

# 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.

## 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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