

In July, President Lukashenko signed into force amendments to the laws on Media and Mass Events, further undermining the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of the media. Belarusian authorities further increased pressure on civil society and human rights organisations, carrying out searches of offices and homes, detaining and launching criminal cases against individuals and organisations. By the end of 2021, more than 300 civil society organisations had been, or were in the process of being, liquidated.

Belarusian security forces continued to act with impunity. While hundreds of criminal cases were launched against members of the opposition, civil society and human rights defenders, there is no indication that the authorities will investigate the thousands of well-documented reports of police brutality, torture and deaths.

In 2021, the UK, alongside the EU, US and Canada, imposed further sanctions, including trade, financial and aviation sanctions, on Belarus. By the end of the year, the UK had announced more than 100 designations in response to the fraudulent election and subsequent human rights violations, including in response to unlawful diversion of Ryanair flight 4978.

Given the lack of progress by the Belarusian authorities on the recommendations set out in the OSCE Moscow Mechanism report (2020), the UK, alongside 34 participating states, triggered the OSCE Vienna Mechanism, setting out a series of questions to Belarus about human rights violations.

The UK continued to financially support civil society and media freedom in Belarus; in 2021 the UK spent significantly more on Belarus-related programming funding compared to pre-crisis levels in 2019. The UK continues to support mechanisms through the UN and independent NGOs in the International Accountability Platform

on Belarus (IAPB) to investigate human rights violations in Belarus and hold those responsible to account.

The UK continued to show our solidarity with the opposition and civil society. Embassy staff frequently attended trials and engaged with the families of political prisoners. The then Prime Minister, then Foreign Secretary, then Minister for Europe and the UK's International Ambassador for Human Rights, Rita French, all met Sviatlana Tskikhanskaya, a prominent member of the Belarusian opposition in 2021, making the UK's commitment to fresh and fair elections in Belarus clear to her.

Rita French additionally met Alex Bialiatski, chairperson of Viasna, a prominent human rights organisation in Belarus – and 2022 Nobel Peace Prize award winner. He has unfortunately been detained for political reasons due to his human rights work; the UK continues to make our solidarity with him clear.

Belarus remained the only country in Europe to retain and administer the death penalty. In 2021, there were unsubstantiated reports of two executions. It is believed that three people remain on death row.

The UK will continue to raise its concerns about human rights directly with the Belarusian authorities and in multilateral forums, including the OSCE and the UN. The UK will also continue to support work on accountability and justice for the victims of human rights violations and shall continue to call on the Belarusian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all those held on political grounds. Additionally, the UK will continue to respond strongly to the Belarusian regime's illegal actions in supporting Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The UK condemned the Belarusian regime's actions in engineering a migrant crisis to try to undermine Poland and others in the region for

political purposes, highlighting their disregard for international norms.

Central African Republic

2021 saw renewed conflict in the Central African Republic (CAR). In December 2020, non-state armed groups formed the Coalition for the Patriots of Change (CPC). Following the re-election of the incumbent President in the same month, CPC advanced on the capital, Bangui, to overthrow the new government. In response, the government requested Russian and Rwandan bilateral forces and the Russian mercenary group, Wagner, to work alongside the CAR Armed Forces (FACA) to repel the CPC.

The subsequent government fight back against the CPC has resulted in allegations of human rights and international humanitarian law violations by CARs forces. In March 2021, a group of independent UN experts expressed alarm at the increased recruitment and use of private military and foreign security contractors by the Government of Central African Republic. The alleged violations and abuses included mass summary executions, arbitrary detention, torture during interrogation and the forced displacement of the civilian population. The experts also reported increased attacks on humanitarian organisations, as well as enforced disappearances.^[76]

In June, a UN report found that the FACA, internal security forces and other security personnel, were responsible for 240 violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law (46% of total number of recorded violations), involving 491 victims (40% of the documented 1221 victims).^[77] The report also found that the armed groups affiliated to the CPC were responsible for the majority of abuses and victims, with 286 (54%) of the reported human rights violations and 730 (60%) of documented victims.

