labour. These were positive developments, but it is vital that Pakistan moves to ensure full and effective implementation of such laws and policies.

Freedom of expression and the ability of civil society to operate came under increased pressure in 2017. In January, five bloggers went missing after criticising state institutions and religious groups. Reports of further abductions and of the intimidation of journalists, activists and political party workers followed. In May, the government introduced new restrictions on online freedoms and the media's ability to operate. In December, a number of international NGOs had their applications to renew their registrations denied without explanation, and were told to cease operations by the government of Pakistan.

Discrimination and violence against members of religious minorities increased, especially against Ahmadiyya and Christians, but also against Hindus, Sikhs and Shia Muslims. Misuse and abuse of the blasphemy laws were frequent. For example, in April a student was murdered following an accusation of committing blasphemy. The Supreme Court later found the claim to be false. The National Assembly called for reform of the blasphemy laws, but the legislation was not changed. In June, a Shia Muslim was sentenced to death after allegedly making blasphemous remarks on social media, the first time that the death penalty has been imposed for blasphemy on the internet. In October, hate speech in the National Assembly against Ahmadiyya was condemned by political leaders, but restrictions on their ability to vote and worship remained. There were recurrent reports of forced conversions and forced marriages of Hindu and Christian women. On the other hand, parliament in February passed the Hindu Marriage Act, strengthening the rights of members of Pakistan's second largest minority and particularly of Hindu women.

There was an increased number of major terrorist attacks against civilians and faith targets in Pakistan. Although the majority of terrorist attacks targeted the security forces, other notable incidents included attacks against Sufi shrines in Sindh and Balochistan, Shia areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and a Methodist church in Balochistan. The downward trajectory of terrorist attacks since 2014 continued, with a total of a little under 400 terrorist incidents leading to around 1,000 deaths in 2017.

Discrimination and violence against women and girls remained widespread. Pakistan ranked 143rd out of 144 countries cited in the World Economic Forum 2017 Gender Gap Index, with 33% of women over 15 having experienced physical violence, female literacy at just 49% and low levels of women's political representation. Education is enshrined as a right in the Constitution of Pakistan but girls make up just 38% of children in government-run schools and 40% of those enrolled at private schools. Despite

stronger laws to protect women from violence, including from ‘honour killings’, enforcement remained weak. In October, the Elections Act 2017 was passed, which will support greater participation of women in general elections due to take place in 2018.

Modern slavery, including bonded and child labour, continued to be a major problem. The Global Slavery Index estimated that Pakistan has the third highest number of modern slaves in the world. A high profile case illustrated the problem: the media reported that a ten-year old domestic servant was regularly beaten by her employer, the wife of a judge. The UK welcomed legislative and policy reforms undertaken by the government of Punjab with support from UNICEF and DFID to combat child labour, including child labour surveys to generate evidence of exploitation, better access to child protection services, improved case management systems, and greater birth registration to support minimum age employment laws.

Pakistan retained the death penalty for 27 separate offences. Fewer executions took place in 2017 than in the previous two years: the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan estimates that 44 prisoners were executed, compared with 87 in 2016 and 333 in 2015. However, particular concerns remained over prisoners with mental and physical illnesses on death row. In March, parliament approved the continued use of military courts to try terrorism suspects. These courts lack transparency and are not subject to independent scrutiny, making it difficult to assess their compliance with international obligations. There were ongoing reports of the detention of prisoners without trial and of extrajudicial killings by the security forces.

LGBT people continued to face violence and discrimination. In a positive move, a new category of ‘third gender’ was introduced for transgender persons applying for ID cards.

Education is enshrined as a right in the Constitution of Pakistan but only 51% girls are enrolled in school according to the Government of Pakistan. Girls’ enrolment has increased from 36% to 39% from 2014 to 2016 and the number of girls out of school has fallen by more than 1.6 million since 2012. The Government of Pakistan has committed to spending 4% of GDP on education by 2020. It currently spends about 3%.

Since 2011, over 15 million children in primary and secondary school – including 6.9 million girls – have benefited from DFID support to education reforms. The UK government is investing in better-trained teachers, improved textbooks, better data and assessment, and improved infrastructure with an increasing focus on the most marginalised communities. DFID’s education programme in Pakistan exceeded £175 million in 2017/18. Through DFID, the UK helped nearly 1 million Pakistani children attend school including specific programmes to enable more girls to receive a quality education.

The government of Pakistan continued to support human rights institutions, including the National Commissions for Human Rights and for the Status of Women, which contributed positively to monitoring the human rights situation in Pakistan. In September, parliament passed legislation establishing a National Commission on the Rights of the Child.

The UK continued to urge the Government of Pakistan to improve the human rights situation for all its citizens. British ministers raised concerns about human rights, including the rights of women and of people belonging to minorities, modern slavery and the death penalty, during visits to Pakistan in 2017. At the UN Universal Periodic Review of Pakistan in November, we pressed Pakistan to take action on the protection of people belonging to minorities, human trafficking and the death penalty. We supported projects to promote tolerance and religious freedom, and to improve capacity in provincial human rights ministries. Through DFID, the UK helped nearly one million Pakistani children attend school, including through specific programmes to enable more girls to receive a quality education.

In 2018, we will support projects to improve citizens’ awareness of their constitutional rights and to promote acceptance and tolerance of cultural diversity. Our Conflict, Stability and Security Fund will continue to help to strengthen democracy and human rights institutions, and to improve the capacity of the justice system to be more accountable to citizens. We welcome the continuing efforts by the government, including by the Attorney General, to monitor implementation of international treaty commitments. We will continue to encourage Pakistan to take the necessary steps towards meeting in full its international obligations on human and labour rights, in line with the EU review of Pakistan’s performance against 27 UN and ILO conventions within the EU Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus framework.

Russia

The human rights situation in Russia deteriorated further in 2017, notably with regard to discrimination against and persecution of LGBT people, the right to freedom of religion or belief, and the right to freedom of expression.

The environment for LGBT people in the North Caucasus is extremely hostile. In April, reports emerged that up to 100 homosexual men had been detained and tortured by state authorities in Chechnya, and that at least three had been killed. The UK was one of the first countries to express concern. On 28 April, the then Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, co-signed a letter to Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov urging an investigation into the reports. The Russian Human Rights Ombudswoman, Tatiana

Moskalkova, agreed to investigate, but the process stalled amid further reports of persecution throughout 2017. The Minister for Europe and the Americas, Sir Alan Duncan, raised our concerns with Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Titov on 8 December, and the then Foreign Secretary pressed Foreign Minister Lavrov in Moscow on 22 December. UK officials continue to monitor the situation and to work closely with NGOs which are supporting victims.

In April, the Russian Supreme Court declared Jehovah's Witnesses to be an “extremist organisation”, in effect criminalising the worship of 175,000 Russians. The organisation was formally banned on 17 August. The Minister for Human Rights, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, condemned the decision, and called on the Russian government to uphold its international commitments to religious freedom. The British Embassy in Moscow attended court hearings.

Freedom of expression and peaceful assembly remained heavily restricted across Russia. On 26 March, hundreds of citizens, including journalists, were detained following peaceful protests. On 12 June, peaceful protesters were again arrested in large numbers. The then Foreign Secretary on 13 June called for their release.

The ‘Foreign Agents’ and ‘Undesirable Organisations’ laws continued to constrict space for civil society; in 2017, four foreign donors were designated ‘Undesirable Organisations’. While the number of ‘Foreign Agent’ NGOs dropped in 2017, this is partly because many NGOs have either stopped accepting foreign funding or have changed their focus; 47 have ceased operations entirely. There are now around 500 human rights organisations in Russia, compared with 800 in 2014. On 25 November, President Putin extended the ‘Foreign Agents’ legislation to media outlets. Independent media continue to face threats, harassment and intimidation.

On 7 February, President Putin approved a bill decriminalising domestic violence. This made battery within families an administrative offence, equivalent to minor assault. Repeated offences or abuse resulting in “serious” medical harm are still considered as criminal. On 8 February, the then Minister for Human Rights, Baroness Anelay of St Johns, condemned the decision. The Prime Minister, Theresa May, called the decision a “retrograde step”, adding that the move “sends out absolutely the wrong message on what is a global problem”.

In addition to the human rights abuses within Russia, the Russian Government continues to sanction and commit human rights violations beyond its borders, including in the illegally annexed Crimea and by its support to separatists in Eastern Ukraine. Russian authorities operating in the peninsula continued to target ethnic minority groups, particularly Crimean Tatars, with many exiled or imprisoned, and with regular raids on homes and mosques. The authorities failed to implement the International Court of Justice’s April provisional measures requiring Russia to refrain from discrimination against the Tatars. Those opposed to the illegal annexation also faced arrest and detention under fabricated charges of extremism. The release of Tatar leaders Akhtem Chiyyoz and Ilmi Umerov in October was positive, but many Ukrainian political prisoners remained in detention, including some transferred outside Crimea to prisons in Russia. In December, we 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.

In eastern Ukraine, the UN estimated that by December the Russian-backed conflict had cost over 10,000 lives and had displaced internally almost one million people. Russia continued to violate its commitments under the 2015 Minsk Agreements by supplying weapons and personnel to separatist forces. Summary executions, sexual and gender-based violence and restrictions on freedom of speech were carried out with impunity by Russian-backed separatists. It remained extremely challenging for humanitarian organisations to gain access. There were widespread concerns that damage caused by the conflict to infrastructure could cause a major environmental disaster.

Increased Russian pressure in the breakaway regions of Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, led to a deterioration in the human rights situation there, including intimidation of members of civil society organisations. Freedom of movement was curtailed further, with the closure of the Meore Otobaia and Nabakevi crossing points on the Abkhazia Administrative Boundary Line (ABL) in March. Access to land remains a challenge for farmers along the South Ossetia ABL. Education in the native language was further restricted in South Ossetia, while new identity document requirements in Abkhazia infringe civic rights. In June, we supported the Georgian UN Human Rights Council resolution requesting access for the UN OHCHR and the UN General Assembly resolution on internally displaced persons.

The UK will continue to support human rights in Russia in 2018. Together with our international partners, we will attend trials, speak out on human rights, support civil society and human rights defenders specifically, promote the importance of girls’ education and press Russia to adhere to its international commitments.

Saudi Arabia

There were some positive reforms in Saudi Arabia in 2017, including around the participation of women in society, as well as positive messages around freedom of religion and belief. However, there was a deterioration in freedom of expression and we continue to have concerns about implementation of the death penalty and the treatment of migrant workers.

There have been some improvements in the rights of women in Saudi Arabia. The highest profile reform came with the Royal Decree in September which permitted women to obtain driving licences from June 2018. Other reforms in favour of women's participation in society included the opening up of more professions to women; the removal of restrictions on women entering courts with their faces uncovered; and allowing women to enter stadiums and to participate in public events such as Saudi National Day in September. From May 2017, all Saudi government departments, as well as education and health institutions, have been required to ensure that guardianship requirements are not being imposed upon women in excess of those still required in law. While all of these are steps in the right direction, many restrictions still remain, including the requirement for women to obtain permission from a guardian to apply for a passport, travel abroad, or marry. Female labour force participation remains low at just⁴² (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:42>) 21% but Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia's economic reform programme, aims to increase this to 30%.

The Prime Minister, Theresa May, visited Saudi Arabia twice in 2017 and raised concerns about human rights, including the death penalty, in her meetings with senior Saudi figures. With Princess Reema bint Bandar, the then Vice Minister of Sport, the Prime Minister discussed how important it was for all Saudi citizens to be able to access sports and leisure and they agreed to work together on efforts to increase the participation of women in sport. Tracey Crouch, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Sport, Tourism and Heritage, visited Saudi Arabia in November to follow up on this work and to press for the removal of remaining barriers for women to access sports in Saudi Arabia.

According to statistics issued by the Saudi Press Agency, confirmed by NGOs, Saudi Arabia executed 146 people in 2017 (c.f. 154 in 2016)⁴³ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:43>). The death penalty was ordered, and executions carried out, for a wide range of offences. Four people were executed for offences related to protesting against the authorities. We continued to express to the Saudi authorities at the most senior levels our strong opposition to the death penalty. The UK, together with our 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 July, there were media and NGO reports that a group of 14 Shia men were due to be executed imminently, and that two of the group, including Murtaza al-Sweikat, were under 18 at the time of allegedly committing their offences. The Minister for the Middle East, Alistair Burt, set out our position on the death penalty in parliament on 14 July. The UK government raised these cases with the Saudi authorities at ministerial and senior official level and we continued to monitor the situation closely. As of the end of 2017, these executions had not been carried out.

There were positive messages from the Saudi authorities regarding tolerance of religious minorities and on freedom of religion and belief. It remains illegal to practise publicly a religion other than Islam in Saudi Arabia, with penalties including imprisonment. In October, the Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman commented publicly that he wanted Saudi Arabia to return to “a moderate Islam open to the world and all religions”. A delegation from Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Islamic Affairs travelled to the Vatican to meet the Pope in November. We will continue to look for opportunities to work with Saudi Arabia to encourage greater freedom of religion and belief.

There was a deterioration in freedom of expression and freedom of the press in Saudi Arabia in 2017. The UN raised concerns about a pattern of arbitrary arrests and detention of religious figures, writers, journalists, academics and political activists and the use of counter-terrorism legislation to prosecute human rights defenders. UN experts have written to the government of Saudi Arabia asking for more detail on the charges.

In 2017, Saudi Arabia signed the Prime Minister's Call to Action on Modern Slavery and drew up a national action plan to combat human trafficking. However, the sponsorship system in Saudi Arabia remains vulnerable to abuse and exploitation of migrant workers.

In Saudi Arabia education is free at all levels, including public universities, and compulsory up to the age of 15. The Kingdom has made significant investments in education in recent years. More than 50% of those who go on to university are women. The challenge now facing the Kingdom is translating these educational outcomes into increased female labour market participation. The UK is currently running projects in Saudi Arabia supporting the introduction of PE classes for girls; and building capacity, skills and international research links for early career female researchers in STEM.

In 2018, we will continue to focus our efforts on identifying opportunities to work with Saudi Arabia and NGOs to encourage further steps towards allowing women to participate fully in society. We will continue to focus on the application of the death penalty when not consistent with international minimum standards. We will continue to raise specific cases at a senior level with the Saudi Arabian authorities, and to monitor closely the situation relating to freedom of religion or belief, and freedom of expression.

Somalia

The human rights situation in Somalia remained challenging in 2017, with continuing violations of the right to life including extrajudicial killing; gender-based violence; the exclusion of women and members of minorities from political, economic and social processes; and restrictions on journalists and media freedom. Overall, human rights protections and domestic mechanisms in the country remained extremely weak. The UN OHCHR documented violations and abuses, including arbitrary arrest, detention, torture and extrajudicial killing by a range of state and non-state actors. In 2017, severe drought caused the displacement of over 900,000 people, restricting many people's access to adequate food, housing and security, and exacerbating gender-based violence.

The UK played a major part in international efforts to strengthen security, stability and the rule of law, which are required to underpin stronger human rights protections. There remained a lack of accountability among the Somali National Army, national intelligence agencies and forces of the African Union mission in Somalia (AMISOM), perpetuating a culture of impunity. Much of our engagement with the AMISOM mission, so vital to Somalia's security and wider stability, concentrated on human rights protection, while our wider work in Somalia was considered carefully to avoid contributing to any human rights violations. In May, the London Somalia Conference set out a range of commitments by the Federal Government of Somalia and the international community in support of stability and security in the country. This included respect for and the protection of human rights. The UK continued to train Somali security forces in international human rights standards. In response to reports by UN bodies and following UK training, the Somali National Army took important steps to prevent the recruitment of children into Somalia's security forces. In December, the UN Secretary-General reported a sharp increase in the recruitment of children by the proscribed terrorist organisation, al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab was responsible for the attack in Mogadishu on 14 October which killed at least 512 people – Africa's most deadly terror attack to date.

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

Despite tentative progress, Somalia was one of the worst places in the world to be a woman in 2017. Two decades of civil war have left a legacy of extreme levels of violence against women and girls. Prevailing social norms legitimise female genital mutilation and cutting, which is nearly universal, including in Somaliland. Women and minority groups continued to be excluded from economic, social and political networks – a problem exacerbated by the Somali clan system. Somalia has one of the world's highest proportions of primary-age children out of school, with⁴⁴

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:44>) 51% of girls not in school. The female illiteracy rate is 76%. A tiny minority of teachers are women. DFID's girls' education challenge supports 53,000 marginalised girls through improved access to education, better quality teaching and life skills training.

Child, early and forced marriage continued to occur, but some evidence suggests that it may be declining. Up to 80% of those internally displaced by conflict and drought were women and children, exacerbating their vulnerability. Early action to respond to drought, led by the UK, helped to avert famine and saved many lives. While the parliamentary elections of 2016 had seen progress in the representation of women (an increase from 14% to 24%, albeit missing the ambitious 30% target), in Somaliland there is only one female parliamentarian and no women at all in the upper house. Throughout 2017, the UK worked with female parliamentarians, political leaders, civil society activists and Federal Government institutions to strengthen the voices of women and to promote awareness of gender equality in policy making and public decision making. The UK also led work with AMISOM, the Federal Government and Federal Member States to deliver tailored gender training in the security sector to improve protection for vulnerable women and girls. The political environment in much of Somalia remained restrictive, particularly for women and members of minority groups – acutely so in areas under al-Shabaab control.

In Somaliland, presidential elections held in November led to the peaceful transfer of power. UK-funded election monitors judged them to be largely free and fair. A UK-supported voter registration process encouraged broad participation. However, for most of 2017 journalists across Somalia – including in Somaliland – continued to face significant restrictions, arbitrary detention and, in some areas, the possibility of assassination. The use of criminal law and the intelligence agencies to prosecute journalists using broadly defined national security concerns further curtailed freedoms and encouraged self-censorship. Female journalists continued to experience additional social stigma, illustrating the intersections of the forms of severe discrimination which women and girls face in Somalia.

In 2018, the UK will support Somalia in implementing the vision set out in the New Partnership for Somalia and endorsed at the London Conference in May 2017. Supporting security forces to provide protection and security for citizens across Somalia, while developing the rule of law and effective accountability for perpetrators of violations and abuse, will remain a top priority. The UK will work with the newly formed Human Rights Commission, parliament and other Somali institutions to strengthen human rights awareness and compliance, not least with regard to strengthening the promotions of gender equality and media freedom.

South Sudan

The human rights situation in South Sudan deteriorated in 2017, against the backdrop of continuing and widespread conflict, and of the erosion of justice and accountability mechanisms. The targeting of civilians on the basis of their ethnic identity, the pervasive use of rape, the recruitment of child soldiers, the displacement of civilian populations, and the clamping down on freedom of expression, all continued. In March, the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan reported a significant increase in gross human rights violations and abuses, committed by all parties, and warned that ethnic cleansing was underway.

Human rights abuses and violations occurred alongside a rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation: by September, 6 million South Sudanese people (56% of the population) lacked sufficient food. In November, the UN reported that the Government of South Sudan was using food as a weapon of war, and was deliberately preventing lifesaving assistance from reaching its citizens. With over four million people displaced, the conflict is driving the largest refugee crisis in Africa.

High levels of sexual and gender-based violence continued to be a hallmark of the conflict. A report in November by the Global Women's Institute⁴⁵ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:45>), funded by DFID, found that up to 65% of women and girls living in conflict-affected zones had experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime. 'Intimate partner violence' remained the most common form of violence reported by women and girls and conflict exacerbated this. Armed men used rape to terrorise communities, as victims were often disowned by their families and communities. Most citizens who were victims of sexual violence had no recourse through the courts to seek justice or to hold perpetrators to account.

The conflict had a particular impact on children. The recruitment of children as soldiers continued to be common, despite commitments by some commanders to end the practice. UNICEF estimated that armed groups recruited 19,000 children, while an estimated 900,000 were suffering from psychosocial distress.⁴⁶ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:46>) The UN Commission on Human Rights said that UNICEF's figures probably underestimated the extent of grave violations which children endured. Children also continued to be severely affected by South Sudan's refugee crisis, accounting for 63% of all refugees from the country in 2017. 53% of girls are not in primary education⁴⁷ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:47>) and recent estimates suggest female literacy rates are less than 20%. Through the Girls' Education in South Sudan programme, the UK supports over 3,600 schools to deliver basic education, helping to keep up to a quarter of a million girls in class.

South Sudan slipped to 145th out of 180 cited in the World Press Freedom Index, published annually by Reporters Without Borders. The authorities closed down media organisations, blocked websites, and subjected journalists to harassment and violence. Nine journalists have been killed in South Sudan since 2011, most recently in August, when US journalist Christopher Allen was killed during fighting between government and opposition forces.

Over the last year, the Media Authority has enforced the registration of media houses and journalists. The charges levied for the registration of media houses appeared to be set arbitrarily, and were often beyond the means of smaller community stations with lower incomes, further reducing the space in which the media operated. South Sudanese media continued to self-censor following years of repression. Most well-trained journalists have left the industry or the country as a result of harassment by the authorities.

UK policy focused on maximising the chances of success for the renewed peace process, led by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). Without progress in this area, there is little hope for improvements in the dire human rights situation. A major diplomatic achievement in December was the signing of an agreement to a Cessation of Hostilities by all parties to the conflict, following the first round of peace talks. Nevertheless, fighting continued across the country.

Achieving a stable South Sudan which protects human rights will be an incremental process. In 2018, the peace process will remain our key priority, without which an improvement in the human rights situation is inconceivable. We will continue to work closely with our Troika partners (the US and Norway) to give the process the best chance of success, and to encourage IGAD to take strong action against those who seek to derail it. We are considering how the UK government can best lend support to IGAD to achieve this important aim. We will also continue to urge the Government of South Sudan and the African Union to expedite the establishment of much needed accountability and justice mechanisms, including the Hybrid Court for South Sudan. It is also vital that evidence of violations and abuses is preserved for use in a future court of law, so that the perpetrators of these crimes can be held to account. Through initiatives such as DFID's Girls' Education South Sudan programme we will continue to support longer-term development efforts.

Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

2017 saw limited progress in the human rights situation in Sri Lanka. There were particular concerns around inter-communal tensions and the slow delivery of key human rights and reconciliation commitments, including delays in introducing new human rights compliant counter-terrorism legislation and in the Office of Missing Persons becoming operational.

There were a number of allegations that the security forces continued to resort to torture, including in reports published by the Sri Lanka Human Rights Commission, by the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) Special Rapporteur on Torture, Nils Melzer, and by the HRC Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, Fionnuala Ní Aoláin. Work continued on a draft Counter Terrorism Act, intended to replace the much criticised Prevention of Terrorism Act, but the government failed to advance the new legislation through parliament.

Civil society and journalists continued to report concerns about surveillance and harassment in the north and east of the country, albeit at a lower level than in previous years. Military involvement in civilian life in the north reduced, and the military released approximately 550 acres of private land.

Communal tensions increased, with incidents of violence and intimidation against Muslims and Evangelical Christians. The Government of Sri Lanka established inter-religious committees to address the issue, and committed to hold to account those responsible for inciting violence.

The International Organization for Migration assessed that human trafficking remained common within the large numbers of Sri Lankans migrating for employment, with men, women and children being trafficked for labour and commercial sexual exploitation. The Government of Sri Lanka established new anti-trafficking units in order to help address the issue and endorsed the Call to Action to end Modern Slavery which was announced by the Prime Minister, Theresa May, at the UN General Assembly in September.

In January, the Cabinet rejected a move, spearheaded by civil society, to decriminalise homosexuality following opposition by some members of the government and by some conservative religious groups. Although there have been no recent prosecutions for homosexual acts, members of the LGBT community face harassment and discrimination in society. Supported by UK funding, the 13th Colombo Pride Week was held successfully in June.

There was progress on legislative reforms and improving institutional and policy frameworks designed to prevent discrimination against women. This included the finalisation of the National Human Rights Action Plan (2017 to 2021) and the introduction of a quota for female candidates in local elections. There are continued concerns around issues affecting gender equality, including discriminatory laws and policies, access to justice, marginalisation of war-affected women, and violence against women. Civil society continued to call for the reform of the Muslim Marriages and Divorce Act, which does not stipulate a minimum age of marriage for women of the Muslim community. 3.6% of Sri Lanka girls are not in primary school compared to 1.8% of boys⁴⁸ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:48>).

In January, the then Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, met former Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera. They discussed constitutional reform, HRC resolution 30/1, the repeal and replacement of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, and accountability and reconciliation issues. The Minister for Asia and the Pacific, Mark Field, visited Sri Lanka in October. He emphasised the UK's support for reconciliation and accountability, and urged greater progress towards delivering the commitments made to the HRC.

In March, the OHCHR published its assessment of Sri Lanka's progress in the implementation of HRC resolution 30/1. While acknowledging positive steps taken, the report described progress towards establishing transitional justice mechanisms as “worryingly slow” and noted reluctance by the government to address difficult issues. The UK welcomed the Government of Sri Lanka's co-sponsorship of a new HRC resolution 34/1, rolling resolution 30/1 commitments over for another 2 years. The UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Guarantees of Non-recurrence, Pablo de Greiff, visited Sri Lanka in October. His report concluded that the Government of Sri Lanka was making slower progress than hoped on transitional justice issues, and questioned its commitment to a comprehensive transitional justice programme.

Sri Lanka had its Universal Periodic Review at the HRC in November. The UK recommended that Sri Lanka should design and implement strategies to tackle sexual violence; mandate companies to ensure supply chain transparency as part of efforts to combat human trafficking; and take steps to implement the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT), following its ratification earlier in November. The Government of Sri Lanka made a voluntary commitment to designate the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka as the national preventive and monitoring mechanism to fulfil OPCAT obligations.

The UK is providing £6.6 million from the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (2016 to 2019) for projects in Sri Lanka, including support for police reform, demining, inter-faith dialogue and mediation, and support for the UN's Peacebuilding Priority Plan.

In 2018, the UK will continue to encourage progress on human rights issues, including modern slavery, gender inequality including girls' education, and reform of discriminatory laws. The UK will also continue to press for the release of private land occupied by the military or the payment of suitable compensation to landowners.

Sudan

There was little overall improvement in the human rights situation in Sudan during 2017. While the government demonstrated an increased willingness to engage with the international community on human rights issues, the state continued to restrict freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief, and to carry out the arbitrary detention of political and human rights activists. Although the impact of conflict on civilians continued to diminish, government and government-affiliated forces continued to violate and abuse human rights with impunity in conflict-affected areas. Sudan's 2.7 million internally displaced persons remained particularly vulnerable to violations of their rights⁴⁹ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:49>) 18% of girls are not in primary school and around 42% of girls over 15 are illiterate.

The international community continued to focus on the humanitarian situation, with 4.8 million people in need of assistance. The implementation of government directives improved humanitarian access, and we continued to encourage the government to ensure full access for humanitarian actors, as well as for the UN/African Union Hybrid Mission in Darfur (UNAMID).

Following a marked decrease in the seizure of newspapers by the security services in the first half of the year (confiscation of three print-runs), more than 30 print-runs were confiscated in the second half of 2017, the majority in December. Sudan continues to be ranked 174th out of 180 countries cited in the World Press Freedom Index. We worked with the international community to identify the implications of the draft media law on the plurality of media ownership and on Sudan's vibrant media scene, as well as on freedom of expression on the internet.

Arbitrary arrests and the summoning of political activists and journalists continued throughout the year, with multiple reports of torture and ill-treatment by the Sudanese authorities of these detainees. We continued to urge Sudan to implement its Universal Periodic Review and National Dialogue recommendations regarding reform of the National Security Act, to ensure that the national intelligence and security services conform to international human rights standards. We urged full accountability for all human rights violations.

While there is freedom to worship, broader restrictions on religious freedom in Sudan continued. Arbitrary rules on acceptable clothing and restrictions in Khartoum State on opening days for Christian schools remained a concern. The Archbishop of Canterbury's visit to Sudan in July was a focal point in efforts to encourage the government to ensure that citizens enjoyed the right to freedom of religion or belief.

We continued to work with the Government of Sudan to tackle forced labour and people trafficking. Throughout the year, there were a number of reports of sexual and gender-based violence by state and non-state actors on the borders and in conflict areas, and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees reported the forced deportation of 66 Eritrean trafficking victims. We will continue to provide support to victims of trafficking, including through supporting safe houses and judicial procedures relating to trafficking cases.

The UK government engaged extensively on human rights with the Government of Sudan and with human rights activists throughout 2017. We continued to press for progress on a range of issues, including the peace process, freedom of association and expression, freedom of religion or belief, and gender equality. We expressed concern about the proposed new laws on freedom of the media and NGOs. Our staff attended several trials of human rights defenders, and we raised individual cases, in public and in private. We worked constructively with the Government of Sudan to make progress in a number of these cases.

Our project work promoted human rights in a number of respects, including on rule of law in conflict areas, promoting women's and marginalised groups' voices in the peace and other processes and parliamentary strengthening and capacity building for political parties. We worked with international partners to secure a mandate renewal for the Independent Expert on Sudan, Aristide Nononsi, at the UN Human Rights Council in September, and urged the Government of Sudan to address the recommendations in his report, as well as encouraging Sudan's future engagement with the UN system and international community on human rights issues. We are working with partners to strengthen the legal framework at national and state level for the prevention of female genital mutilation and cutting, although progress at the national level has been delayed.

In 2018, we will continue to push for systemic change to improve the human rights situation in Sudan. This will focus on freedom of expression and association and greater political inclusion, particularly the freedom for political parties to organise ahead of the elections scheduled for 2020. We will maintain pressure on the Government of Sudan to recognise the constitutional rights granted to all Sudanese citizens, to reform its intelligence and security service, to maintain progress on conflict resolution, and to improve humanitarian access. We will support Sudan in its accession to international human rights treaties, particularly the Convention against Torture.

Syria

There was no improvement in the dire human rights situation in Syria. The continuing conflict gravely hindered efforts to protect human rights and there were numerous allegations of the most egregious human rights violations and abuses. The Syrian regime was by far the primary perpetrator of human rights violations, but Daesh and some armed groups also committed many human rights abuses.

There were also allegations of breaches of international humanitarian law. Many civilian areas, including some in areas supposedly subject to de-escalation agreements, were subjected to disproportionate and indiscriminate aerial bombing and artillery bombardment, mainly by pro-regime forces, resulting in heavy casualties. The UN Commission of Inquiry (COI) found that pro-regime forces’ intentional targeting of medical facilities amounted to war crimes. One in three schools have now been destroyed. Almost⁵⁰ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:50>) 30% of girls are out of school. The lack of protection of civilians was a major factor in new displacement; between 113,000 and 442,000 people were newly displaced per month in 2017. According to a UN needs analysis, 97% of communities reported one or more protection issues, ranging from lack of civil documentation (reported in 83% of communities) and keeping children out of school in order to work (82%) through to sexual violence (27%) and kidnapping/abduction (24%).

NGOs and the UN also expressed concern about heavy civilian casualties during the campaign by the Global Coalition and Syrian Democratic Forces to liberate Raqqa from Daesh control. The Coalition takes seriously all reports of civilian casualties and investigates all claims. We have not seen any evidence that the RAF caused civilian casualties in Syria in 2017 but the UK and Coalition continue to take seriously and investigate all reports of civilian casualties.

The regime used sieges, and blocked humanitarian aid and medical evacuations to force opposition fighters to surrender. By the end of 2017, nearly 3 million people were living in besieged and hard-to-reach areas. This included almost 400,000 besieged by the regime in Eastern Ghouta, where the UN reported that almost 12% of children under five were suffering from acute malnutrition. The regime denied, or only approved with conditions, 73% of UN inter-agency aid convoy requests in 2017. The UK lobbied in support of UN Security Council resolution 2393 to ensure the continuance of cross-border humanitarian aid deliveries to almost 3 million people. The UK continued to disburse the £2.46 billion which we have pledged in humanitarian aid in response to the Syria crisis. We are at the forefront of the humanitarian response to the Syria crisis, providing life-saving support to millions of Syrians, supporting refugees to remain in countries in the region, and enabling their host communities to accommodate them. Since 2012, across Syria and the region, UK support has delivered over 27 million food rations, 12 million medical consultations, 10 million relief packages, and 10 million vaccines. We also co-hosted the Brussels conference in April to support Syria and the region.

The COI reported that local truces, which ended some sieges, led to the regime forcibly displacing thousands of civilians, and either detaining or conscripting others.

There were several reports of chemical weapons attacks by the regime and by Daesh. The Joint Investigative Mechanism of the UN and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons concluded that an attack in Khan Sheikhoun in April, which killed around 80 people and injured hundreds, was carried out by the Syrian regime using sarin – the 4th chemical weapons attack it has ascribed to the regime. The EU added more regime-linked names to its sanctions listings in 2017 for their role in the use of chemical weapons. In February and April, the UK co-drafted and co-sponsored draft UN Security Council resolutions condemning the use of chemical weapons, but Russia (twice) and China (once) vetoed their adoption.

There were continued reports of widespread and systematic use of arbitrary detention, torture and execution of detainees, predominantly by the regime, which is estimated to have detained tens of thousands, but also by Daesh and some armed groups. NGOs reported that Kurdish forces have also arbitrarily detained and tortured people.

A number of organisations reported that sexual violence, especially against women and girls, but also against men and boys, was widespread, particularly by pro-regime forces during house searches, at checkpoints, and in detention facilities. Daesh and some armed groups also reportedly used sexual violence. The UK has allocated £29 million since 2013/14 to the UNFPA in Syria, including for projects to help reduce and mitigate gender-based violence. We have also provided over £9 million in direct support to gender-related projects in Syria. These projects will document and raise awareness of sexual violence, and provide support to its victims.

Much of the territory held by Daesh in Syria was retaken during this period. However, where it retained control, Daesh continued to detain people arbitrarily, carry out summary executions, impose severe corporal punishments against those perceived to transgress its rules, conscript civilians forcibly, and use civilians as human shields. Daesh also held captive enslaved Yazidis.

A UN protection needs analysis reports that 83% of assessed communities cited lack/loss of civil documentation as an issue. Respondents mentioned consequences of restrictions of movement, inability to register life events, housing/land/property-related transactions and access to humanitarian assistance as main consequences of not having official/government-issued civil documentation.

The UK continued to support accountability for human rights abuses and violations. We led action in the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) on Syria, including the thrice-yearly resolutions on the human rights situation in Syria, and co-sponsored the UN General Assembly Third Committee resolution. The UK contributed £200,000 towards the start-up costs of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to assist in the investigation and prosecution of those responsible for the most serious crimes under international law committed in Syria since March 2011. This is in addition to our continuing funding for the collection of evidence.

In 2016 to 2017, the UK supported over 350,000 children (50% girls) to access formal education inside Syria and over 80,000 (50% girls) to access non-formal education. In addition, in 2017 we published the Education and Gender report which analysed the barriers which women, girls, men and boys face in accessing school and jobs in education. This has informed how we approach inclusion through our education programme, including under the joint CSSF/DFID/EU funded Syria Education Programme (2018 to 2021).

In 2018, the UK will continue to highlight the appalling human rights situation and to press for 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 mediation to negotiate a long-term political settlement to end the conflict.

Turkmenistan

In 2017, there were continued allegations of torture and poor prison conditions, and no visible improvement in gender equality, freedom of expression, of religion or belief, of speech and of movement, or in the rights of those belonging to minorities, including LGBT people. The presidential election did not offer voters a meaningful choice of candidates. Human rights defenders continued to operate largely from outside the country. Few contacted foreign embassies for fear of reprisals by the authorities against them or their families. Turkmenistan has signed many of the international conventions on human rights and has incorporated their requirements into law, but implementation remains poor or non-existent.

The Turkmen government appointed Yazdursun Gurbannazarova as Human Rights Ombudswoman in March for a 5-year term of office. In September, the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) approved a Turkmen declaration linking participation of refugee teams in the Olympics to the protection of refugee rights, a positive response to a Turkmen initiative to strengthen their engagement with the HRC. However, we regret that Turkmenistan did not participate in the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, and we encouraged them to resume participation in 2018.

During his visit to Ashgabat in May, the Permanent Undersecretary of State (PUS) at the FCO, Sir Simon McDonald, raised human rights directly with Foreign Minister Raşit Meredov, who assured him that Turkmenistan is in the process of implementing its new National Human Rights Action Plan. The PUS confirmed that the UK would continue to engage and support Turkmenistan on human rights. The PUS was the first senior foreign visitor to call on the Ombudswoman, to whom he offered UK support. The British Embassy is providing help to set up her office, working through the UN Development Programme (UNDP). As part of the National Human Rights Action Plan, the UNDP, with support from the British Embassy, organised training for the judiciary in implementing international standards of justice.

NGOs outside Turkmenistan continued to call for information on over 80 people taken into detention, the majority of whom were detained 15 years ago. In March, the EU asked the Turkmen government to re-examine some of the cases raised ahead of the Human Rights Dialogue in 2017 together with some new cases, and received a written response covering a small number of the individuals listed. The EU further urged the Turkmen government to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. The Turkmen government continued to deny the use of torture, but has yet to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture. In January, foreign ambassadors in Ashgabat, including the British Ambassador, visited the women's prison in Dashoguz. Despite repeated requests, permission was not granted to visit the Ovadan Depe detention centre where many political prisoners are said to be held and where NGOs allege that prisoners are tortured. In a traditional gesture of goodwill, the president pardoned some 3,400 prisoners to mark national holidays in February, June and October.

The OSCE held a seminar in May to discuss how the Turkmen government could bring its media legislation into line with its OSCE commitments and international standards. There remains, however, no independent media in Turkmenistan, and the state prohibits the sale of foreign publications. The authorities block most social media, including Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and WhatsApp, and many internet sites.

NGOs outside Turkmenistan continued to report the persecution of religious groups and the arrest and torture in prison of those accused of Wahhabism. The embassies of EU Member States in Ashgabat, in company with the embassies of Canada, Norway and the US, raised concerns regarding the obstacles still faced by religious groups seeking legal registration.

The state further curtailed freedom of movement in 2017. During the months before the Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games, the authorities banned vehicles registered in other parts of the country from entering the capital. They closed the border to all foreign visitors except those holding accreditation for the Games. For security reasons, they forced residents to leave flats overlooking the site until the Games were completed and no provision was made for their housing elsewhere. Restrictions remained in place on vehicles from outside the city and surrounding Ahal province.

The incumbent president, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, won the presidential election on 12 February with 97.69% of the vote. The OSCE / Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Election Assessment Mission reported that the elections had taken place in a strictly controlled political environment with a lack of genuine opposition and transparency. They also noted serious irregularities in the voting process, with a rigidly constrained media giving the incumbent a clear advantage.

Data on girls’ education is not readily available in Turkmenistan. According to UNESCO statistics in 2014, girls had an almost equal share to boys in primary and secondary education with a ratio of 0.97%. We believe the practice of keeping girls from school is decreasing and we are not aware of any disparity in performance between girls and boys. The British Embassy has supported gender equality projects promoting the rights and empowerment of rural women run by international organisations and local NGOs. We will consider support for a UNFPA project empowering teenage girls in rural areas in 2018.

In 2018, we will continue to work closely with the EU and other like-minded countries represented in Ashgabat, as well as bilaterally, to raise human rights concerns with the Turkmen government and to press for reform. Using project funding, we will continue to support the human rights work of UNDP and the OSCE, as well as local NGOs where possible, focusing on the implementation of the National Human Rights Action Plan, improving the judicial system, and supporting the Ombudswoman’s office and gender equality.

Uzbekistan

There were positive developments in Uzbekistan in 2017, which have the potential to improve significantly the wider human rights environment in the country.

In 2017, Uzbekistan re-engaged with international human rights bodies. In May, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein became the first ever UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to visit Uzbekistan. Subsequently, there was a visit by Ahmed Shaheed, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief. The authorities followed up these visits, engaging with the UN on prison reform, freedom of religion or belief, torture, media freedom, civil society, gender equality and labour reforms. The leading international human rights NGO, Human Rights Watch, was also invited back to the country, and was received at a senior level. Following these very welcome high-level and high-profile exchanges, there now needs to be consistent implementation of tangible reform.

During 2017, the government began to reform the criminal justice system, focusing on protecting the rights of individuals. Since this series of reforms was announced, a conviction for religious extremism was successfully appealed and a judge was dismissed for not following due process. We welcomed progress on prison reform, particularly releases of a number of high-profile prisoners whose detentions had been politically motivated, including Rustam Usmanov, Muhammad Bekjanov, Erkin Musayev, A’zam Farmonov, Sali Abdurakhmanov, A’zam Turgunov, Mamatkhanov Ganikhon and Muhammadali Karabaev. There also appeared to be a reduction in the practice of arbitrarily extending prison sentences during the year. However, challenges remain. We have concerns over the legal process followed and treatment in custody of journalists arrested in the autumn and accused of attempting to overthrow the constitutional system. Widespread allegations continued to be made of torture in custody, so we welcomed the law introducing CCTV into holding cells, and the presidential decree making evidence obtained through torture or harassment inadmissible in court.

Freedom of religion or belief remains a sensitive issue. Uzbekistan permits the practice of officially registered religions. However, registering new religious groups or groups in new locations remains a challenging and opaque process, in effect criminalising those who practise their religion outside state-sanctioned structures. President Mirziyoev has called for greater tolerance, support and rehabilitation of individuals formerly charged with radicalisation and of their families. In August, the government stated that it had removed from a ‘black-list’ the names of approximately 16,000 individuals, many previously accused of religious extremism.

State authorities continued to harass some human rights defenders (HRDs), but have also begun to meet HRDs directly to discuss their concerns, for example on labour issues connected to the cotton harvest. The highly restrictive Ministry of Justice Order 177 on procedures regulating NGO activity remained in force. The authorities permitted small-scale demonstrations. They also initially allowed an unauthorised demonstration of at least 200 people in Tashkent, protesting against police inaction over the death of a student, to go ahead. However, the organisers were later sentenced, in a closed hearing without legal representation, to administrative detention of 10 and 15 days. Demonstrations on the anniversary of the events in Andijan in 2005 took place unchallenged.

In 2017, Uzbekistan continued to work on the Decent Work Country Programme for 2014 to 2016⁵¹ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2017/human-rights-and-democracy-the-2017-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report#fn:51>). We followed the work of the ILO and World Bank in this area. Higher prices for cotton and higher wages for the pickers led to better conditions in the cotton harvest. We received credible reports of schools, universities and hospitals in several regions being required to provide workers for the harvest, although there were fewer such reports after President Mirziyoev referred to the issue in his speech to the UN General Assembly in September. Human rights activists and embassies conducting independent monitoring of the harvests found the authorities less obstructive than in previous years.

On gender equality and women's rights, the Uzbek government has taken measures to address the issue of suicides among young women and the high incidence of domestic violence. The Women's Committee has drafted a National Action Plan to fulfil the obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women for Uzbekistan's 2018 Universal Periodic Review. Primary and secondary education are compulsory and free of charge for both boys and girls. According to UNICEF the literacy rate is 99.98% for women and 99.99% for men. Government policy is to support gender parity in education.

Consensual sexual activity between people of the same gender remains illegal and LGBT people in the country continue to face discrimination and homophobia.

President Mirziyoev promised significant reforms to the political system. He publicly held government officials to account and introduced elections for local government leaders. However, freedom of association was still restricted, in effect preventing the formation of credible, independent opposition parties.

There was growing freedom of expression. President Mirziyoev has pushed the media to become more critical and analytical, but traditional media has been slow to modernise, and self-censorship is rife. By contrast, online and social media provided an increasingly popular means to speak out. Media stations were encouraged to use content from international news agencies, but progress on the accreditation of foreign journalists was slow. We continued to hear from a variety of sources about the harassment of families of Uzbek journalists working overseas.

During 2017, the British Embassy expanded its programme supporting progress on human rights and good governance. We funded projects on promoting the rule of law, prison reform, press freedom, media plurality and women's rights (including education reform, empowerment and preventing domestic violence), and we actively monitored developments in the area of labour reform, including the cotton harvest.

In 2018, we will continue to prioritise support for Uzbekistan's reform programme, media development and plurality. We will also continue to address adult involuntary labour, and will support the empowerment of women.

Venezuela

The human rights situation in Venezuela deteriorated markedly in 2017. A wide range of civil and political rights violations, against a backdrop of reduced access to food and healthcare, were issues of particular concern.

The economic crisis, with hyper- inflation and continuing shortages of food and medicines, severely reduced the capacity of Venezuelans to meet their basic needs. According to Caritas International, the Global Acute Malnutrition Index, which measures the percentage of children under the age of five with acute to severe malnutrition, stood at 15.6% in November. Medical and pharmaceutical associations reported a sharp increase in cases of malaria, diphtheria, measles, and a lack of medication. Criminal violence remained a serious problem. One local NGO, Venezuelan Observatory of Violence, estimated more than 26,000 violent deaths in 2017. UNESCO figures suggest that nearly 50% of girls are not in primary education.

The International Migration Laboratory of the Simon Bolivar University calculated that the number of Venezuelans living overseas doubled between 2015 and 2017, growing from an estimated 1.4 to 3.2 million. UNHCR reported that the number of Venezuelan asylum-seekers increased from 34,200 in 2016 to 52,000 in 2017.

In March, Venezuela accepted 193 and noted 81 recommendations out of the 274 it had received from 102 countries during its Universal Periodic Review at the UN Human Rights Council in November 2016. The UK's recommendations on outcomes- based political dialogue and enhanced cooperation with the UN OHCHR were not accepted.

Political violence soared in Venezuela, especially between April and August when there were sustained protests against the government. An OHCHR report published in September reported at least 124 deaths and the arbitrary detention of more than 5,000 individuals during the protests. Patterns of ill-treatment were reported, in some cases amounting to torture. OHCHR also highlighted that more than 600 civilians had been tried at military courts for offences including treason, rebellion and theft of military equipment, following anti-government protests between April and July 2017.

Protests started following two rulings by the Venezuelan Supreme Court at the end of March. By these rulings, the Supreme Court gave itself new powers to exercise the legislative powers of the National Assembly and to restrict the parliamentary immunity of MPs. The opposition declared this an attack on the autonomy of parliament. The Supreme Court announcements provoked strong international reactions, including from the UK and the EU.

On 1 May, President Maduro called for a Constituent Assembly to rewrite the Venezuelan Constitution. He said that the Constituent Assembly would transform the state and bring about peace, dialogue and elections. On 30 July, despite internal and international criticism, a vote took place to select the members of the Constituent Assembly. The opposition dismissed it as a fraudulent process and did not take part in the vote. Several countries, including the UK and EU member states, refused to recognise the Constituent Assembly, and called for negotiations to ensure a lasting solution to any disagreements. Following the election, the Constituent Assembly took on a supra-constitutional authority, taking away legislative capacity from the National Assembly. It replaced the Prosecutor General who had spoken against the government during the protests, and ordered the electoral authorities to call for overdue gubernatorial and municipal elections before the end of the year.

Despite having no constitutional powers to write laws, on 8 November, the Constituent Assembly passed a Law against Hatred, which imposed further restrictions on media outlets and political parties. The Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Edison Lanza, said that the law would fuel repression and self-censorship. The NGO Freedom House ranked the internet in Venezuela as “not free”. The Venezuelan press workers’ union reported a total of 498 violations to freedom of expression during 2017, an increase of 26.5% compared with 2016. Venezuela continues to lack legislation and policies to protect LGBT communities, and impunity for hate crime is high.

In November, the EU Foreign Affairs Council unanimously adopted a sanctions regime on Venezuela. The EU expressed its concerns about the lack of respect for and erosion of democratically elected institutions, violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the urgent needs of the population that affected their rights such as the right to food and to health.

The UK maintained dialogue on human rights with diverse actors. In May, the then Minister for Human Rights, Baroness Anelay of St Johns, visited Caracas and held meetings with senior government representatives, including the then Foreign Minister, Delcy Rodríguez, in which she encouraged respect for civil and political rights for all Venezuelans, including the holding of free and fair elections. She also met the National Assembly’s Board, as well as representatives of civil society organisations and high-profile human rights defenders. In March and November, we organised two major events: Women of the Future, Venezuela, and the inaugural meeting of the Business Forum of the Venezuelan Alliance for Women’s corporate leadership.

The deteriorating humanitarian situation is likely to have increased Venezuelans’ vulnerability to modern slavery, particularly to neighbouring countries (including islands in the Caribbean). These practices include sex trafficking (especially of women, girls and LGBT), domestic servitude and forced labour.

In 2018, the UK will continue to focus on concerns over the erosion of political freedoms and the adverse impact of the social and economic crisis, including modern slavery, girls’ access to education and women’s rights, with a special focus on eliminating violence against women and girls.

Yemen

The human rights situation worsened in Yemen in 2017. The conflict undermined the rule of law, leaving few mechanisms to protect human rights. The main issues were women’s rights including girls’ education, the recruitment of child soldiers, arbitrary detention, and attacks on freedom of religion or belief and on freedom of speech and association. The de facto Houthi authorities in northern Yemen, the Government of Yemen and a number of non-state militias across the country allegedly committed a wide range of human rights violations and abuses. The UN reported that 13,520 civilians had been killed or injured since April 2015, and that over 2 million people had been displaced.

The right to freedom of religion or belief was denied in several areas. Members of the Baha’i faith faced persecution, including arrest and imprisonment. The UN Human Rights Council resolution on Yemen in September called for the immediate release of all Baha’i detainees. There were credible reports alleging that the de facto Houthi authorities in northern Yemen had tortured Baha’i detainees. In the liberated areas of southern Yemen, there were reports that three teenagers in Aden accused of atheism had been murdered. The UK lobbied for the release of Baha’i detainees and raised the importance of freedom of religion or belief both publicly and in our engagement with parties to the conflict.

UN and NGO reports highlighted the continued recruitment of child soldiers by all parties in Yemen. Economic deprivation and the breakdown of the education system rendered young males especially vulnerable. There were anecdotal reports of families sending their children to fight in order to generate much-needed income. The UNICEF Resident Representative said that the organisation had verified 2,369 cases of child recruitment between March 2015 and January 2018 in Yemen.

Yemen was last among the countries cited in the 2017 World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap report. The breakdown of the rule of law meant that there was limited recourse for victims of gender-based violence or abuse. A 2017 UN report highlighted child marriage as a particular concern, estimating that 52% of women marry before the age of 18, and 14% before the age of 15. The report said that the desperate need of many families for income had exacerbated the problem. Through the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF), we supported UN Women to increase Yemeni women's capacity to influence political and conflict actors and their inclusion in the peace process, political dialogue and local peacebuilding initiatives.

Arbitrary disappearances and the use of torture were common across Yemen. In northern Yemen, there were regular credible reports of kidnapping being used as a political tool. In December, the Houthis reportedly imprisoned hundreds of General People's Congress members without proper judicial process. In the liberated areas, there were credible reports from the Associated Press and from Human Rights Watch of the use of secret prisons. There is no reliable process for inquiry into detainees held at these facilities.

Freedom of speech was curtailed across the country. There were reports that the Houthis arrested dozens of journalists in Sana'a. There were also reports of beatings and killings. Yahya Al Jubeiha, a journalist, was sentenced to death in April in Sana'a. Human rights defenders were also under threat. The Houthis arbitrarily detained prominent activist Hisham Al Omeisy in Sana'a for five months with no access to a lawyer or to his family. The UK spoke out publicly about the need to respect journalists and freedom of expression.

The death penalty is used in Yemen. In August, there was a credible report of a public execution in Sana'a for an alleged violent crime. Consensual sexual relations between people of the same gender remain illegal in Yemen and are subject under the law to the death penalty in some cases.

As part of our commitment to improving the overall human rights situation in Yemen, the UK negotiated and agreed the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) resolution which was adopted in September. The resolution mandated the creation of a panel of experts to conduct an independent investigation into the human rights situation in Yemen.

In 2018, the UK will continue to lead international efforts to end the conflict and restore the legitimate Government of Yemen. A stable political settlement is the only way to provide the conditions necessary to improve the human rights situation. While the conflict continues, we will continue to urge all parties to protect civilians and respect international human rights and humanitarian law. The UK will work with the UN OHCHR to increase the capacity of Yemeni bodies to investigate and to prevent human rights violations and abuses.

DFID provided £112 million in aid to Yemen for 2016 to 2017, including programmes supporting internally displaced persons, education and the protection of civilians. The UK provided £205 million in aid to Yemen for 2017 to 2018, making us the 2nd- largest donor to the UN Humanitarian Appeal for Yemen and the third-largest humanitarian donor to Yemen overall. In 2018, we will continue to use the CSSF to support additional activity to increase the role of women in local governance and peacebuilding.

Zimbabwe

In 2017, the human rights situation in Zimbabwe remained serious. The human rights monitoring group Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP) recorded 1,852 human rights violations, 20% fewer than in 2016. This continues a long-term trend of slow improvement since the extensive government- sponsored political violence in 2008. Incidents included politically motivated intimidation, discrimination, harassment and assault, violent policing, arbitrary arrests and torture. Following a military intervention, Emmerson Mnangagwa was sworn in as president on 24 November, marking the end of Robert Mugabe's 37 years in power.

Politically motivated intimidation occurred throughout 2017. The National Constitutional Assembly alleged that ZANU-PF members assaulted its candidate and agent in a by-election in Bikita West in January. In October, ZANU-PF supporters reportedly assaulted supporters of the Movement for Democratic Change – Tsvangirai (MDC-T) mobilising voter registration in Chitungwiza. Factional disputes within ZANU-PF resulted in intra-party intimidation and violence. There were incidents of violence along ethnic lines in the MDC-T also, as rivals clashed over alliance building with other parties.

The authorities continued to use the distribution of food aid for political ends, including after the inauguration of President Mnangagwa. In May, the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission deployed teams to Gutu, Zaka and Bikita West to investigate alleged cases.

The authorities imposed more stringent conditions on opposition demonstrators than on supporters of the ruling ZANU- PF party. Several planned opposition demonstrations were banned, and at least 2 opposition political meetings were interrupted by Zimbabwe Republic Police.

The state continued to limit freedom of expression. The authorities responded to perceived criticism of former President Mugabe by arresting 2 journalists and several activists and charging them with insulting the office of the president.

The ongoing economic crisis left citizens without access to cash as banks struggled to honour deposits. Anecdotal evidence indicated that children in low income areas were increasingly vulnerable to sexual exploitation because of the economic situation. Child rights groups reported that girls aged between 12 and 17 had been engaging in prostitution along major highways and in some poor neighbourhoods of Harare. Despite a ban in 2015, child marriage remained common. In June alone, 40 cases were reported in Mbire District. Gender- based violence was also a common problem. There is near gender parity of schooling until secondary level where there are 5 boys for every 4 girls. Pregnancy and/or early marriage account for 18% of total female drop- outs and financial pressure accounts for a further 46%. In response, the UK supported Camfed's Zimbabwe Girls' Secondary Education project which provided 40,374 girls with bursaries and complementary support.

Periodically, small-scale urban street traders had their wares confiscated and destroyed by the local authorities with the assistance of government security forces. Many local authorities failed to provide basic services, including safe drinking water and sanitation. There were multiple reported incidents of road traffic accidents caused by aggressive use by the police of metal spikes to stop vehicles in order to extort money. However, police roadblocks largely disappeared following the military intervention in November.

LGBT people faced discrimination, family disownment, displacement from lodgings, unfair labour practices, arrest and harassment by police, blackmail and bullying on social media. A court sentenced one LGBT person to 18 months in jail for “inappropriate conduct”.

The state continued to fail to enforce property rights effectively, and court orders were frequently ignored. The farms owned by the Connolly and Rankin families remained occupied in violation of court orders. The Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission is investigating allegations of human rights violations by government officials during the eviction of villagers from a farm seized by former First Lady, Grace Mugabe.

Elections will take place on 30 July 2018. Opposition groups and civil society organisations have campaigned for a broad set of electoral reforms including reform of the Electoral Act. The new government indicated its intention to do this before the elections. Thanks to a UK funded court case, 300,000 citizens previously denied the right to register to vote – because their residency status described them as “aliens” – won the right to do so in an extended voter registration exercise.

Civil society organisations raised concerns about the militarisation of state institutions. Conflict between the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA), Zimbabwe Republican Police and artisan miners resulted in assaults, injuries and the deaths of 10 miners.

During the military intervention which led to former President Mugabe's resignation, the ZNA arrested, detained and reportedly tortured government officials and politicians. ZNA personnel were responsible for 36% of the violations recorded by ZPP in December.

During 2017, the Embassy met activists, democracy campaigners, parliamentarians and political leaders from across the political spectrum to encourage engagement, dialogue and a more open society, respecting the rights of all the people of Zimbabwe.

The UK supported a £30 million multi donor programme through DFID and the FCO Magna Carta Fund to improve access to justice, to promote media freedom, to support girls' education and to improve the electoral environment ahead of the 2018 elections, including through public education and access to biometric voter registration. The UK welcomed the president's openness to international observation of the elections.

In 2018, the UK will continue to call on the Government of Zimbabwe to uphold the rule of law and human rights, and to encourage all Zimbabweans to exercise their democratic rights, including through free, fair and credible elections, under the protection of the 2013 Constitution and international human rights law.

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