

Colombia

While significant progress had been made since the signature of Colombia's landmark Peace Agreement in 2016, considerable human rights concerns remained, particularly around the high number of killings of human rights defenders (HRDs) and continued violence in some areas. The UN Secretary-General's Special Representative, Carlos Ruiz Massieu, identified these concerns as the biggest threat posed to the success of the Peace Agreement.

Although there was a reduction of the national homicide rate (from 25 to 23.7 per 100,000 persons in 2020, compared to 2019), killings increased in certain areas of the country throughout the year, largely where the Peace Agreement's crop substitution programme and the PDETs (Territorially Focused Development Plans) were being implemented. Lockdown measures and travel restrictions introduced to combat COVID-19 increased the risk to HRDs from illegal armed groups, since they were more easily targeted, and often killed, near their homes. Community and indigenous leaders were most affected. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) confirmed that at least 133 HRDs had been killed in 2020^[78], an increase from 108 in 2019.

The Colombian Government reiterated its commitment to protecting HRDs, and there were some improvements in the situation. The Attorney General's Office increased convictions of perpetrators, including of those ordering the killings. The UK contributed to the protection of Colombian HRDs in many ways. For example, we supported the special unit at the Attorney General's Office in charge of investigating attacks against HRDs; helped boost the capacity of the Ombudsman's Office early warning system to act against

threats; contributed to the funding of a study to identify patterns and causes of attacks against HRDs; and supported the system set up to establish protection mechanisms. In 2021, the UK will support a new joint programme, funded through the UN Trust Fund, working across the Colombian Government to establish safe spaces for social leaders and former FARC fighters.

The full implementation of the Peace Agreement continued to be crucial to improve the security situation for former FARC combatants, 248 of whom were killed from 2016 to 2020,^[79] with 73 of these killings taking place in 2020. The Government expressed its solidarity, and committed to protecting them and their families, but not enough was done to provide security in conflict-affected areas.

Colombia's lengthy lockdown because of COVID-19 allowed illegal armed groups to expand and exert more control over certain communities. As well as threats and killings, armed groups carried out forced displacements and vehicle incinerations as punishment for not abiding by their movement restrictions. In addition, they blocked land and waterways, and disrupted the arrival of food and medical supplies. Although the national lockdown was lifted on 1 September, armed groups continued their own lockdowns in some regions.

Criminal groups settling scores or vying for control of territory led to the killing of at least 292 people^[80], with perpetrators ranging from narco-trafficking organisations to armed groups and dissidents who rejected the peace process. The Colombian Defence Ministry created a Special Unit to identify, locate and prosecute the perpetrators.

Colombia fell one place in the Reporters without Borders Media Freedom Index, ranking 130 out of 180 countries^[81]. Violence and

fear leading to self-censorship were the most common threats. The UK continued to defend media freedom through supporting projects to strengthen and facilitate the creation of local media outlets in municipalities lacking them.

The Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) remained one of the UK's top priorities. We engaged in high-level conversations to address sexual violence in conflict, and funded a project to produce informative and educational pieces to tackle sexual and gender-based violence and mental health in indigenous communities.

Violent protests broke out in September after a video went viral on social media, showing Bogotá police repeatedly shocking a man with a taser during an arrest; he later died in hospital. 13 protesters died in the demonstrations that followed, and over 400 people were injured, including over 100 police officers. There were reports of some police firing indiscriminately into crowds gathered outside police stations, a number of which were burned down during the protests. The Government condemned the excessive use of force by some police, suspended the officers involved, and launched an investigation. The UK welcomed this investigation and affirmed its support for Colombians' right to protest peacefully.

In addition to its programme activities, the UK continued to raise concerns about human rights both directly with the Government and in multilateral fora such as the UN Security Council. In October, Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon, the Minister responsible for human rights, held a virtual visit to Colombia. He met HRDs, survivors of sexual violence, journalists, and a range of government officials including the Deputy Attorney General, Martha Mancera, to discuss how the UK could provide further support. In

[78] A/HRC/46/76 available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session46/Pages/ListReports.aspx>

[79] A/HRC/46/76 available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session46/Pages/ListReports.aspx>

[80] A/HRC/46/76 available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session46/Pages/ListReports.aspx>

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

2021, we plan to build on these suggestions and seek to provide targeted UK expertise and assistance where it can make the most impact.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

There was no improvement in the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in 2020. Human rights violations remained widespread and systematic, and the perpetrators unaccountable. On paper, freedom of speech, religion or belief, the press, association, and demonstration were guaranteed by the North Korean Constitution. In reality, North Koreans enjoyed none of these freedoms. The DPRK remained top of Open Doors' annual ranking of the 50 countries where Christians experience extreme persecution^[82], and came bottom in the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index^[83].

The DPRK authorities continued to deny allegations of human rights violations. They continued to refuse to cooperate with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) or with the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights in North Korea, Tomás Ojea Quintana. The regime continued to refuse to act on the 2014 UN Commission of Inquiry report, which had concluded that the wide-ranging and continuing human rights violations taking place in the DPRK may amount to "crimes against humanity". Restrictions on internal movement introduced in response to COVID-19 at the beginning of 2020, including for members of UN agencies and NGOs, severely affected the distribution of aid and support throughout the year. The DPRK authorities also introduced a wider lockdown of entry into the country in response to the pandemic.

The UK continued to raise and challenge the DPRK's human rights record in multilateral fora. We

co-sponsored resolutions on the human rights situation in the DPRK adopted by the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) and UN General Assembly Third Committee, in March and November respectively. Both resolutions recalled the DPRK's responsibility to protect its population from human rights violations, and urged the DPRK to cooperate fully with the UN Special Rapporteur by giving him unrestricted access to the country. At the UN General Assembly in November, we reminded the DPRK that measures used to contain COVID-19 should be proportionate, and should not be used unnecessarily further to restrict the freedom of citizens. In December, the UN Security Council discussed human rights violations in the DPRK as a threat to international peace and security.

Reports by the UN Special Rapporteur to the HRC in May, and by the OHCHR in July, added to the growing body of information regarding human rights violations in places of detention. Women, including those who had escaped the DPRK and subsequently been repatriated, faced gender-based human rights violations, notably an increased risk of sexual violence.

The UK continued to use its bilateral relationship to engage with the DPRK Government on its human rights record. FCDO officials used meetings in London with DPRK embassy officials to raise human rights concerns. Officials encouraged incremental change where they saw opportunities. In May, the UK temporarily closed its Embassy in Pyongyang as restrictions on entry to the DPRK made it impossible to sustain its operation. Nonetheless, the UK Ambassador to the DPRK Colin Crooks continued to engage with DPRK officials and UN human rights actors on human rights issues.

In July, the UK imposed sanctions on two DPRK entities under the Global Human Rights sanctions regime. The Ministry of State Security

Bureau 7 was designated as a DPRK Government body with responsibility for running political prison camps, estimated to hold 80,000-120,000, with involvement in the murder, torture and forced labour of those incarcerated. The Ministry of People's Security Correctional Bureau was designated as a DPRK Government body with responsibility for running prison camps for 'ordinary' prisoners, with involvement in the serious human rights violations committed in those camps, estimated to hold over 70,000. Both entities are now subject to an asset freeze and a travel ban.

In October, the Korea Future Initiative released a report entitled 'Persecuting Faith: Documenting religious freedom violations in North Korea'. The report assessed the status of freedom of religion or belief in DPRK, and contained disturbing accounts of human rights violations against those who have attempted to practise their religion or belief.

In 2021, the UK will continue to raise the human rights situation in the DPRK and use multilateral fora to urge the regime to cooperate fully with relevant UN human rights mandate holders, and allow them immediate and unhindered access to the country. When conditions allow, we shall seek to return our Embassy staff to Pyongyang, and explore new opportunities for greater engagement between the international community and the DPRK authorities on human rights.

Democratic Republic of Congo

The human rights situation in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) deteriorated, reversing progress made in 2019. The UN Joint Human Rights Office (UNJHRO) documented 7,909 violations and abuses, a 21% increase from 2019, and more than the 6,814 recorded in the 2018 election year^[84]. Human rights violations and abuses included

[82] <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/world-watch-list>

[83] <https://rsf.org/en/north-korea>

[84] https://monusco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unjhro_-_analysis_of_the_human_rights_situation_in_the_drc_-_2020.pdf