[76] <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26961&LangID=E>

[77] https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/CF/report_abuses_violations_HR_InternationalHumanitarianLaw_Elections_CAR_EN.pdf

The same UN report flagged that armed groups, state security forces including FACA, Internal Security Forces and other security forces were responsible for human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law. These included killings, conflict-related sexual violence, attacks against humanitarian personnel and UN peacekeepers, denial of humanitarian assistance, and recruitment of children into armed groups.

The COVID-19 pandemic and continued security concerns reduced monitoring of human rights violations and abuses. Further, the increased use of explosive ordinances disrupted the delivery of humanitarian assistance, particularly in the western prefectures of Nana-Mambéré, Mambéré-Kadei, Ouham-Pendé.^[78]

The UK worked closely with international partners in support of our ambition to end violence and build stability in the country. The UN, through its peacekeeping mission in the CAR (MINUSCA), remained central to this effort and the UK contributed approximately £40 million to MINUSCA in 2021.

In July, the UK's International Ambassador for Human Rights, Rita French, addressed the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) during the Independent Expert's oral update on Central African Republic. She noted the overwhelming evidence that parties to the conflict committed widespread and multiple human rights violations and abuses, and violations of international humanitarian law, including acts of sexual violence and prevention of humanitarian access, and called on all parties to the conflict to cease all forms of violence immediately.^[79]

In September, during the 48th session of the HRC, the UK co-sponsored a resolution on technical

assistance and capacity-building for human rights in CAR, which was adopted by the HRC on 11 October. The resolution renewed the mandate of the UN Independent Expert for one year and called for a high-level interactive dialogue to assess human rights developments, placing special emphasis on the reconciliation process and the implementation of guarantees of non-repetition.^[80]

In October, the UK welcomed the announcement of a ceasefire by President Touadéra. The then Minister for Africa, Vicky Ford MP, spoke with President Touadéra on 1 November welcoming his call for the unilateral ceasefire and underlining the importance of an inclusive peace-building process.

In November, the UK voted in support of the UN Security Council (UNSC) adopting resolution 2605 (2021), renewing MINUSCA's for a further 12 months. The resolution, for the first time, holds the Government of CAR, as well as armed groups, responsible for the escalating human rights and international humanitarian law violations.

In December, the UN added the leader of the Unité pour la Paix en Centrafrique, Ali Darassa,^[81] to its sanctions list. This followed the UK vote, with other UNSC members, for a one-year renewal of the CAR sanctions regime in July. Along with targeted sanctions, the regime also includes an arms embargo to prevent armed groups accessing weaponry. The UK continued to press the Government of CAR to work to achieve the benchmarks set by the UNSC so that the sanctions regime can be lifted.

The UK will support efforts to promote peace and stability in CAR by encouraging the Government of CAR to make progress on the implementation of the peace agreement. The UK will continue to

welcome the Republican Dialogue for reconciliation as a way to reduce violence and alleviate the deepening humanitarian crisis across the country.

China

The human rights situation in China continued to deteriorate in 2021. The evidence of widespread, systematic human rights violations and abuses in Xinjiang grew. Extensive restrictions continued to be imposed on media freedom, freedom of religion or belief and rule of law. Restrictions on LGBT+ and gender rights also persisted, as did those impeding civil society from operating freely. In Hong Kong, civil liberties have been curtailed, particularly freedom of speech.

China's authorities continued to pursue policies which violated human rights, including the extra-judicial detention of Uyghur Muslims and other minorities in political re-education camps and, increasingly, in region's expanding prison network. Further credible and compelling evidence emerged of invasive surveillance of minorities, forced labour and forced birth control.

Systematic restrictions on Uyghur culture and Islam persisted. Visits to Xinjiang by British diplomats continued to corroborate open-source reporting. Uyghurs outside of China continued to report harassment and intimidation by China's authorities. China persisted in refusing free and unfettered access to Xinjiang to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and continued to use large-scale propaganda and disinformation campaigns to support its policies in Xinjiang.

China's authorities continued the implementation of advanced technologies in ways which violated human rights. Mass surveillance and

[78] <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/car/card/30CQKXi7pF/>

[79] <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/un-human-rights-council-interactive-dialogue-with-the-independent-experts-oral-update-on-central-african-republic>

[80] <https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/RES/48/19>

[81] Security Council 2127 Committee concerning Central African Republic Adds One Entry to Its Sanctions List | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases