

Human Rights & Democracy



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

The 2015 Foreign &
Commonwealth Office Report



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The 2015 Foreign & Commonwealth Office Report

Presented to Parliament

by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

by Command of Her Majesty

April 2016



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Rwanda / Burundian refugees / An elderly woman who has fled from Burundi waits for assistance in Mahama Refugee Camp, Rwanda Wednesday, May 6, 2015. UNHCR / Kate Holt / May 2015

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Preface by Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond

“On Human Rights Day last year, I explained that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office had mainstreamed human rights, making it a core part of the everyday work of all British diplomats. As Baroness Anelay sets out in the Foreword, good governance, the rule of law and respect for human rights are not just goods in their own right – they are also the fundamental building blocks of economic development, and thus of a more stable, peaceful and prosperous world.”

This report provides examples of the important work we have undertaken to support and strengthen human rights, under three broad themes: democratic values and the rule of law; human rights for a stable world; and strengthening the rules-based international system. These themes provide our Posts with the flexibility they need to tailor their human rights work to have the greatest impact on the ground.

The report also introduces our concept of Human Rights Priority Countries. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of human rights trouble spots. Nor is it a homogenous group. Rather, we have chosen to focus on 30 countries where we judge that the UK can make a real difference. Some of these are, in our analysis, countries in which the worst, or greatest number of, human rights violations take place. Others are countries where we judge we have the potential to make a greater impact as a result of the strength of our bilateral relations and our ability to influence.

Making progress – particularly in countries in which a lack of freedom and respect for human rights is entrenched – will often be difficult. It will require determined and sustained engagement, often in collaboration with like-minded partners and allies. However, we have at our disposal a broad spectrum of tools; and we will bring them to bear in ways calculated to deliver the best effect, according to local circumstances. The Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy – which we have doubled this year to £10.6 million – will play an important role in this delivery.

This report is deliberately more concise than its predecessors, to make it better-focused and more accessible to non-specialist readers. I commend it to all those who share the view that the promotion of human rights is a fundamental part of the promotion of the British national interest.

The Rt Hon Philip Hammond MP

Foreign Secretary

Foreword by Minister for Human Rights Baroness Anelay



"For those of us devoted to human rights work, 2015 brought hope as well as despair. In different ways, Burma, Sri Lanka and Colombia all showed that progress really does depend on effective leadership from the top. Hope is also growing that perpetrators of the worst crimes can be held accountable. The conviction of Radovan Karadzic holds a message for warmongers everywhere. Elsewhere, the picture was bleak, with gross violations and abuses of human rights, not least in Syria, other parts of the Middle East, Burundi and South Sudan."

2015 proved the value of international co-operation. The 70th anniversary of the UN and the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) confirmed our interdependence, the crucial contribution of civil society, and the relevance of the Prime Minister's "Golden Thread" (good governance and the rule of law). In the UK, the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta and a new National Security Strategy on the back of a Strategic Defence and Security Review, underlined the benefits of human rights, and our strong interest in sharing those benefits with international partners. The point is not abstract. It is about people at home and abroad; their well-being. That was the word used by the Head of the UN in Geneva when I presented to the organisation a replica of Magna Carta and debated its significance with children from the international school. It fits well with the UK's practical approach to human rights.

Following the general election in May, I reviewed our approach to human rights with my Ministerial colleagues at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office. I listened to civil society,

parliamentarians and others with relevant expertise. I wanted to determine how we could have most impact, using the full range of tools at our disposal.

We decided to focus human rights work around three themes:

- > democratic values and the rule of law;
- > strengthening the rules-based international system; and
- > human rights for a stable world.

How these themes play out in practice is the subject of this report. A shorter answer can be found at the end, where we have included our human rights vision and goals, on which I have encouraged FCO's network to concentrate. I think that will reassure readers about the breadth and range of our ambitions.

Our approach gives the FCO's network the freedom it needs to identify where and how the UK can make most difference,

and just do it. At the same time, our themes will help ensure that our approach is strategic and consistent – exploiting and enhancing our national reputation and soft power.

The Foreign Secretary has said that human rights are part of the everyday work of all British diplomats. We will continue to “mainstream” human rights across the FCO, making the most of our world-class diplomatic network. Human rights work is integrated with our consular, prosperity and security goals. It is conducted on the front line wherever possible, but backed up at the centre, wherever necessary.

We will underpin this strategy with more and better human rights projects. On 18 January, we announced that the 2016-17 Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy (MCF – formerly known as the Human Rights and Democracy Programme) would double to £10.6 million – its highest ever level. The fund will place more emphasis on institution-building, and target the underlying causes of human rights violations. The new name – “Magna Carta” – deliberately evokes the importance of the rule of law and good governance in achieving sustainable development, security and respect for human rights.

We have encouraged our network to exercise judgement. That means using quiet diplomacy where that is most likely to yield results and public pressure where appropriate. That public diplomacy will be state of the art, using all the modern and traditional techniques at our disposal – from Ministerial visits to social media.

Sometimes the impact of our private diplomacy is very clear. More often, though, we cannot trumpet our achievements if we are to retain the influence which made them possible. But I am in no doubt that, across the world in 2015, as a result of our private diplomacy, governments have changed tack, NGOs have been able to resume their operations, prisoners have had cruel punishments commuted, and journalists and bloggers have been released.

In this year’s Annual Report we have for the first time employed a single category around which to focus our in-country work, designating 30 Human Rights Priority Countries (HPRCs). Our human rights advocacy and projects will by no means be confined to these countries, but the list will help prioritise our efforts for the rest of this Parliament (excepting major changes in circumstance).

Working in and with these countries for the duration of this Parliament will enhance our impact and, to a degree, make it easier to measure. Progress on human rights is usually incremental. Improvements come as a result of multiple factors, not all of which are in our gift. But our persistent approach can deliver tangible results and lasting change.

This report contains many examples. Here are just a few. In Sri Lanka, sustained engagement spanning the Prime Minister’s intervention at CHOGM (Commonwealth Heads of

Government Meeting) in 2013, an adversarial resolution at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in 2014, and a consensual HRC resolution in 2015, has helped this important partner put civil war behind it and embrace a brighter future. This shows what the rules-based international system can achieve when patient protagonists like the UK show firmness in pursuit of human rights objectives.

We have made inroads against the persecution faced by LGBT people in many parts of the world. At last year’s CHOGM, the Prime Minister urged his colleagues to “leave no one behind”. We encouraged civil society organisations in the Caribbean and Eastern Europe to make their voices heard. While, in Uganda, quiet diplomacy helped persuade the government to reflect civil society’s recommendations in their new NGO legislation.

Our Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative (PSVI) has seen progress in a number of countries; for example, Bosnia. In November I visited Iraq to witness – after two years of facilitation by the UK – the launch of the International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict. In Somalia we provided medical and psycho-social services to over 1,500 victims of sexual and gender-based violence.

Following the detention of five female women’s rights activists in China, we were among a group of states publicly to argue that they had been exercising their right to freedom of expression; they were released the following month. Our constructive advocacy of better ways to prevent torture in Morocco – backed by programme spending – hastened Morocco’s accession to the all-important Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT).

Our sustained engagement with Colombia, in private and in public, has reinforced the peace process and raised performance in other key areas, such as business and human rights. We have shared democracy expertise with Tunisia; worked with the Kenyan government to monitor hate speech in the lead up to elections, and, in the southern Philippines, helped armed groups embrace democracy and form political parties.

Such examples inspire me to hope that 2016 can bring more progress on human rights. We have built a strong case for UK re-election to the HRC in October. I look forward to working with committed individuals in civil society, colleagues in government and Parliament, and human rights defenders everywhere, to discharge our manifesto commitment to uphold universal human rights.

The Rt Hon Baroness Anelay of St Johns DBE

Minister of State at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office and Prime Minister’s Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict

CHAPTER I: Democratic Values and the Rule of Law

Introduction

Democracy is a core British value. We believe it to be the form of government most conducive to long-term peace and sustainable development. In the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review, the government recognised that “security and prosperity suffer when violations and abuses of human rights go unchecked”; and pledged to “work with our partners to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights, and hold to account those responsible for the worst violations and abuses”.

Democracy is about much more than elections. By “democracy” we mean the existence of properly functioning institutions and the rule of law to protect people from all forms of discrimination and uphold their human rights – people having a say in the decisions that affect them through accountable, participative, representative and transparent political systems. Progress in this area can sometimes come quickly, even unexpectedly; but it is more often the work of decades.

Democracy

Magna Carta Anniversary

In 2015, the UK used the 800th anniversary of the sealing of the Magna Carta to share Britain’s experience of democracy with others. On 15 June, the Foreign Secretary said, “Magna Carta is a symbol of the UK’s deeply rooted democracy: a story of evolution rather than revolution; of patient embedding of the principles and institutions that support successful societies. We are proud to be sharing our experience with others making their own journey to democracy”.

More than 50 British Embassies and High Commissions marked the anniversary by hosting a “LiberTea” or other bespoke event. In the last quarter of 2015, seven territories welcomed

the Magna Carta 800 Global Tour. Hereford Cathedral’s 1217 Magna Carta and the only surviving 1215 Kings Writ from Runnymede were taken to: New York during the 70th session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA); Luxembourg for the opening of the European Court of Justice; Beijing, Guangzhou, and Shanghai to coincide with the State Visit of President Xi to London; Hong Kong; Singapore for the 50th anniversary of independence; Malta for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM); and Lisbon, where they were displayed alongside the 1386 Treaty of Windsor. Around 25,000 visitors viewed the Magna Carta during its 39 days of public exhibition, and the associated debate about democratic values reached millions. FCO Minister for Human Rights, Baroness Anelay, also presented the first authentic replica to the UN in Geneva in March 2015.

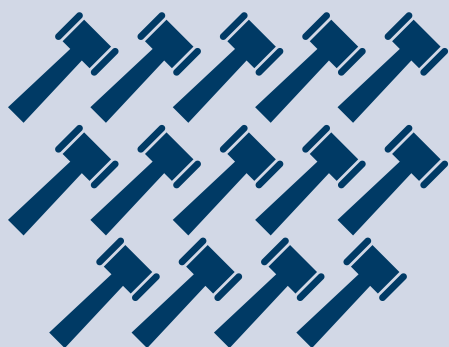
Magna Carta Partnerships

On International Day of Democracy (15 September) at Gray’s Inn – in the heart of the UK’s legal community – Baroness Anelay announced a pilot fund of £100,000 to share the UK’s legal and parliamentary expertise. The Magna Carta Partnerships initiative built on the 800th anniversary, and provided small, flexible grants to help guide parliamentarians, judges and lawyers overseas along their own path to democracy and the rule of law. The FCO worked closely with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (see below) and the Department for International Development’s (DFID) Rule of Law Expertise Programme (ROLE UK) to match demand for assistance with UK expertise.

The initiative generated interest from a wide range of UK legal and parliamentary experts and demonstrated the global reach of their work. By the end of 2015, we had committed funding to 14 projects in 13 countries in Africa, the Americas, Central Asia, South Asia, and South East Asia. The first activity took place in Thailand on 5-8 November 2015. Andrew Hood, the Prime Minister’s Legal Adviser, shared UK experience on

The Magna Carta Partnerships fund...

has financed 14 projects...



in 13 countries...



worth over £100k.



the rule of law and Magna Carta at the King Prajadhipok's Institute's 17th Congress.

In 2016 highlights will include: the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK working with the Parliament of Sri Lanka to develop a strong select committee system; the Bingham Centre for the Rule of Law working with Kenyan officials on the implementation of the Fair Administrative Action Act; and the UK Sierra Leone Pro Bono Network sharing experience on the administration of the High Court of Sierra Leone. Because of the interest the fund generated, FCO has decided to scale up the focus on democracy and the rule of law under the new Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy (MCF).

Other Democracy-strengthening Activities

In 2015, our diplomatic missions continued to support democracy strengthening in practical ways, tailoring their approach to the context. The Human Rights and Democracy Programme Fund (HRDP) contributed £500,000 towards seven democracy-building projects in Africa, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, South Asia and South East Asia. These helped strengthen national Parliaments, increase youth participation in politics, and combat attempts by authorities to restrict civil society space.

Elections

The UK continued to support credible and inclusive elections by providing financial and technical assistance to international organisations that carry out election observation missions, in particular the EU, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Commonwealth. The FCO worked with these multilateral organisations to prioritise countries that would most benefit from an observation mission. Election observation can help build voter confidence, deter violence, and support the credibility of the electoral process. It can reduce the risk of fraud and violence in the transfer of power, and help embed and strengthen democratic principles, even in countries in a state of democratic transition or crisis.

There were notable election success stories in 2015. In Burma, the elections took place in a calm and orderly manner. This was an important step towards democracy and a victory for the people of Burma. In Sri Lanka, a country which only recently emerged from civil war, parliamentary elections were reported as being the most peaceful in living memory, giving the country a strong democratic platform on which to build. In Nigeria, the historic presidential election saw the first fully democratic transfer of power, as the All Progressives Congress defeated the People's Democratic Party.

The UK assisted these processes bilaterally and through our support of EU election observation missions. In Burma, UK support to the elections included funding specialist technical advice to the Union Election Commission (through the International Foundation for Electoral Systems), training for 5,000 domestic observers, and supporting/providing international best practice on security planning. In Sri Lanka, the UK provided support to domestic election monitors and

to voter education programmes. Through DFID's Deepening Democracy in Nigeria programme, the UK provided technical support to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), supported voter education and independent electoral observation, promoted mitigation of violence, and provided support to civil society in holding the INEC and government to account.

In 2016, election observation missions will continue to be a high priority for the UK, and the MCF will be available to support democracy strengthening work.

Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD)^[1]

The UK shares its democratic experience and expertise through the WFD, a non-departmental public body funded largely by FCO and DFID. WFD helps build legitimate and inclusive political institutions capable of strengthening human rights. It works with political parties and Parliaments to strengthen democratic practices in developing countries, directly tackling human rights issues, particularly gender equality. In 2015, WFD organised the first ever Women's Parliament in Uganda, promoting the implementation of legislation combating domestic violence, female genital mutilation (FGM), and property discrimination. WFD supported the Coalition of Middle East and North African female Members of Parliament in their campaign to reform penal laws which allow rapists to escape prosecution by marrying their victim. In Bosnia, WFD worked with political parties and the media to increase the number of women participating in politics ahead of local elections in 2016.

In Georgia, its Parliament's Human Rights Committee spent 2015 scrutinising the Georgian government's progress towards its Association Agreement with the EU. WFD helped bring Georgian parliamentarians together with civil society organisations. WFD also improved the link between civil society organisations and Parliament in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). A group of female Members of the DRC Parliament successfully worked with campaigners to introduce a proposed change in legislation to establish a quota for women's representation amongst the chiefs selected to serve within the Provincial Assembly of Province Orientale.

WFD believes human rights are best protected within a democratic culture. Its work aims to foster this by improving Parliaments' capacity to scrutinise the actions of their governments effectively. In 2015, WFD helped new MPs by providing induction training in Kyrgyzstan; encouraged dialogue on anti-corruption in Tunisia and Iraq; and supported improved parliamentary financial oversight in Morocco, Ukraine and Serbia.

WFD's 2015-18 funding cycle means it has a range of active programmes set to strengthen human rights around the world in the coming 12 months. By mid-2016, parliamentary-strengthening programmes will be underway in over 20 countries. With the help of UK political parties, they will have established programmes of activity in over 40 countries in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

[1] For more information on WFD, visit www.wfd.org.



Freedom of Expression

Freedom of expression continues to be under threat from governments and groups which regard freely expressed opinion as a threat to authority. For the UK, freedom of expression is not only important in its own right, but also as a vital enabler of other human rights. The ability of the media to operate without censorship, intimidation, or unnecessary restriction is a key indicator of the state of a country's democracy, and of the ability of citizens to participate in the development of their society.

2015 saw the murder in Paris of nine journalists from the satirical magazine, "Charlie Hebdo", and a related attack in Copenhagen. The reaction demonstrated deep political and public attachment to the principle that the media should be able to operate freely; and that a person should be free to express their views, whether or not others agree with those views.

These attacks were part of a broader assault on media freedom throughout the course of 2015. Journalists continued to be at risk in conflict zones around the world. NGO Reporters Without Borders estimate that 110 journalists, citizen journalists and media assistants were killed in the course of, or as a result of, their work. Precise figures are hard to determine. But as the FCO Minister for Conflict Issues, James Duddridge, told the House of Commons in a debate on the deaths of journalists in conflict zones, "one death is too many". Too often the threat to journalists is exacerbated by a culture of impunity for those who commit these crimes. It is estimated that in 90% of cases the murder of journalists goes unpunished.

One significant step forward was the unanimous adoption by the UN Security Council (UNSC) of Resolution 2222. This resolution condemned violations and abuses against journalists,

condemned the impunity often seen in such cases, and affirmed the importance of a free, independent and impartial media as "one of the essential foundations of a democratic society". In the accompanying debate, the UK's Permanent Representative to the UN highlighted the important role played by all journalists, including citizen journalists and bloggers, and called for an end to impunity.

Whilst journalists face heightened risks in conflict zones, Reporters Without Borders estimated that two-thirds of the murders of journalists during 2015 were committed in countries considered to be "at peace". In Bangladesh bloggers were killed for expressing atheist views.

With the development of social media, the distinction between professional journalists and so-called "citizen journalists" is blurred; but the same principle applies – that all should be able to express their opinion without fear of intimidation or death. The UK continued to work with international partners to address the issue of safety of journalists, and would like to pay particular tribute to the role of the OSCE's Representative on Freedom of the Media, Dunja Mijatovic, who has been a tireless advocate of press freedom across the region. She has set a high standard which all subsequent holders of this important position should aim to match.

The UK is a strong supporter of the principle that the rights which exist offline should also be protected online. We are founder members of the Freedom Online Coalition, a grouping of countries which promotes internet freedom and highlights government restrictions on internet access and related limitations to freedom of expression. The UK is an active member of the coalition and participated in its Ministerial Conference in Mongolia in May 2015. The number of members

rose to 29 during 2015, with Australia, New Zealand, Norway and Spain joining the coalition.

In 2015, the UK continued to support projects to promote and protect freedom of expression for all. The HRDP contributed over £500,000 towards nine such projects in Africa, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, South America, and South Asia. These included mapping threats to journalists and journalism, informing bloggers and online activists about rights and protection issues, and facilitating effective civil society engagement in international internet-related policy debates.

Restriction of Civil Society Space

2015 saw further challenges around the world to the ability of civil society to play an active role in decision making and democratic processes, something the UK regards as fundamental for building successful societies and economies.

Restrictions included laws to regulate the media, including the internet, and under the guise of protecting national security. Whilst states are obliged to protect their citizens, the use of broad legislation (particularly on the financing of the not-for-profit sector) can have the opposite effect. Restrictions can prevent civil society organisations contributing to better policy making, and can also damage health and education programmes. One particular focus has been on Recommendation 8 of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), which refers to the abuse of non-profit organisations. The laudable aims of FATF are to combat money laundering and terrorist financing. We support that objective. But its regulations can be abused, or misapplied, to restrict the ability of legitimate civil society organisations to function. A consultation exercise was held in 2015 by the FATF Secretariat to look at ways to address this.

In May 2015, Russia passed the “Law on Undesirable Organisations” giving authorities the power to close down civil society organisations without a court order if they consider them a threat to national security. This adds to the “foreign agent” regulations on NGOs receiving overseas funding, which have been in place since 2012, making it hard for civil society to operate effectively. The first civil society organisation to be banned under the 2015 regulation was the US-based National Endowment for Democracy.

Russia’s approach has been copied in several other countries in the region. In 2015, regulations restricting NGO financing – as well as restrictive media laws – were passed in Azerbaijan, whilst Serbia needs to secure implementation of its media regulations to create an enabling environment in which freedom of expression can be exercised without hindrance. New restrictive regulatory measures were also initiated in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. There were similar approaches elsewhere including Cambodia, Pakistan, Tanzania and Sierra Leone.

During 2015 the UK was an active participant in the Community of Democracies, a group of countries committed to supporting the transition to democracy and the strengthening of democratic values and institutions worldwide, and participated in its Ministerial Conference in San Salvador. The

UK intends to become a member of the Governing Council of the Community of Democracies during 2016.

Human Rights Defenders (HRDs)

The values which the UK stands for – democracy, tolerance, public participation, the fight against discrimination and respect for the rule of law – are all underpinned by the work of HRDs.

In December 2015, the UK hosted a visit by Michel Forst, the UN Special Rapporteur on HRDs. This was an opportunity for in-depth discussion of the threats faced by HRDs, including pressure on civil society. The UK places great importance on work at the EU level on HRDs, including through the EU Guidelines. In December 2015, the EU launched its first comprehensive mechanism for HRDs providing short, medium and long-term support including legal and medical support, training and advocacy. The mechanism will be backed by a budget of €15m up to 2018, and will be managed by a consortium of 12 NGOs.

In the UK we continued to support the work of HRDs through the HRDP. Over the last four years, the FCO has provided financial contributions to “Lifeline”, an NGO which provides emergency support to HRDs.

Non-discrimination

Women’s Rights

2015 was an important year for women’s rights. Highlights included the 20th Anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (an internationally agreed plan for realising full and equal rights for women) which the international community further endorsed at the UN Commission on the Status of Women in March. It was also the 15th Anniversary of UNSC Resolution 1325, which underlined that women’s rights had to be at the heart of any successful search for peace and security.

The UK worked hard to secure a strong goal on gender (“SDG5”) which was included in the Sustainable Development Goals unanimously agreed by the UNGA in September. SDG5 includes targets on ending all forms of violence against women and girls, FGM, and child, early and forced marriage (CEFM). Including these targets was a top priority for the UK. The UK continues to work towards international agreement on a detailed set of indicators for the Violence Against Women and Girls target.

Despite the progress that was achieved at the UN level and elsewhere, significant challenges remain. These include: ending the many different forms of violence against women; securing sexual health and reproductive rights; achieving gender equality in the workplace and in political and public life; and women’s economic empowerment and equal access to education. Regrettably, despite the fact that women make up around 50% of any country’s population, and despite demonstrable benefits for countries’ prosperity of women’s

economic empowerment, too many countries – at national, provincial and community level – continue to restrict the human rights of women and girls, including to adequate health care and to justice.

This is particularly apparent in Syria where women are at risk of sexual violence, which is predominantly perpetrated by government forces and some armed groups. As a result, Syrian women are unable to access healthcare and are left without basic legal protections. We also remain concerned about the inability of women to participate fully in society in Saudi Arabia, where the guardianship system remains in place and segregation presents many challenges, including in political life.



A workshop for women victims of violence run by Sisters For Change in Bangalore, as part of a Human Rights & Democracy Programme project.

Violence against women and girls occurs in peaceful societies as well as those experiencing conflict. It is often a result of discriminatory attitudes and harmful social norms. Violence against women and girls is unacceptable and should not be tolerated in any circumstance. Alongside ensuring the equal representation of women in political and public life and challenging discriminatory laws and practices, tackling violence against women and girls was a priority for our work in 2015.

FCO marked International Women's Day in March with Posts in all regions staging over 40 innovative events designed to further women's political and economic empowerment. Examples included: the launch of funding for a civil society alliance to push for a gender perspective in Burma's peace process; an event to promote women in business with the Minister of Trade and Industry for Kosovo; a speed mentoring event in Hungary for disadvantaged young women with successful female role models; and a lecture at a university in Kyrgyzstan by the Deputy Head of Mission on women's political empowerment in the UK.

Such initiatives helped create new networks of influential, gender-sensitive policy makers, including in China, where 100 women from political and economic life were brought together to discuss ways to achieve greater empowerment of women. Social media messages reached thousands of people in each country where we staged events, demonstrating the UK's

commitment to promoting and protecting women's rights, whilst showcasing that change is possible and within our reach.

In 2015 the HRDP spent over £550,000 on seven projects aimed at promoting women's rights. Projects ranged from promoting women's political participation in the peace process in Mindanao in the Philippines, to engaging male leaders and community members as active promoters of women's rights in Afghanistan.

The FCO supported a series of events from 26-30 October in the UK and across the diplomatic network under the banner of a "Week of Women". The week was designed to promote women's political and economic leadership. It was supported by Baroness Anelay and women's rights champion, Pinky Lilani (Women of the Future).

Over 60 international delegates attended "Week of Women" events, nominated by our Embassies and High Commissions. Highlights included the Women of the Future Summit and Awards ceremony hosted by the Department of Education Minister for Women and Equalities, Nicky Morgan. Many senior female FCO colleagues attended, including High Commissioner to Malaysia and Ambassador to Afghanistan. The FCO ran a strategy session for international delegates, hosted by Maria Miller (Chair of the UK's Parliamentary Select Committee on Women and Equalities). The strategy session discussed barriers faced by women to positions of leadership and how the FCO and others could best support their ambitions.

We are aware of the particular concerns around violence against women and girls in India and are committed to working with the Indian government on this important issue. We welcome the steps the Indian government has already taken, such as fast-track courts and public safety measures. A group of Indian women leaders visited the UK in November to learn about the UK's approach to tackling violence against women and girls. This visit took place during the week that marked International Day for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. The group met Baroness Anelay, parliamentarians, representatives of the private sector, UK civil society and UK officials. The objective was to help shape public policy in India so that the criminal justice system and society will be more responsive to women victims of violence, specifically those from vulnerable, marginalised and minority groups.

FCO worked closely with the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and DFID to coordinate cross-Whitehall efforts on Women, Peace and Security, and made eight strong commitments^[2] at the 15th anniversary of UNSC Resolution 1325 in October. The record number of speakers at this UNSC event was testament to the worldwide support for the agenda. The UK's Strategic Defence and Security Review in November confirmed that Women, Peace and Security (WPS) was a high priority for the government, stating that the full attainment of political, social and economic rights for women is central to greater peace and security overseas:

[2] <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-uk-firmly-believes-that-the-15th-anniversary-must-represent-the-start-of-a-new-era-on-women-peace-and-security>

“It is a UK priority and we will ensure that women’s rights are fully taken into account in our overseas counter-extremism work, in humanitarian emergencies, in our early warning and conflict analysis and in our new military doctrine. We will continue to promote the active participation of women in peace-building discussions, including through work with governments such as in Afghanistan and Iraq. It is already a key theme running through our development work. We will build on it over the next five years, including through investing in research to understand what needs to be done in conflict-affected states to ensure lasting equality for women and girls.”

We continued to implement our National Action Plan (NAP) on WPS^[3]. This NAP is the joint responsibility of FCO, DFID, and MOD. Afghanistan, Burma, DRC, Libya, Somalia and Syria are its focus countries. An external evaluation of the NAP^[4] was published in November and a report to Parliament^[5] in December. We continued to encourage other countries to develop and implement their own NAPs and to be transparent about how they are fulfilling their commitments.

The UK is a world leader in the fight to stamp out forced marriage. It has been illegal in UK since 2014. The joint FCO-Home Office Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) leads efforts to combat it both at home and abroad. Overseas, the FMU provides consular assistance to victims prior to or after marriage to secure their return to the UK.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Rights

The authorities of many countries actively persecute LGBT people. 78 countries criminalise homosexuality, the majority of which are in the Commonwealth. Even in many countries where homosexuality is legal, people still face discrimination because of their sexual orientation. Faced with this unacceptable discrimination, which often has violent consequences, the FCO places great importance on working to challenge violence and discrimination against LGBT people wherever it exists.

We directly challenge governments that criminalise homosexuality at the highest political levels. For example, after lobbying by the British High Commission, Mozambique revised its Penal Code. This led to so-called “acts against nature” – widely interpreted as homosexuality – being decriminalised. In Belize, Kyrgyzstan, Nigeria and Uganda, UK diplomats have raised concerns about legislation which could lead to persecution and discrimination against LGBT people.

FCO offers support to civil society activists to ensure that their voices and needs are heard. In 2015, FCO supported projects to improve the prosecution of homophobic hate crimes in Montenegro and to develop an online platform on which LGBT people can access various services, including health and legal advice, throughout the Caribbean region.

FCO also worked to create space at the international level for LGBT rights to be discussed, debated and – we hope ultimately – accepted as a clear reaffirmation of the universality of human rights. In 2015, the UK raised LGBT issues at the CHOGM in Malta where Baroness Verma chaired a meeting at the People’s Forum. UK also supported a further cross-regional statement at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva.

Another important part of the government’s approach lies in communications work – reaching out to communities in order to change perceptions whilst demonstrating solidarity with civil society activists. An example of this is support for the UN’s Free & Equal campaign which seeks to break down stereotypes.

In 2015, UK Posts around the world marked Pride in a number of creative and visible ways. Examples included the British Embassy in Bucharest using the “Love Is GREAT” banner during Bucharest Pride in May and posting photos on their Facebook page, and the British Embassy in Vienna launching a “Love is GREAT” campaign during Eurovision week, promoting the UK as a LGBT-friendly destination for tourists. The UK’s Ambassador to the Dominican Republic gave the introductory speech at the EU’s LGBT Film Festival, stressing that tolerance, respect for LGBT people, and non-discrimination are UK – and EU – values.

A striking example of the impact of UK soft power was the “fiveFilms4freedom” social media campaign. The British Council, British Film Institute and British Embassies and High Commissions in over 70 countries hosted films online which promoted awareness and tolerance of LGBT rights. Over 5 million people in 135 countries saw the films – and the campaign achieved a vast social media footprint of 75 million posts on Twitter, Facebook and, in China, on Sina Weibo.

The FCO was delighted to host the PinkNews annual awards ceremony in October. This recognised the outstanding work of individuals in promoting and protecting the rights of LGBT people, and gave us the opportunity to showcase exceptional work across the FCO network.

The UK government continues to offer a consular same-sex marriage service in 26 countries and a conversion service in 11 countries. Since the introduction of these services, we have conducted approximately 240 same-sex marriages and 140 conversions. By offering these services we have drawn attention to the lack of local legislation for same-sex marriages and prompted wider debate on LGBT issues. This helps to educate public opinion in countries where the national authorities, and many in wider society, are as yet unprepared to countenance same-sex marriage.

Child Rights

Violence, discrimination, poverty and marginalisation can impact children disproportionately, affect their health, education and overall development, and put them at an increased risk of exploitation, abuse and trafficking. With this in mind, the protection and promotion of children’s human rights, including those of children who are victims of armed conflict and children at risk of abduction and exploitation, form an important part of the FCO’s wider international human rights agenda. During 2015, we continued to work actively to

[3] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-national-action-plan-on-women-peace-and-security>

[4] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/external-evaluation-of-the-national-action-plan-on-women-peace-and-security-baseline-report>

[5] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-national-action-plan-on-women-peace-and-security-2014-17-report-to-parliament-december-2015>

ensure that child rights are protected and that child rights are taken into account in our work on a range of issues, including forced marriage and preventing sexual violence against children in conflict.

Much of our work on child rights is focused at the UN. At the March UN HRC, the UK co-sponsored the annual resolution on the rights of the child, which had as its theme “towards better investment in the rights of the child”. This called upon all states to recognise that investing in children is critical to achieving inclusive, equitable and sustainable human development for present and future generations, and delivers benefits to society and the economy at large. In July the HRC passed a UK-supported resolution on Unaccompanied Migrant Children and Human Rights, which expressed serious concern about vulnerability of unaccompanied child migrants.

In 2015 the UK continued to build on the success of the Girl Summit held in London in July 2014, through work nationally and internationally to support the international movement to eliminate FGM and CEFM. The UK remains highly committed to working with partners towards the vision of ending both practices within a generation, and there are UK-led programmes in over 25 high-prevalence countries.

The FCO remained at the forefront of efforts to address the issue across the international system, including at the HRC, where we are members of the core group for the Child Marriage resolution. In July, the HRC unanimously adopted a resolution, co-sponsored by the UK, which sought to strengthen efforts to prevent and eliminate CEFM, a practice that affects 15 million girls every year. This built on the first ever UN Resolution on Eliminating Child, Early and Forced Marriage in 2014, and recognises child marriage as a violation of human rights “that prevents individuals from living their lives free from all forms of violence” and that has “wide-ranging and adverse consequences on the enjoyment of human rights, such as the right to education, the right to the highest attainable standard of health, including sexual and reproductive health”.

Within the stand-alone gender goal (SDG5) the UK argued for a target on eliminating harmful practices that impact on girls, including FGM and CEFM. We were closely involved in the process to determine the indicators for global prevalence rates.

Our Embassies and High Commissions play an important role in our work to protect and promote the rights of children. In March the British Embassy in Bucharest became one of the latest missions to support the National Crime Agency (NCA)’s International Child Protection Certificate (ICPC) which aims to combat the exploitation and abuse of children overseas by travelling British child sex offenders. Our responsibility to protect children from abuse does not stop at the UK’s borders, and the ICPC is a valuable tool in helping to prevent abuse overseas. An ICPC can only be issued following checks made against police information and intelligence databases. It aims to provide reassurance that staff employed in schools and voluntary organisations do not have a UK criminal record that makes them unsuitable to work with children. The launch of the ICPC in Romania was the culmination of months of close co-operation between the NCA and Romanian partners.

Technology is a transformative force for growth, and of benefit to children in many ways. But technology is also enabling new forms of crime against children that need to be tackled with urgency. That is why, on 16–17 November, the UK brought together the technology industry, civil society and governments under the WePROTECT initiative. WePROTECT will now merge with the Global Alliance Against Child Sexual Abuse Online to create, for the first time, a single coordinated global initiative to transform how these crimes are dealt with.

Child safeguarding in the UK Overseas Territories (OTs)

The UK government is committed to working in partnership with territory governments to support their efforts to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in the UK OTs^[6]. We report here on the child safeguarding measures taken because of the UK’s special constitutional relationship and responsibilities for the OTs^[7].

UK action

In February 2015, the FCO established the Child Safeguarding Unit (CSU) to help strengthen safeguarding capabilities and systems in partnership with the territories. To strengthen engagement, CSU ran targeted safeguarding sessions at conferences for OT representatives, including OT Heads of Public Services, Police Commissioners and human resources directors. The unit issued a protocol for Governors and their officers about the reporting of child abuse cases. In September, the UK Solicitor General chaired the annual OTs Attorneys General Conference where action was agreed on child safeguarding, including exploring means for closer co-operation on information and best practice sharing.

At the annual Joint Ministerial Council (JMC)^[8] in December, FCO Minister for the OTs, James Duddridge, chaired a child safeguarding session, at which the UK and OT governments reaffirmed their commitment to leading a national response. This will ensure a child-centred and coordinated approach to safeguarding based on multi-agency working, information sharing and robust risk assessment. The UK government published the Wass Inquiry Report^[9] into allegations surrounding child safeguarding issues on St Helena and Ascension Island. The UK government and St Helena governments accepted the recommendations in full. A senior UK official, who will be based on St Helena, was appointed to oversee the implementation of recommendations from the Wass Report. DFID continues to support OTs through the Safeguarding Children in the Overseas Territories programme

[6] Anguilla; Bermuda, Cayman Islands; the Falkland Islands; Gibraltar; Montserrat; Pitcairn, Henderson, Ducie and Oeno Islands (commonly known as the Pitcairn Islands); St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha; the Turks and Caicos Islands; and the Virgin Islands (commonly known as the British Virgin Islands).

[7] Except for the British Antarctic Territory; British Indian Ocean Territory, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands or the Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia in Cyprus, as we are focusing our efforts to promote human rights in those territories which have permanent resident populations.

[8] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/overseas-territories-joint-ministerial-council-2015-communicue>

[9] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-wass-inquiry-report-into-allegations-surrounding-child-safeguarding-issues-on-st-helena-and-ascension-island-redacted-version>

(SCOTT II). Over the past year, financial support to Montserrat and St Helena has enabled the OTs to significantly scale up their interventions on the prevention of and response to abuse.

OT government action

- > Child safeguarding reviews supported by DFID were conducted in Montserrat, Pitcairn and Tristan da Cunha. The Falkland Islands government supported by the FCO held a successful follow-up to their 2013 child safeguarding review.
- > The Cayman Islands commissioned a UK Children's Services professional to look at raising standards in safeguarding.
- > The Ascension Island government appointed its first full-time social worker and introduced criminal record checks for anyone wishing to volunteer or work unsupervised with children.
- > Anguilla passed its flagship domestic violence legislation^[10] and the Royal Anguilla police force undertook family liaison training, supported by FCO. An interagency child protection protocol (CPP)^[11] was introduced. Concurrently a CPP for the local secondary school was adopted. The British Virgin Islands, Montserrat^[12] and St Helena successfully created public awareness campaigns around child safeguarding and protection by drawing on expertise from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and NGOs. The Turks and Caicos Islands passed four Organisations of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) model family law bills in children care, protection and adoption^[13];
- > The government of Bermuda partnered with a local NGO (SCARS^[14]) to deliver child sexual abuse training across the island. This was attended by over 350 police and police reserve officers.
- > The Falklands Islands government presented a draft memorandum of understanding and child safeguarding roadmap at the JMC. The territory-led initiative is intended to facilitate greater cross-OT co-operation on a range of child safeguarding and protection matters, as well as to encourage the sharing of information and best practice. Finally, the majority of the OTs also participated in a child sexual exploitation online investigation training workshop as part of Operation Guardian in Miami.

Looking ahead to 2016

The UK and OT governments are committed to working together to delivering a zero tolerance approach to child abuse in all of its forms and, as stated in the JMC 2015 communiqué^[15], to doing all we can to prevent harm, support victims, and bring offenders to justice.

[10] http://www.gov.ai/documents/msd/Domestic_Violence_Bill_2014.pdf

[11] <http://www.gov.ai/documents/MSD%20-%20Interagency%20Child%20Protection%20Protocol%202015.pdf>

[12] <http://www.gov.ms/2012/06/04/ministry-of-health-and-social-services-launches-child-protection-booklet/>

[13] Children Care and Protection; Family Law (Guardianship, Custody, and Access to Children); Adoption; and Domestic Violence.

[14] <http://www.scarsbermuda.com/>

[15] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/488498/Overseas_Territories_Joint_Ministerial_Council_2015_Communique.pdf

The UK government will focus on ways it can further support OT governments to develop front-line capability and fulfil our wider international human rights obligations. These include upcoming reviews of UK government compliance under CRC^[16], CESC^[17] and CERD^[18].

In addition, the UK government will host the first ever child safeguarding conference for OT Directors of Children's Services as part of wider efforts to help improve co-ordination, enhance capacity, and exploit existing frameworks for best practice within and across the OTs. This will be supported by a separate child safeguarding multi-agency investigation workshop in Miami. We will also work in partnership with the government of St Helena to implement the Wass recommendations. A progress report will be presented to Parliament by June. We will be considering which examples of good practice, applied in St Helena in implementing the recommendations, could be shared across the OTs. The OTs will continue to strengthen their safeguarding systems, and Montserrat will create a unit dedicated to child protection, establish a child safeguarding board and work to pass the Child Protection Act. Police officers from Montserrat, Anguilla and Turks and Caicos Islands will receive training in interview techniques and procedures when investigating child abuse cases.

Business and Human Rights

Business operations can have an impact on human rights, both positive and negative. Whilst the obligation to protect human rights rests with national governments, businesses have a responsibility to respect human rights throughout their operations. This is most clearly set out in the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) which the government strongly supports.

The UK was the first country to produce a National Action Plan (NAP) on Business and Human Rights (in September 2013) in order to implement the UNGPs. In line with the structure of the UNGPs, this covered actions at state level, expectations of business behaviour, and the provision of remedy and access to justice for those who believe they are victims of corporate human rights abuses.

The NAP includes a number of commitments, including the provision of sector-specific guidance, promotion of reporting, and transparency. During 2015 we began the process of reviewing and updating the NAP. We held a number of consultation events involving a wide range of stakeholders from business, civil society and academia. Following this consultation exercise, an updated version of the NAP will be published in 2016, capturing the range of business and human rights related activities and initiatives which take place across government and recording some of the actions we have taken since September 2013.

One of the most significant developments in business and human rights in 2015 was the entry into force of the Modern

[16] The International Convention on the Rights of the Child.

[17] International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

[18] International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

Slavery Act on 31 July. As well as consolidating and simplifying existing legislation, it includes a requirement for companies covered by the Act to set out for each financial year a statement on the steps they have taken to ensure that their business and supply chains do not include slavery or human trafficking.

Alongside the UK Bribery Act, the Health and Safety at Work Act and other regulatory and policy measures, the Modern Slavery Act ensures that the UK stays at the forefront of action to support business and human rights, and provides protection for workers and reassurance for customers and investors. This is consistent with the UK's view that respect for human rights is good for business and promotes economic prosperity. The UK also strongly supports the provision of remedy, including through the UK's National Contact Point.

At the international level, the importance of the UNGPs was given a considerable boost by the G7 Leaders' Declaration in June 2015. Leaders said they "strongly support the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and welcome the efforts to set up substantive National Action Plans". They also called for efforts to "enhance supply chain transparency and accountability".

The UK wants to see similar action carried out across the world. A comprehensive and consistent approach to the implementation of the UNGPs will provide a clearer and simpler global business environment for UK companies, as well as ensuring that individuals are protected or offered adequate remedy across the world (a level playing field). So far very few countries have published NAPs, though many are in production (including in most EU Member States and the United States). The UK has strongly supported these processes. In particular, FCO has supported Colombia in the production of its National Action Plan, the first of its type to be published outside Europe. FCO has also supported similar work in Malaysia through the Malaysian National Human Rights Institute. British Embassies have hosted events to promote the UNGPs in a number of capitals, including Washington, Bogotá and Stockholm. FCO also took part in an event hosted by Brazil's main business association for the launch of their national process to develop an action plan. In Bangladesh we have funded projects to increase awareness of the UNGPs among trade unions in the garment and leather sectors.

Since 2011, the FCO has invested around £1.8 million through the HRDP to support business and human rights work, and has supported the UN Working Group on business and human rights in its work to promote implementation of the UNGPs.

In taking forward our work on business and human rights, FCO will concentrate on encouraging greater international implementation of the UNGPs, and work to provide better governance to create a positive business environment for UK companies operating overseas. We will also prioritise work to support HRDs to enable them to have access to relevant information and, where necessary, to appropriate remedy or grievance mechanisms.

Anti-corruption and transparency

Corruption harms societies, undermines the rule of law and economic development and threatens democracy. It creates barriers to doing business and deters investment. UN SDG16 calls on states to "substantially reduce corruption in all its forms".

The UK has been at the forefront of tackling corruption, both through international engagement and targeted funding of specific initiatives. The UK's Bribery Act (2010) and the Anti-Corruption Action Plan, published in 2014, are practical demonstrations of the UK's commitment to tackling corruption and promoting transparency. This is good for business and economic development; the World Bank estimates that bribery can add up to 10% to business costs globally, and that over US\$1 trillion is paid in bribes each year.

In 2016 this commitment will be underlined when the UK hosts the "London Anti-Corruption Summit". This will address both the causes of corruption, and methods to promote transparency and to help those most affected. It will build on the growing international consensus around tackling corruption and promoting transparency, for the public and private sectors and international organisations.

At the 2015 G20 Summit, Heads of Government committed to implementing the 2015-16 G20 Anti-Corruption Action Plan and endorsed the G20 High Level Principles on Integrity and Transparency in the Private Sector, helping businesses across the G20 comply with global standards on ethics and anti-corruption.

As part of our commitment to international action on corruption and transparency the UK also works to improve standards of anti-corruption legislation and enforcement among our trading partners internationally through the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the UN, and the Council of Europe conventions against corruption. Our Posts throughout the world support the implementation of the UK Bribery Act 2010. The FCO's Overseas Business Risk service, providing advice to businesses on identifying and mitigating business risks in over 80 overseas markets, includes advice on bribery, corruption and the threat from organised crime.

DFID's development assistance programmes contribute to strengthening anti-corruption systems in partner countries, both through direct assistance to anti-corruption institutions and oversight bodies, as well as through improving public financial management and delivery of public services.

DFID provides targeted funding to police teams in the UK tackling corruption in developing countries. DFID has funded two UK police teams since 2006 to investigate the laundering by foreign politicians and officials through the UK of the proceeds of their corruption, and allegations of UK citizens' and companies' involvement in bribery in developing countries. An investment of over £18 million during 2006-2015 resulted in numerous convictions in the UK of corrupt individuals and companies for acts of bribery in developing countries. Around £156 million of assets stolen from developing countries and laundered in the UK were restrained, recovered or returned. To increase impact, the work of these units was merged in

June 2015 into a new International Corruption Unit at the National Crime Agency. The Secretary of State for International Development, Justine Greening, announced up to £21 million of new funding for this work during 2015-2020.

At the HRC in June, the UK supported a resolution recognising the negative impact of corruption on human rights. This represents a step change in the way the HRC and its mechanisms can consider this topic. All Special Rapporteurs

now have the mandate to take into account anti-corruption in their work. This is a significant development and one the UK will follow closely as it evolves.

The Department for International Development's (DFID) Work on Economic and Social Rights

Respect for human rights underpins sustainable development. The Global Goals, which sit at the heart of the UK Aid Strategy, represent a commitment to achieve substantive, measurable improvements on economic, social and political human rights. This includes the overarching commitment in the Global Goals to "leave no one behind", an expression of the human rights agenda, which the UK played a key role in securing in the negotiations. The Global Goals, agreed by the Prime Minister and other world leaders in September 2015, include Goal 3 (good health and well-being for all), Goal 4 (quality education for all) and Goal 5 (gender equality).

A range of DFID programmes that protect and promote human rights in areas such as security, peace and justice are referred to throughout this report. This section describes DFID's work in 2015 relating to economic and social rights.

Girls and Women

Promoting the rights of girls and women remained a top priority for DFID in 2015. Building on the Girl Summit to end child early and forced marriage (CEFM) and female genital mutilation (FGM) which took place in UK in 2014, 11 governments began developing national plans on one or both issues. Nigeria and The Gambia banned FGM^[1]. By March 2015, DFID support had enabled 35.9 million women to work their way out of poverty by providing access to financial services, helped 5.3 million girls to go to primary and lower secondary school, and supported 5.1 million births with skilled birth attendants.

Health

In 2015, 5.9 million children under the age of five died. More than half of these deaths were due to conditions that could be prevented or treated with access to simple, affordable interventions. DFID funds the provision of good-quality, cost-effective, basic health services by public, private and NGO providers to provide access for the poorest. DFID achieved the commitments for 2011-15, including helping 9.3 million additional women to use modern methods of family planning, ensuring 5.1 million births were delivered with the help of nurses, midwives or doctors, distributing 50 million insecticide-treated bed nets, and immunising 43.8 million children against preventable diseases.

Education

Despite good progress against the education Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), more than 58 million children do not attend school. 31 million of these are girls and at least 250 million children cannot read or count, even if they have spent four years in school. DFID's priorities are for children to be in school and learning. Between 2010 and 2015, DFID met its pledge to support 11 million children in primary and lower secondary school. Between 2015 and 2020, DFID has again pledged to support 11 million children with a decent education.

Water and sanitation

Globally, 2.4 billion people do not have access to sanitation, and 663 million people do not have access to clean water. Inadequate access to water and sanitation is the principal cause of diarrhoeal disease, which kills nearly 1,000 children every day. The UK recognises the right to water and sanitation as an element/component of the right to an adequate standard of living under Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. From 2011 to 2015, DFID provided 20.9 million people with access to clean drinking water, and 26.2 million people with access to improved sanitation.

Economic empowerment

Economic development and growth are the main drivers of long-term poverty reduction through the creation of more and better jobs, which result in higher incomes. Women and girls are less able to benefit from the opportunities generated by economic growth. Between 2011 and 2015, DFID improved access to financial services for 35 million women and helped 2.5 million women gain secure land rights. In 2016, the Secretary of State for International Development, Justine Greening, will become a member of the UN Secretary General's recently announced High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment. This will increase global leadership to tackle deep-rooted structural barriers that prevent women and girls from accessing economic opportunities.

Social protection

Social protection is important to help the poorest and most vulnerable meet their basic needs, have more control over their lives, and allow them to take advantage of economic opportunities. DFID supports social protection through 16 of its bilateral country programmes, as well as in countries in the Sahel and Middle East and North Africa regions. By March 2015, more than 9.3 million people had benefited from DFID-supported cash transfers, including 4.9 million girls and women.

[1] See http://www.unicef.org/protection/files/6.1057_DFID_AR_Girl_Summit_Final_web_20072015.pdf for more details on progress made since the summit

CHAPTER II: Human Rights for a Stable World

Introduction

In 2015, the UK sought to tackle the causes of conflict, and to promote more peaceful and inclusive societies, including by strengthening compliance with international norms.

Galvanising international action against violent extremism, and the narratives which sustain it, was a top priority. The barbaric acts of Daesh and other groups led to egregious human rights abuses. Many people were targeted on the basis of their religion or belief, with women and girls particularly at risk. In the Middle East and North Africa region, the international community is starting to appreciate the bellwether qualities of freedom of religion or belief, and associated rights such as freedom of expression and equal opportunity for women; and to assess in that light the unfolding tragedy for the region and the world's original Christian communities. The government has a manifesto pledge to promote freedom of religion or belief, which has a practical contribution to make in the search for peace in the region, and in defence of Christians in the Middle East.

Faced with an unprecedented migration crisis in Europe, the UK worked for a comprehensive solution, condemning all violations and abuses of human rights, promoting a solution to Syria's civil war, resettling refugees to the UK, funding those states supporting refugees in the region, and supporting international monitoring efforts, including the UN's Commission of Inquiry on Syria.

2015 also marked the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. Keeping alive the memories of the holocaust is not only an act of remembrance, but also of re-dedication to the fight against discrimination anywhere in the world. For these and other reasons, 2015 saw increasing focus on the relationship between human rights and conflict prevention, which re-energised our work to prevent sexual violence and extremism, and to protect freedom of religion or belief. In September, the UK pledged to strengthen our commitment to international peacekeeping.

Migration and Refugee Crisis

In 2015, the crisis in Syria led to a dramatic, unsafe and destabilising growth in the number of refugees from the conflict. 3,711 migrants or refugees died attempting to travel to Europe via sea routes.

During the year, the UK more than doubled our support in response to the Syria crisis from £1.12 billion to over £2.3 billion. Since February 2012 to the end of June 2015, our aid in Syria and the region had provided almost 20 million food rations, provided 1.6 million people with access to clean water, 4.6 million people with relief packages, 2.5 million medical consultations, and education to a quarter of a million children.

The Prime Minister's focus was on securing a comprehensive solution to the refugee crisis. He reiterated the need for the EU to deal with the root causes of the crisis, not just respond to the consequences.

In Syria that meant working with the international community to bring about an end to the brutal conflict and to defeat the threat of Daesh in the region. It also meant helping countries to reduce migration push factors, to build stability and create livelihoods, and to go after the criminal gangs and smuggling networks that profit from this human misery.

In September, the Prime Minister announced that the UK would resettle 20,000 of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees over the next five years. This would build on an existing scheme for Syrians designed to support refugees based on their vulnerability. In addition to those 20,000 people the UK pledged to accept from the region, we have partnered with the UN's Refugee Agency, UNHCR, to identify vulnerable child refugees in the region for resettlement to the UK, where it is in the best interests of the child. The Department for International Development (DFID) committed nearly £55 million in humanitarian assistance, of which over £51 million was spent in 2015-16, making the UK the largest bilateral contributor to the humanitarian response. In addition, DFID also committed to establish a £10 million Refugee Children Fund to help support vulnerable children in Europe, including unaccompanied and separated children, and those at risk of being trafficked.

UK funding in 2016 will include new commitments to provide Syrian refugees with jobs and education and support host countries in the region to accommodate them. Richard Harrington MP has been appointed as Minister with specific responsibility for Syrian refugees. He coordinates and delivers work across government to resettle Syrian refugees in the UK, and coordinates the provision of government support to Syrian refugees in the region.

Countering Extremism

The UK government is appalled by the brutal human rights abuses perpetrated by Daesh. Despite suffering a series of significant setbacks in Iraq and Syria at the hands of local forces and the Global Coalition, Daesh continued to commit atrocities throughout 2015.

There were many reports of Daesh carrying out public executions, with civilians, including children, encouraged or forced to attend. Daesh used many abhorrent methods of torture and execution, including immolation, crucifixion, and throwing victims from tall buildings. Bodies were routinely mutilated and put on public display as warnings to the local population. There was also significant evidence of mass executions taking place in Daesh-held areas.



Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond, Haider Al-Abadi, Prime Minister of Iraq and US Secretary of State John Kerry speak to the media following the Counter-ISIL Coalition Small Group Meeting in London, 22 January 2015

The majority of Daesh's victims in Iraq, Syria, Libya and elsewhere were Sunni Muslims. Members of minority groups, such as Christians and Yazidis were also routinely persecuted, including because of their religion or belief, with women and girls being a key target.

Kurds were also targeted by Daesh. In one recorded incident, on 25-27 June, Daesh fighters disguised themselves in Kurdish uniforms in order to infiltrate the town of Kobane in Syria where they proceeded to execute approximately 250 civilians at random, often in their own homes.

The UK will continue to look at every available option to ensure accountability for these crimes, and to work with our international partners on what can be done to assist the victims. In 2015, the UK was at the forefront of efforts to relieve the suffering caused by Daesh and other groups in the region, most notably the Asad regime in Syria, pledging over £1.1 billion in humanitarian aid to the crisis in Syria and the region.

In 2015, the UK played a leading part in a Global Coalition of over 65 countries and international organisations, including many in the region, united to defeat Daesh on all fronts. The UK led UN efforts on sanctions, and worked with the private sector to disrupt supply routes on which Daesh relies for its oil income.

The UK is participating in the coalition's military campaign in Iraq and Syria, which has reversed Daesh's advance, limiting its scope to carry out atrocities. We are also working hard for

a durable political transition in Syria and inclusive government, reconciliation and reform in Iraq, both of which are needed for the comprehensive defeat of Daesh.

The government is committed to tackling the growing threat from extremists, who seek to undermine the values of tolerance upheld by the vast majority of people in our diverse country. In October, the government published its Counter-Extremism Strategy^[19], which aims to defeat all forms of extremism, violent or non-violent. The strategy outlines comprehensive measures in four key areas: countering extremist ideology, building a partnership with all those opposed to extremism, disrupting extremists and building cohesive communities. The strategy is focused on tackling the threat posed by extremism to the UK. But we recognise that the problem is a global one, so will work internationally to reinforce our domestic efforts. In 2016 a key dimension will be support for the UN Secretary General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism.

Counter Terrorism

Security, justice and human rights are mutually reinforcing. Most human rights violations and abuses occur in unstable, conflict-affected countries. Where human rights violations and abuses do occur, redress can only be achieved by effective policing and judicial systems which uphold the rule of law.

[19] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/470088/51859_Cm9148_Accessible.pdf

The UK acts to underpin international security and justice systems in a range of ways. Following attacks such as those in Sousse and Sharm al-Sheikh, British law enforcement officers and security experts deployed to protect the immediate welfare of British citizens and to help the countries which suffered from attacks to investigate and to improve their preventative security. We also offered capacity-building assistance to dozens of countries wishing to improve their security and justice systems.

UK assistance is always intended to improve public safety and respect for human rights. However, it is possible for skills and equipment shared during assistance programmes to be misused. To address this risk, in 2011 the UK published guidance on the provision of UK Overseas Security and Justice Assistance (updated in 2014).

Responsible defence and security exports are essential for our security and prosperity, and underpin long-term relationships with our partners and allies and help deliver wider foreign policy objectives. We remain committed to operating our robust export licensing process to ensure such exports accord with our values. All export licence applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis against the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria (Consolidated Criteria), including whether there is a clear risk the items might be used for internal repression or in the commission of a serious violation of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), or might be used aggressively against another country or to assert by force a territorial claim.

Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB)

The UK is committed to upholding the right to FoRB. Societies which protect this right are more tolerant and ultimately more likely to be prosperous and stable.

The challenge is complex but increasingly urgent. The Prime Minister has described the fight against extremism as “the struggle of our generation”. Communities which teach their children to reject and devalue those who follow a different religion, or who do not have a religious belief, are providing fertile ground for extremist views and behaviours. As the international community works together to combat violent extremism, the importance of tackling its root causes is clear. Absence of FoRB can be one of those root causes. We must work with our international partners to amend laws and change practices that discriminate on grounds of religion or belief. We are looking at FoRB through a new lens, focusing on its contribution to building a more stable world.

In 2015, we continued to champion the right to FoRB through the multilateral system. In the UN we played an active part in ensuring that the EU resolution on FoRB and the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation (OIC) resolution on combating religious intolerance were both adopted by consensus.

We also contributed to the Canadian-led International Contact Group on FoRB, which was formally launched in Brussels in June. We maintained a high profile for the issue in the EU, agreeing a guidance note to help EU Delegations and Member State Embassies implement the EU’s guidelines on FoRB. We assisted a meeting of the International

Panel of Parliamentarians in September at the UN General Assembly (UNGA), with the participation of more than 100 parliamentarians from across the world. Initiatives such as these strengthen the resolve of the international community to act on FoRB, sharing information on individual cases, and coordinating responses.

In March, FCO Minister for the Middle East, Tobias Ellwood, took part in a French-led UN session on religious minorities in the Middle East. During the debate, Mr Ellwood called for bold leadership from governments and communities in the region to promote tolerance and reconciliation. Mr Ellwood and FCO Minister for Human Rights, Baroness Anelay, also held a brainstorming meeting with UK NGOs in November to consider what more could be done to help Christians and other persecuted minorities in the Middle East.

We raised individual cases of persecution. In Burma, we voiced our concern at the situation of the Rohingya community with members of the Burmese government. FCO Minister for Asia, Hugo Swire, discussed this directly with the then Rakhine State Chief Minister, General Maung Maung Ohn, when he visited Rakhine in July. Mr Swire also raised this issue with the then Burmese Foreign Minister, Wunna Maung Lwin, in September.

We regularly raise our concerns about FoRB in China. We did so in detail during the UK-China Human Rights Dialogue in April, and continue to do so as part of our broader relationship.

We repeatedly lobbied the Iranian authorities about the incarceration of seven Baha’i leaders in Iran and have spoken up about their shocking sentencing to 20 years’ imprisonment on charges of espionage, “propaganda against the regime”, “collusion and collaboration for the purpose of endangering the national security”, and “spreading corruption on earth”. As we made clear in public statements, it is appalling that the Iranian justice system reinstated this original sentence after acquitting the leaders of several charges.

We were very concerned by reports of persecution of Christians in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. Through our policy of critical engagement with North Korea we regularly raised our concerns about human rights abuses, including FoRB.

The Foreign Secretary and FCO Ministers pressed Pakistan a number of times throughout the year on religious freedom and human rights, including the treatment of the Ahmadiyya community.

The FCO supported projects designed to tackle discriminatory legislation and attitudes. We worked with human rights and faith-based organisations to promote dialogue, build capacity, foster links and strengthen mutual understanding within societies. For example, we funded the NGO Christian Solidarity Worldwide to create a network of human rights activists working on FoRB in South Asia. It was encouraging to see the way that people of different faiths came together to support each other. They developed a web-based platform to share information, and some members of the network invited others to visit them to share best practice. As a result of activism by the group, the UN Special Rapporteur on FoRB was able to visit India.

We supported a project run by Religion News Service encouraging responsible journalism in Burma. It led to articles on themes seldom covered by the local media, and to a marked reduction in the use of emotive language, omissions caused by bias, stereotypical imagery, and other shortcomings that had stoked inter-communal tensions in the past.

Other projects have included one delivered by the Indonesia Legal Aid Institute to strengthen the capacity of advocates in Indonesia to protect the right to FoRB in their caseloads; and another, run by Hardwired, to inspire and equip key civil society leaders in Iraq to become articulate defenders of FoRB. As part of this project, an innovative four-day training course was conducted in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region for 20 civil society leaders, including teachers, religious leaders, journalists, and advocates, on the principles of FoRB. Participants came from diverse political and religious backgrounds, including Christians, Yazidis, and prominent members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Several participants commented that this was the first time they had ever discussed sensitive religious issues on a training course, especially with members of other religions. While participants exhibited initial discomfort with the topic and one another, by the end plans were in place to work together.

In 2015, we continued to increase religious literacy training amongst staff from the FCO and other government departments through regular courses on religion and foreign policy, and a series of seminars with high-profile experts. Among the most prominent speakers were the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Grand Imam of Al Azhar. FCO's rapidly evolving Diplomatic Academy includes an online foundation-level module on religious literacy. Equipping our diplomats with a greater understanding of the key role faith plays in global politics helps us to make better policy judgements.

In 2016, a key focus will be support for the UN Secretary General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism. We will encourage countries to develop action plans which include actions to promote FoRB as one way of tackling the root causes of extremism.

Post-Holocaust Issues

The government supports international efforts to ensure that the lessons of the Holocaust are learned, including by future generations. We play an active part in the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA); and in the International Commission which ensures that millions of records from the Second World War concentration and displaced persons camps are accessible to scholars and the public, through the International Tracing Service (ITS).

In September Sir Eric Pickles succeeded Sir Andrew Burns as the UK Envoy for Post-Holocaust Issues. Sir Andrew had spent five extremely productive years in the post, placing the UK at the forefront of international activity in the field. Sir Eric has four priorities: drawing greater attention to the "killing sites", where more victims of the Holocaust died than in concentration camps; focusing on the role of bystanders – to prompt today's generation to reflect on what we would have done in their place; the return of stolen property; and opening up some of the still-closed archives relating to the Holocaust.

As Head of the UK Delegation to IHRA, Sir Eric led the delegation to its meeting in Debrecen, Hungary, in November. Partly as a result of international pressure, including by Sir Eric and others in the margins of that meeting, the municipality of the western Hungarian city of Székesfehérvár withdrew its support for a project to erect a statue of a wartime antisemitic politician, Bálint Hóman. Joint lobbying by IHRA Heads of Delegation was also effective in ensuring that the EU's new General Data Protection Regulation will contain a specific exemption for historical data relating to the Holocaust.

Before stepping down, Sir Andrew took a leading role in the recruitment of a new Director for the ITS. We were delighted to welcome the appointment of Floriane Hohenberg to this post. We also pay tribute to the work of the Wiener Library, holder of the UK copy of the ITS archive. Sir Eric is actively involved in the government's work to strengthen international co-operation against antisemitism. We strongly welcomed the European Commission's decision to create the position of Coordinator on Combating Antisemitism, and the appointment of Katharina von Schnurbein to the post. The government played an active part in the Global Forum to Combat Antisemitism, held in Jerusalem in May.

Looking ahead, we will press for further restitution of property stolen by the Nazis and their allies, and support the IHRA in its focus on practical outcomes and the ITS in its drive to put as many as possible of its collections online. We will work closely with other countries' Envoys for Post-Holocaust Issues to promote a stronger international voice on this theme. We will ensure that the Holocaust is not seen solely as an historical fact, but also as a profound lesson about the danger of letting prejudice run unchecked, which can help us guard against intolerance and future genocides.

Death Penalty and Torture Prevention

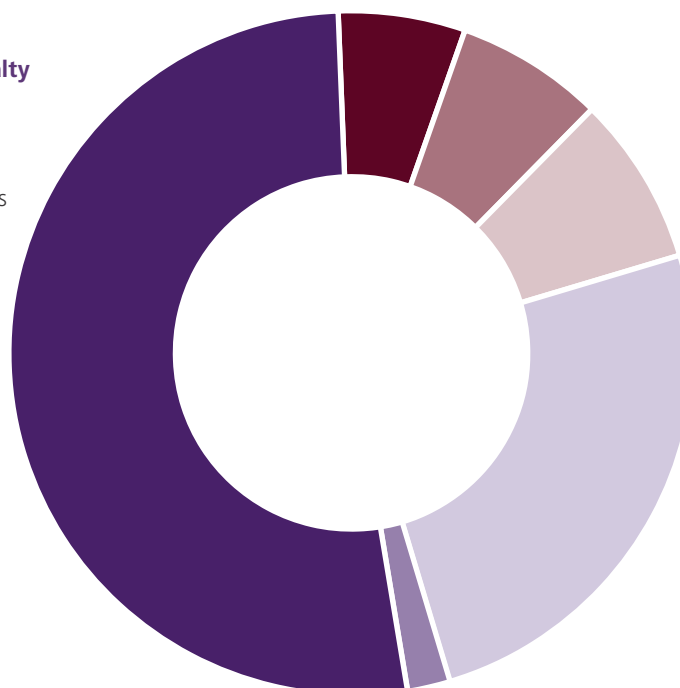
The UK supports global abolition of the death penalty; as a first step to achieving that, we call for a moratorium in the use of this outdated, cruel, unfair and ineffective punishment. To this end, the FCO funded 14 projects costing over £540,000 in 2015. British diplomats in retentionist countries sought to persuade their host governments to join the move towards global abolition of the death penalty.

It was disappointing that a small number of countries made increased use of the death penalty in 2015. Amnesty International reported a 54% year-on-year increase in the number of reported executions; and that 25 carried out at least one execution.

China remains responsible for the large majority of the world's executions. It is a source of great concern that these are carried out in secret and that it is not possible to confirm the exact number of people executed. However, there are signs of progress. In August, the National People's Congress resolved to reduce the number of crimes punishable by death from 55 to 46. We believe that the number of executions carried out annually has fallen by more than half over the last decade. Three other countries – Iran, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia – were responsible for 89% of all recorded executions in 2015. The 320 people executed in Pakistan may have been the

More than 75% of States have now abolished the Death Penalty

- Entirely abolished the death penalty (52%)
- Abolished for all ordinary crimes (2%)
- De facto abolitionist—no execution for ten years (25%)

**Countries that executed more than 10 people in 2015**

(in descending order of estimated number of executions): China, Iran, Pakistan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the United States, North Korea, Egypt, Somalia and Chad.

- More than 10 executions in 2015 (6%)
- Fewer than 10 executions in 2015 (7%)
- Executed in last 10 years, but not in 2015 (8%)

Source: *The Death Penalty Project*

highest number in Pakistani history. It was also disappointing that Egypt and Somalia executed more people than in 2014 and that Chad carried out executions, ending an informal moratorium that had lasted some years.

However, despite negative developments in a small number of countries, 2015 also confirmed the long-term movement towards abolition of the death penalty. Many countries took decisive steps away from use of the death penalty, which is now used intensively by only a small rump of states.

Madagascar, Fiji, Suriname and Congo took legal steps to abolish the death penalty in 2015 and in December the Mongolian Parliament voted to abolish it. South America has long been an almost exclusively abolitionist continent, but Africa has recently seen considerable improvement. 17 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have abolished the death penalty for all crimes; a further 20 states have not carried out an execution for 10 years. In July 2015, Zambian President Edgar Lungu commuted the sentences of the country's 332 death row prisoners to life imprisonment, while Ghanaian President John Mahama commuted 14 death sentences to mark the 55th Ghanaian Republic Day anniversary. Togo ratified the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights – on the abolition of the death penalty – in 2015.

In the United States, Nebraska abolished the death penalty in 2015, while Oregon, Pennsylvania and Washington State established moratoria.

Several countries which faced terrorist attacks, including Tunisia, exercised restraint on the use of the death penalty in 2015. In Jordan the barbaric killing of Muath al-Kasasbeh led to the execution of two prisoners in February, but no executions have been carried out since.

To mark World Day against the Death Penalty in October 2015, the FCO hosted a debate on the relationship between Sharia

and the death penalty at which Muslim scholars pointed out that the Koran rarely requires a death sentence and that, when it does, evidence standards must be high and provisions must be made for merciful commutation.

The UK will work with international partners to maximise the number of votes for a moratorium on use of the death penalty at the UNGA in December 2016.

"We condemn and do not support the death penalty in any circumstances and that includes Saudi Arabia. We always make representations on the death penalty".

Prime Minister David Cameron

Consular work and the death penalty

Twelve British nationals faced the death penalty, globally, at the end of 2015. The UK objects to the use of the death penalty in all circumstances and uses appropriate interventions to prevent the execution of any British national. We intervene at whatever stage and level is deemed most effective from the moment a death sentence becomes a possibility. We lobby at senior political level when necessary, and made representations on behalf of British nationals in a number of countries, including Indonesia, Pakistan, Egypt and the United States. We work closely with legal teams employed by British nationals facing the death penalty and are supported in this endeavour by two NGOs: Reprieve and the Death Penalty Project (DPP). In 2016 we will continue to intervene in death penalty cases as and where necessary.

Torture

We are concerned that torture or other ill treatment – a practice prohibited under all circumstances – continues to blight the criminal justice systems of many states.

The illegality of torture means that its use is covert and denied, making its effect on the rule of law particularly corrosive.



Baroness Anelay meeting UN Special Envoy Angelina Jolie Pitt and Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission in London, 26 June 2015

Worldwide, there were some encouraging developments in 2015. Brunei signed the Convention against Torture. South Sudan and Vietnam ratified it. Belize, Mauritania, Mongolia, Rwanda and South Sudan took the more advanced step of ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention, committing those countries to establish an effective national mechanism to prevent torture.

The FCO spent over £600,000 funding a wide range of torture prevention projects in 2015 and will fund more in 2016 using the Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy. FCO project work in 2015 focused on two main goals: supporting regional efforts to prevent torture in Africa, and combating torture through effective prohibition, criminalisation and prevention in future role model states. For example, the Human Rights and Democracy Programme (HRDP) funded the NGO Redress to work with the Committee for the Prevention of Torture in Africa to strengthen anti-torture legal frameworks in seven target countries. In Rwanda, we funded a project to help establish an National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) that can effectively monitor detention facilities throughout the country and prevent torture.

In September, the FCO hosted an event to launch the FCO-funded second edition of Essex University's "The Torture Reporting Handbook"^[20], a guide for all those tasked with investigating and documenting instances of torture with a view to gaining redress.

[20] <http://www.essex.ac.uk/hrc/documents/practice/torture-reporting-handbook-second-edition.pdf>

In November, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons participated in a high-level workshop in Abuja. Sharing British experience could be helpful to Nigeria as it implements measures under its obligations as a state party to the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture (OPCAT).

Building effective torture prevention systems will remain a focus of British diplomacy. Our key goal is for states to establish NPMs as part of ratification and full implementation of the OPCAT. The UK will work with international partners, particularly Denmark, to mark the 10th anniversary of the OPCAT coming into force on 22 June 2016. We will use that milestone to share the British experience of establishing a NPM and to promote further state ratifications and signatures of the Protocol.

Consular work and torture

In 2015 we provided torture and mistreatment awareness workshops to help our staff take appropriate action in high-risk countries. We also launched a torture and mistreatment awareness e-learning programme for consular staff worldwide.

Overseas prisoners

At the end of September 2015, we were aware of 2,003 British prisoners detained overseas. Of these, drug offences account for 36% of cases and child sex offences for 8% – a slight increase in each from 2014. 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, regardless of the crime with which they have been charged. In certain exceptional circumstances, we can help dual nationals in the country of their second nationality and nationals of other European and Commonwealth countries.

In line with our consular policy, we aim to contact British detainees within 24 hours of being notified of their arrest or detention. Depending on the individual, country, and local circumstances in which they are detained, we will also seek to visit them as soon as possible afterwards. Our primary role is to monitor their welfare and to provide basic information about the local legal and penal system, including a list of English-speaking lawyers and interpreters, and the availability of legal aid.

We continue to support the welfare of British detainees overseas in close partnership with Prisoners Abroad. This UK charity offers grants and vitamin supplements to improve the health and well-being of prisoners held overseas, and provides resettlement assistance on return to the UK. We work with Prisoners Abroad on over 1,000 cases a year, particularly those of prisoners with medical concerns.

Conflict

Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative (PSVI)

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is a feature of many conflicts, frequently affecting those with least recourse to support and justice mechanisms. It exacerbates conflicts and – if its consequences are not dealt with as a key part of peacebuilding processes – hinders community reconciliation.

PSVI was launched in 2012 to tackle this problem and, in 2014, we convened the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict. In June 2015, Baroness Anelay was appointed the

Prime Minister's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict. Since her appointment, she has met survivors in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Iraq; announced the translation of the International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation into Sexual Violence in Conflict into six languages (including Kurdish, Lingala and Albanian); and initiated new projects supported by the HRDP in a range of conflict-affected countries.

The government continued to pursue the objectives established at the launch of the Initiative. Highlights included:

- (1) *To address the culture of impunity that exists for these crimes.*
 - In Syria, we deployed members of the PSVI Team of Experts to support the training of health professionals and human rights defenders in collecting and preserving evidence of human rights abuses, including sexual violence, for future prosecutions.
 - In Bosnia and Herzegovina, we supported the NGO Medica Zenica through the HRDP. Medica Zenica provided assistance to survivors of sexual violence seeking damages from the state. In August, the Cantonal Court in Zenica granted "civil war victim" status to a male survivor of sexual violence for the first time. Medica Zenica supported him throughout his case.
- (2) *To increase the number of perpetrators held to account.*
 - In Colombia, we supported a project to create a network made up of women survivors of sexual violence and support professionals across five regions (Putumayo, Nariño, Bolívar, Cesar and Meta). The network is providing assistance to survivors seeking justice and promoting their leadership in prevention programmes.

Implementing the International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict

Since its launch at the 2014 Global Summit to End Sexual Violence, HRDP funds have supported training on and use of the International Protocol in a number of conflict-affected countries. In the DRC we have supported the NGO TRIAL to:



train 50 beneficiaries

(local policemen, lawyers and human rights defenders) on the International Protocol



undertake 20 documentation missions to gather evidence on sexual violence cases



submit 18 sexual violence cases to justice on behalf of a total of 132 survivors



as a result, 4 criminal trials against perpetrators of sexual violence crimes opened in South Kivu province

- In Bosnia and Herzegovina, we supported the NGO “TRIAL” in legal work through the HRDP. In June, TRIAL secured a landmark ruling. A former Bosnian-Serb soldier was sentenced to eight years in prison and ordered to pay more than £10,000 to the woman he raped in 1993. This has opened the way for thousands of survivors in Bosnia to claim compensation.

(3) To ensure better support for survivors.

- In Syria, we funded the National Democratic Institute to train human rights activists. Since June, these activists have led discussions with over 1,000 Syrian women and men on the topic of preventing sexual violence and supporting survivors.
- In the DRC, we continued to support an initiative by the NGO Tearfund to support survivors of sexual violence. Through this project, more than 200 survivors have come forward to receive counselling, and 75 faith leaders have been trained on sexual violence and the needs of survivors.
- Baroness Anelay visited Kosovo in July, where she announced that the Kosovo Centre for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Torture and its partners would receive funding of £80,000 for their work with survivors of sexual violence.

PSVI priorities in 2016

In 2016, the FCO will work with like-minded countries, multilateral organisations, NGOs, and other UK government departments to:

1. Challenge traditional attitudes to sexual violence in conflict and work to end the stigma suffered by survivors.
2. Improve how security forces around the world prevent and respond to these crimes and abuses, including through supporting the Ministry of Defence’s work in this area.
3. Deliver justice for survivors, including better access to healthcare, psychosocial support, and livelihood programmes.

Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC)

The UK continued to play a role on the UN Working Group on CAAC, which leads the international response to the issue of child soldiers and child protection. This included pressing those countries listed in the UN Secretary-General’s (UNSG) annual report on CAAC to agree concrete Action Plans with the UN to verify and release any child soldiers associated with armed groups and forces. We also pushed for the inclusion of child protection in peacekeeping responses through UN mandate renewals and resolutions. We continued to support the campaign of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) to end the recruitment and use of children by government armed forces in conflict and provided funding to support her work on implementation of the UN Action Plans, including technical missions to monitor violations committed against children. Following a visit from the SRSG in July, the government of Burma signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in September 2015. In the same month, the government of the DRC endorsed

a roadmap to accelerate the implementation of their Action Plan, following a workshop held in Kinshasa a month earlier, in which the Office of the SRSG participated.

UN Peacekeeping and Human Rights

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 that they produce, often leave civilian populations vulnerable to human rights violations and abuses. Peacekeeping missions contribute to reducing that threat, and protection of civilians is at the heart of their objectives. All new UN peacekeeping missions since 1999 have had a protection of civilians element in their mandate, and for some it is the primary goal.

The UK contributes strongly to both the policy and the delivery of peacekeeping. The recently published Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) made clear that “the UK will continue to champion reform to increase the efficiency and impact of UN engagement”.

In 2015 the UN published the High Level Independent Panel on Peacekeeping Operations review on UN peacekeeping. The UK was a major contributor to the review, pushing to make peacekeeping missions quicker, more tailored to their environments, and more willing and capable to protect civilians effectively. In 2016 the UK will work with UN partners to implement the recommendations of the review and realise those changes.

The UK has always been a significant financial supporter of peacekeeping, and is currently the fifth largest contributor to the UN peacekeeping budget. During 2015 the UK deepened its operational involvement. On 28 September the United States hosted a UN Peacekeeping Summit, at which the UK pledged to double its military contribution to peacekeeping. In 2016 the UK will send up to 70 troops to Somalia (UNSOS) and several hundred troops to South Sudan (UNMISS). Both missions have a strong focus on the protection of civilians. The UK will hold a further conference in London in 2016 to follow up the pledges made in the United States and drive forward the process of turning those commitments into action.

Peacebuilding

Human rights violations are both symptoms and among the causes of violent conflict. Peacebuilding encompasses activities designed to consolidate peaceful relations and strengthen political, socio-economic, and security institutions capable of handling conflict, in order to lay the foundation for sustainable peace and development in the longer term. This is fundamental to the UK’s national security objectives, and integral to the promotion of rule of law, good governance and human rights.

The UK pursues several peacebuilding goals through the UN, which play a key role in addressing post-conflict challenges. The UK is committed to encouraging a more coordinated approach to peacebuilding throughout the UN, supporting efforts to strengthen the UN’s involvement in conflict prevention. This includes working to support

the UN peacebuilding architecture and the UN's political, humanitarian, security and development tools so that they can work together more effectively. During 2015, a review of the UN's peacebuilding institutions took place. We remain engaged in the process to decide the UN's response to the recommendations and use them to strengthen its peacebuilding function.

The UN's primary tools for delivering peacebuilding activities in conflict-affected states are Special Political Missions (SPMs) and its Peacebuilding Fund (PBF). The UK takes a strategic approach to SPMs, including evaluating their mandates, leadership and resourcing. Human rights are at the heart of their activities. In 2015, the UK provided £8 million to the Peacebuilding Fund, supporting projects in a wide range of countries. In Central African Republic, the PBF helped maintain a police presence during a tense moment in the peace process by paying salary costs, and played a part in demobilising hundreds of former fighters. In Somalia, the PBF contributed to a stabilisation strategy that is establishing interim administrations and delivering security and services in 25 newly recovered districts. In Sierra Leone an existing PBF-funded security sector reform project was rapidly refocused to provide human rights and civilian relations training at Ebola checkpoints. In Liberia, a PBF-supported land disputes resolution mechanism has built good community trust, resolving 200 cases last year.

The UK's SDSR pledged support to civilian UN policing. During 2015, the UK maintained its contingent of police officers in the UN's mission in South Sudan, developing trust between communities and the police. We also supported the development of the Liberian National Police through a secondment to the UN's mission. British expertise is strengthening the national police service's capacity to respond to major incidents and crises.

In 2016 we will continue to support the UN's peacebuilding institutions in their efforts to help countries emerging from conflict to progress towards sustainable peace. The PBF will continue to target its efforts in around 20 countries. It will continue to commit funding to Somalia to help establish interim regional authorities, and it will help establish a national dialogue in South Sudan. We will provide financial support, and use our political influence to encourage effective co-ordination between the peacebuilding architecture and other parts of the UN. We will continue police support to UN peacekeeping missions in South Sudan and Liberia, and look for opportunities to deploy police officers and experts to other countries affected by conflict.

Responsibility to Protect, and Mass Atrocity Prevention

In 2015, the UK continued its support for the principle of the Responsibility to Protect, and mass atrocity prevention more widely. We continued to provide funding for the UN's Joint Office of The Special Adviser on The Prevention of Genocide and the Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect, alongside support to the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. The UK pledged its support to the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group's Code

of Conduct regarding UNSC action against genocide, crimes against humanity, or war crimes. We continued to support programmes in regions at risk of, or suffering from, mass atrocities, focusing on improving governance, promotion of tolerance and moderate religious voices, and reducing support for violent extremism, aiming to prevent escalation of violence and build tolerance in societies.

Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA)

The UK fully supports the UNSG's zero tolerance policy towards SEA against civilians in peacekeeping missions, and tackling this is a priority for the UK. Peacekeeping is part of the solution to preventing and responding to sexual violence in conflict, so it is all the more appalling when it is seen, instead, to abuse or attack those it is deployed to protect. This tarnishes both the reputation of peacekeepers and the credibility of the UN.

We are pleased to see a number of detailed initiatives by the UNSG to help prevent SEA, and to strengthen accountability when abuses have taken place. We welcome the adoption of UNSC Resolution 2272 (2016) supporting these initiatives. In 2016, the UK will be working closely with the UN to help the UNSG implement these initiatives.

Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights (VPs)

Throughout 2015, the UK continued to be a strong supporter of the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights (VPs)^[21]. The UK's one-year Chairmanship of the VPs^[22] concluded in March 2015. At the closing Plenary in London, we took the opportunity to promote the benefits of the VPs among invited governments, discuss security and human rights challenges, and encourage members to peer review each other's performance. Since March, the UK has remained active via a role on the Steering Committee. This has enabled us to support the implementation of initiatives agreed under our Chairmanship, such as more frequent peer reviews of company and government activity in complex environments. We have also supported the further development of the guidance for the Voluntary Principles Initiative, and have played a leading role supporting national implementation and conducting outreach in priority countries including Kenya, Tanzania, Angola and Guinea. UK-led projects in 2015 include hosting VP events at Mining Indaba in South Africa, and funding a project on implementing the VPs in Lunda Norte, Angola, through the HRDP.

In 2016, our work on outreach will continue as we aim to increase awareness, understanding and implementation of the VPs.

Private Security Companies (PSCs)

Legitimate PSCs working to high standards play a vital role in the protection of businesses, NGOs and diplomatic missions

[21] <http://www.voluntaryprinciples.org/>

[22] <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-concludes-chairmanship-of-global-business-best-practice-initiative>

working in complex and dangerous environments around the world. However, the nature of their work makes it essential that PSCs manage and mitigate any negative impact their work has on local communities and conflicts. The UK is a signatory to the Montreux Document on private military and security companies, which defines how international law applies to the activities of private military and security companies when they are operating in an armed conflict zone.

In 2015, our objective was to ensure that the standards respect human rights and can be implemented by PSCs. Internationally, we continued to advocate the benefits of PSCs pursuing certification to a standard via membership of the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Providers Association (ICoCA)^[23]. As members of the Board of ICoCA in 2015, we assisted the development of gap analysis between the industry standard PSC-1 for land-based PSCs and ISO 28007 for maritime PSCs. In the UK, we have worked closely with our industry partner, the Security in Complex Environments Group (SCEG)^[24], and with civil society, to develop the international process to consider revisions of the relevant standards, including ISO 18788 standard for land-based PSCs. This work contributed to the publication of ISO 28007 standard in April 2015, and of ISO 18788 in November 2015. We also continued to work with United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS), facilitating contributions from industry and civil society expertise, to ensure that UKAS Guidance for Certification Bodies certifying against ISO 28007, published in November, correctly interpreted the human rights aspects of the standard.

In 2016, our focus will be working with ICoCA and its government, companies and civil society partners, to develop its certification, monitoring and grievance processes. We will also continue to work with UKAS on their guidance on the implementation of ISO18788.

Responsible sourcing of minerals

As high value-added products, minerals can provide a source of funding for armed groups and, where funds are diverted from legitimate local producers, can harm local communities who should expect to benefit from a valuable economic resource. In 2015, the UK continued to address both issues through The Kimberley Process (KP)^[25] Certification Scheme for trade in rough diamonds, and by encouraging better corporate due diligence on supply chains for minerals.

The Government Diamond Office (GDO), based in the FCO, and the UK Border Force are responsible for implementing the requirements of the KP and preventing illicit diamonds entering or leaving the UK. In September, the UK hosted a visit by a KP Peer Review team, as part of a KP audit of the EU's compliance with KP standards. This review allowed us to demonstrate how the GDO implements the KP in the UK via company audits, advice to traders, and handling seizures of illegal goods.

Effective due diligence by companies buying minerals which may originate from conflict-affected areas complements the diamond-specific work of governments in the KP. In 2015, we

continued to support and encourage relevant UK importers to carry out full and transparent due diligence based on OECD Due Diligence Guidance^[26] for Responsible Supply Chains of Minerals from Conflict-Affected and High-Risk Areas. This provides specific guidance on gold and tin, tungsten and tantalum, all of which are used in consumer electronics. We also supported significant progress in the negotiations between EU Member States towards agreement on the EU Regulation^[27] on the responsible sourcing of minerals, which aims to encourage EU importers of minerals to carry out due diligence on their supply chains. We will continue our active role as negotiations towards a final regulation continue in 2016

[23] http://www.icoca.ch/en/the_icoc

[24] <http://www.scegu.org.uk/>

[25] <http://www.kimberleyprocess.com/>

[26] <http://www.oecd.org/corporate/mne/GuidanceEdition2.pdf>

[27] http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2014/march/tradoc_152227.pdf

CHAPTER III – Strengthening the Rules Based International System

Introduction

The UK's 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) made clear that our long-term security and prosperity benefit from membership of a stable international system that reflects our values. Throughout 2015, the UK championed universal rights through the multilateral system, supported countries in transition, promoted ratification and implementation of core human rights treaties, and called for those states and non-state actors who violated international law to be held to account. Through our membership of organisations such as the UN, the EU, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe (CoE) and the Commonwealth, the UK is committed to ensuring that the benefits of the rules-based international system are extended to all.

The United Nations

In 2015, the UN celebrated its 70th anniversary. The UN emerged from the ashes of WWII bearing hope of a better world. Much has been achieved by the UN and its member states over the past seventy years, including establishing the tenets of international human rights law and promoting compliance with international humanitarian law by all parties to armed conflict. While the UN has its own challenges, it has never been more relevant than today, including in the area of human rights.

The UN is key to the UK's objectives on human rights. It provides a forum for the development of internationally agreed standards on human rights and technical support for their implementation, and for international scrutiny of country situations and dialogue between states on the major issues of our day. The main intergovernmental forum on human rights is the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council (HRC), of which the UK is currently a voting member, giving considerable importance to the human rights work of our Permanent Representative. Other UN fora central to UK human rights priorities include the UN General Assembly (UNGA) Third Committee and the UN Security Council (UNSC), which needs to be able to consider whether human rights crises are a threat to international peace and security. Over the course of 2015, the UK was pleased to support increasing dialogue on human rights at the UNSC, with the High Commissioner and Assistant-Secretary General for Human Rights briefing the Council on numerous issues.

The UK 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 country or thematic issues), as well as the UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and its field

presences. All these mechanisms help ensure that political commitments translate into action on the ground.

In 2015, the UK maintained its financial support for the UN's human rights institutions, providing, through DFID, £2.5 million to the OHCHR on top of our usual contribution via the UN Regular Budget. We provided approximately a further £1 million to support OHCHR projects and field work around the world. OHCHR is included in DFID's Multilateral Aid Review, which assesses the performance of the UK's multilateral partners.

Country issues

On 1 October, the HRC adopted, by consensus, the UK/ United States-led resolution on "promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka". This was a historic moment for Sri Lanka and the HRC, turning the page after years of international confrontation. The investigation of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights was mandated by a hard-won vote at the HRC in March 2014, following a global lobbying campaign led by the Prime Minister. It described many appalling violations and abuses committed by both sides during and after the Sri Lankan civil war. Many of its recommendations are reflected in the 2015 resolution which focuses on measures for accountability for past violations and further steps on reconciliation. This consensual UN outcome on Sri Lanka in 2015 has provided a framework for an important Commonwealth partner to rebuild peace and prosperity, which was the Prime Minister's vision from the 2013 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). It also demonstrates where collective international focus and ministerial engagement can promote change.

The UK continued to lead action on Syria at the HRC. We successfully renewed the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry (COI), the only UN body collecting evidence on human rights violations and abuses in Syria. This series of resolutions also: called for full accountability for crimes committed and unhindered humanitarian assistance; condemned the regime's use of barrel bombs and aerial bombardment and abuses by Daesh; gave support to the political track; and included new language on assisting Syrian refugees. In February and November, the UK hosted Arria-formula (informal) meetings of the UNSC with the COI so that Council Members could be briefed on their latest findings.

Following a COI report on the appalling human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), the UK, as part of the EU, in partnership with Japan, led resolutions at the HRC and the Third Committee to maintain pressure on DPRK. The resolutions contained strong calls for accountability and consideration of referral of the situation to the International Criminal Court (ICC), to maintain momentum and international focus after the COI report. These resolutions

were supplemented by a panel discussion on human rights at the September HRC, and a tabled discussion at the UNSC in December on the human rights situation, where the UK made a strong statement condemning DPRK regime actions.

In March, the HRC voted to renew the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Iran for 12 months. The more detailed text on Iran in UNGA Third Committee set out numerous human rights concerns, including the use of the death penalty and harassment of journalists. The vote count in both cases was tight, as success on the nuclear deal affected the willingness of some states to make a stand on human rights.

As part of the EU, the UK agreed strong consensual resolutions on the human rights situation in Burma in both the HRC and the Third Committee. Both were negotiated in close co-operation with Burma and included concerns about the Rohingya in Rakhine State and other minorities, whilst also recognising the efforts to bring about reforms in some areas. The HRC resolution renewed the mandate of the Special Rapporteur for a further year and urged Burma to establish an OHCHR country office with a full mandate. Additionally, at the UK's request, the UNSC continued to follow developments in Burma, including the human rights situation. This included four briefings in 2015 by the UN Secretary-General's (UNSG) Special Adviser on Myanmar, at which OHCHR representatives were also present.

There was international action on Ukraine in all three sessions of the HRC. In March, the UK made a joint statement with 41 other states raising concerns about abuses by Russian-backed armed groups in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. This was followed in June by the Ukrainian-led resolution on technical assistance to Ukraine. This set up a quarterly discussion on UN human rights reporting in Ukraine, which has since documented Russian military involvement in the conflict, as well as serious violations in Crimea and abuses by separatist

groups in Eastern Ukraine. In September, an interactive dialogue on Ukraine showed Russia to be isolated, with many states speaking out about abuses by separatists in the east, and Russia's continuing supply of weapons and fighters. The UK joined 35 other countries in a statement on the human rights situation in Crimea during the Third Committee session in October.

In March, the UK worked closely with the Libyan government and the African Group to agree a strong, consensual resolution, which established a UN mission to investigate violations and abuses of human rights in Libya and report back to the HRC on how to ensure accountability. The OHCHR mission deployed quickly and effectively, and is now complementing the work of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL). The HRC discussion on Libya provided an opportunity to demonstrate wide support for the political dialogue and the need for accountability to ensure sustainable peace.

In June, the UK's priorities on Sudan (access for the Independent Expert to the conflict areas, and language on the need for accountability and reform of national security legislation) were secured in a United States-negotiated resolution. In September, the UK played a leading role in securing a step change in the HRC's response to South Sudan, despite significant resistance from the country and its allies. A strong consensual resolution expressed deep concern at the situation, called for accountability, and asked the High Commissioner to send a mission to undertake a comprehensive assessment. The inclusion of benchmarks against which the government will be assessed will enable the international community to increase pressure for change, and has laid the foundation for any future HRC action.

The HRC agreed a resolution on Yemen in September 2015, which the UK supported. This resolution tasked the UN to report on human rights violations and abuses and to offer assistance to Yemen to improve its human rights record.

UK candidacy for the UN Human Rights Council (HRC)

On the eve of Human Rights Day (10 December), the UK formally launched its re-election campaign to the HRC for 2017-19. Our pledges are based on UK priorities at home and abroad, and where we assess we can use our membership to make progress internationally:

- strengthening the protection of human rights in the UN's work**, including by: encouraging a fast international response to severe human rights violations and abuses, including in support of conflict prevention; helping states through transition by supporting stability and reform efforts on the ground; and supporting a strong and independent UN human rights system;
- translating the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development into action that leaves no one behind**, including by: helping women and girls achieve voice, choice and control in development (goal 5); tackling the scourge of modern slavery across borders (goal 8.7); and supporting work on justice, rule of law and open societies (goal 16);
- making a stand for freedom of religion or belief**, including by: defending the freedom of people of all religions and beliefs to live without discrimination and violence; supporting persecuted Christians and other minorities in the Middle East; and advocating in favour of equality and non-discrimination, including on the grounds that freedom of religion or belief can help to counter violent extremism;
- working to end violence against women and to promote their full participation and leadership in political and economic life**, including by: tackling violence against women and girls, including sexual violence in conflict, and all forms of domestic violence and harmful practices, including during humanitarian crises; promoting women's economic empowerment and the representation of women in political and public life, especially in leadership positions; and challenging discriminatory laws and practices;
- working to promote open societies and challenge threats to civil society**, including by: promoting open societies, which are inclusive and just; working to expand civil society engagement with international organisations including the HRC; and harnessing the Universal Periodic Review process to strengthen safeguards for civil society in the states under review.

The UK played a prominent role in renewing UN mandates for a number of other countries: Special Rapporteurs on Belarus, Cambodia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC); Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea; Independent Experts on Somalia, Cote d'Ivoire and Central African Republic (CAR); and OHCHR monitoring of Burundi. The UK also supported a cross-regional statement on the human rights situation in Bahrain in September 2015, and we raised our concerns on a range of other country and thematic situations through our national statements.

The HRC met for two Special Sessions in 2015, on Boko Haram and Burundi.

Thematic issues

In 2015, the UK continued to participate in discussions across the breadth of thematic issues considered by the HRC and Third Committee.

The UK worked to ensure consensual outcomes were reached on the two resolutions concerning religious freedom at the HRC and Third Committee: Freedom of Religion or Belief (led by the EU) and Combating Intolerance (led by the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation). The focus of the EU's text was to protect the right to freedom of religion of belief, whilst noting the rise in religious extremism and condemning all violence in the name of religion.

The issue of migration was prominent throughout 2015. A special debate in the HRC on 15 June focused on the crises in the Mediterranean and South East Asia. The HRC adopted two resolutions by consensus on the situation of migrants in transit and unaccompanied minors. The UK also supported the UN's wider efforts to tackle the Syrian refugee crisis, including through our support to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, where the UK remains the second biggest donor, as well as supporting host communities in Jordan and Lebanon through the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and other agencies.

The UK strongly supported a Canadian-led resolution on violence against women focused on ending domestic violence – a first for the HRC. It contained ground-breaking references to intimate partner violence, marital rape and comprehensive education on sexuality, which were challenged by a vote but retained. The HRC also adopted a strong, action-oriented, consensus resolution on ending discrimination against women in cultural and family life. We will continue to promote consensus on sensitive issues in UN fora; but also to support voted action where necessary.

The UK and a large cross-regional group of states successfully led the first substantive HRC resolution on Child and Early Forced Marriage (CEFM), adopted by consensus. The text encourages states to take concrete steps to prevent an eliminate CEFM. It further strengthened language from UNGA reaffirming the right of women and girls to decide on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health.

UK leadership on behalf of the EU enabled us to take a principled stance against a regressive HRC resolution which

purported to seek "protection of the family". In essence, this was an anti-LGBT initiative that did not recognise diverse forms of family, and sought to place "the family" as a rights-holder on a par with individuals. The resolution had sufficient support, but we led a successful effort to demonstrate cross-regional opposition, working with Brazil, Uruguay and South Africa. A South African-led motion to include mention of the diversity of family structures was defeated by a single vote – an encouragingly close result.

On counter-terrorism, the UK worked to re-orientate a contentious UN debate towards the primary responsibility of states to protect and uphold human rights while fighting terrorism. The UK continues to believe that all states should respect international human rights and humanitarian law when fighting terrorism and extremism.

Action in support of human rights defenders (HRDs) met resistance in the Third Committee, with the African Group tabling 39 hostile amendments to the draft resolution. This was followed by Russia and China calling a vote, citing concerns that HRDs were not clearly defined in legal terms, and did not require additional protection. The resolution eventually passed, with strong support from the UK and EU partners. More widely, we remain concerned about an increasing trend in some states to frustrate the work of HRDs.

The UK also remained a vocal supporter of the UNSG's "Human Rights Up Front Initiative". In December, the UK Permanent Representative to the UN in New York joined the Deputy Secretary General and High Commissioner in a panel discussion on the important role the initiative can play in preventing human rights violations and abuses in conflict.

Universal Periodic Review (UPR)

The UK is committed to the continuing success of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), whereby the human rights records of UN member states are subject to peer review in a four-and-a-half-year cycle. The UPR process examined 42 countries in 2015, including Belarus, Maldives, Burma, Libya and Rwanda. The second cycle of the UPR process concludes in 2016. The UK is working on plans to strengthen the third cycle.

Treaty Monitoring Bodies and Special Procedures

Experts from British civil society, who work independently of the government, continued to play a prominent role while serving on human rights treaty monitoring bodies. Professor Sir Nigel Rodley chaired the Human Rights Committee; Professor Sir Malcolm Evans continued as Chair of the Sub-Committee on the Prevention of Torture; and Diane Mulligan OBE continued in her expert capacity on the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The UK underwent examination under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in summer 2015. The UK's report and concluding observations of the Committee on Human Rights are available on the OHCHR website.

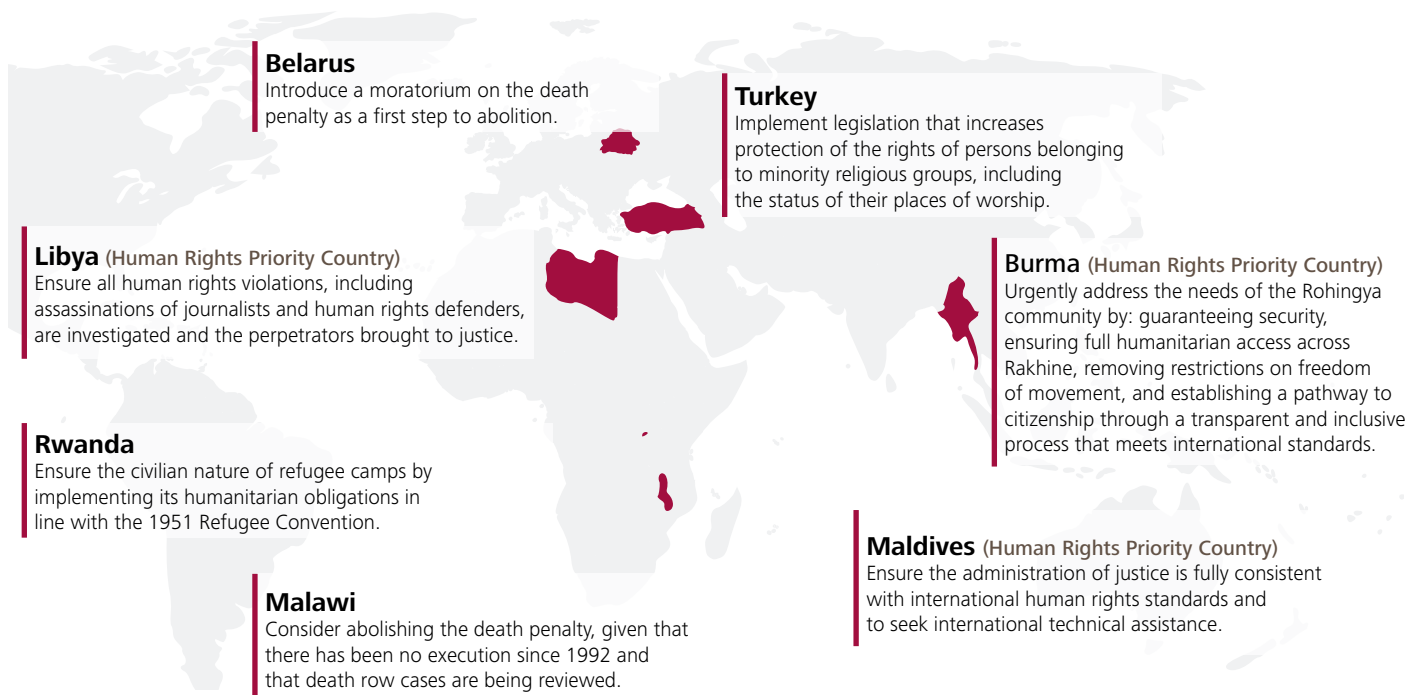
The UK extends a standing invitation to any UN Special Procedures that wish to visit. In 2015, the UK welcomed the UN Special Rapporteur on Truth, Justice and Reconciliation,

United Nations Universal Periodic Review 2015

Countries reviewed

The UK participated in all reviews, providing two recommendations to each country. Examples of some UK recommendations are given below.

Andorra	Georgia	Kiribati	Malawi	Oman	Spain
Armenia	Grenada	Kuwait	Maldives	Panama	Sweden
Australia	Guinea	Kyrgyzstan	Marshall Islands	Rwanda	Turkey
Austria	Guinea-Bissau	Laos	Mauritania	Saint Kitts and Nevis	USA
Belarus	Guyana	Lebanon	Micronesia	Saint Lucia	
Bulgaria	Honduras	Lesotho	Mongolia	Sao Tome and Principe	
Burma	Jamaica	Liberia	Nauru		
Croatia	Kenya	Libya	Nepal		



Mr Pablo de Greiff. The report of his visit will be presented to the HRC in September 2016. The UK also received a number of unofficial visits by UN Special Rapporteurs in 2015, including Philip Alston (Extreme Poverty), Michel Forst (HRDs) and Christof Heyns (Extrajudicial, Summary and Arbitrary Executions).

UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

In September, the international community agreed the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development (SDGs), which will guide global and national development action for the next 15 years. The SDGs offer an important opportunity to advance human rights, based on the principle of "Leave No One Behind".

The SDGs differ from the predecessor Millennium Development Goals in some key ways. They provide a universal agenda, applying equally to developing and developed countries. The SDG framework reflects human rights in substance, not just form. The principle of "Leave No One Behind" promotes equality and non-discrimination across all SDG goals and targets. Alongside a wide range of social, economic and environmental objectives, the SDGs embed transparency, accountability, non-discrimination and participation. In particular, Goal 5 aims to achieve gender equality and

empower women and girls; and Goal 16 includes targets on reducing violence, promoting the rule of law, access to justice, transparent and accountable government and inclusive and representative decision making, as well as ensuring access to information and the protection of fundamental freedoms. In 2016, the challenge will be to start translating this political commitment into action, and the UK looks forward to working with a range of partners to do this.

Sanctions

Sanctions, such as arms embargoes, asset freezes and travel bans, are one of the tools used by the international community to promote human rights and democracy, particularly in conflict and post-conflict situations. Targeted measures against human rights abusers can be effective in either coercing a change in the target's behaviour, constraining their ability to continue that behaviour, or signalling disapproval as a way of stigmatising and potentially isolating them. The UK is active on the UNSC and within the EU to promote its policy of "Smarter Sanctions" that are legally robust and effective in delivering our human rights goals.

The UNSC and EU have established a number of sanctions regimes that include measures targeting human rights abuses,



Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond chairs the Council meeting on the situation in Somalia in November 2015

in countries such as CAR, DRC, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Iran, Libya, Sudan, Syria and Yemen. In 2015, the UK took action to ensure that these measures were reviewed so that they remain effective in supporting wider human rights work. For example, several individuals were sanctioned under the UN and EU sanctions on South Sudan for human rights violations, primarily attacks on civilians. We also supported the imposition of EU sanctions concerning the situation in Burundi, which included measures targeting individuals responsible for serious human rights violations.

Sanctions are also used to counter terrorist groups that commit human rights abuses such as Al Qaeda and Daesh. In 2015, the UNSC responded to the growing terrorist threat by adopting a series of resolutions, including new measures to choke off financial support for Daesh, and a call for increased co-operation between UN member states in the fight against terrorism.

Europe

The European Union (EU)

The UK works through the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) to amplify its work to promote and protect human rights and democracy around the world. In partnership with other EU member states, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the European Commission, the UK can increase its impact on human rights. For example, the EU worked together to encourage El Salvador to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Following a prolonged campaign, and domestic developments, the Legislative Assembly of El Salvador voted in favour of accession in November 2015.

Coordinating with the EU increases the UK's influence in multilateral fora on a range of issues, such as mobilising support for a global moratorium on the death penalty. Our bilateral engagement about human rights with individual countries, in public and in private, can also benefit when the EU brings coordinated pressure to bear. When 28 Member States speak out against the most serious violations of human rights, it can help set the agenda at the UN (for example on DPRK and Syria), and in other international organisations such as the OSCE and Council of Europe (on issues such as Russia's conduct in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine).

EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy

On 20 July 2015, the EU Foreign Affairs Council adopted a new Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy. The Action Plan is an essential point of reference for the international

community. It sets out the steps that the EU will take to promote human rights and democracy in all its external policies until 2017. These include: support for strengthening local institutions and justice systems; tackling threats to HRDs and civil society; and addressing serious challenges such as torture, the death penalty, women's rights, conflict prevention and response, migration, and counter-terrorism.

The Action Plan has led to activity on many themes important to the UK, such as a €1.2 million grant to the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum, and projects in support of local governance in Syria and grassroots initiatives to strengthening community resilience against extremism. In Saudi Arabia, the regionally accredited EU Delegation in Riyadh awards the Chaillot Prize to civil society organisations and public or private institutions. The prize rewards activities, campaigns and projects which support human rights awareness, promotion and protection in the Gulf countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council. In 2015 the prize winners were from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: the Baladi Initiative, the Thulatha Cultural Forum and the lifetime achievement of Ibrahim Al Mugaiteeb.

Since the adoption of the Action Plan, the EU has focused increasingly on support for civil society. This has included expressing concern about restrictions to freedom of peaceful assembly and association in Cambodia, Russia and the DRC.

An important part of the Action Plan is the funding of programmes by the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), which had a budget of €181 million in 2015. The new EU HRDs Mechanism announced in December aligns well with the UK's own focus on HRDs.

A mid-term review of the Action Plan will be held in 2017^[28].

EU Special Representative for Human Rights (EUSR)

The role of the EUSR is to contribute to the effectiveness and visibility of the EU's external human rights policy, including through dialogue with governments in third countries and engagement with international organisations and civil society. In 2015, the work of the current EUSR, Mr Stavros Lambrinidis, did much to enhance the visibility of EU human rights policy in his engagement with countries facing serious human rights challenges and with countries that are influential partners in multilateral fora. He led EU delegations in human rights dialogues with Brazil, Burma, Mexico, South Africa, the African Union and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), as well as in the EU's first human rights meeting with Cuba (at which the two sides agreed in principle to continue dialogue on an annual basis, and that the talks should cover all human rights issues brought to the table by either side). He made official visits to a number of other countries, including Azerbaijan, Bahrain and China, where he expressed the EU's concerns on a range of issues, including our readiness to continue working with China to promote adherence to international human rights obligations. The UK's own dialogue with China on human rights informed the EU's approach, a good example of how the EU Action Plan can be a multiplier for our own human rights work.

In February 2015, the EU Foreign Affairs Council extended the EUSR's mandate until 28 February 2017.

The EU's support to transitional justice

The EU seeks to prevent violations and abuses of human rights throughout the world and, where these occur, to ensure that victims have access to justice, and that those responsible are held to account. On 16 November 2015, the EU Foreign Affairs Council adopted a policy framework setting out how the EU can engage in situations where past abuses have occurred, using measures that promote justice, truth, reparations and guarantees of non-recurrence^[29].

EU Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy

On 22 June, the EU published its latest "Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World". The report detailed the human rights work undertaken in 2014 by the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, the EUSR, and the network of 139 EU Delegations around the world^[30].

EU Enlargement

In the Western Balkans and Turkey, the EU accession process – and prospect of accession – provides a powerful vehicle to drive human rights reform and compliance. The UK continues to support a conditions-based, firm-but-fair approach to EU enlargement. In its 2015 Enlargement Strategy^[31], the European Commission made clear that all countries seeking to join the EU faced major challenges with respect to the rule of law. Fundamental rights were largely enshrined in national legislations, but were not fully implemented. There was also backsliding in the area of freedom of expression and media in a number of countries.

In Albania, FCO projects continue to be delivered through the Slynn Foundation to help strengthen the rule of law, as well as work with the Albanian prison service to modernise operations. British Embassy Tirana supports the only LGBT youth shelter in the Balkans. The Embassy also organised a training event with the elite police corps of Tirana covering diversity, hate crime and LGBT rights.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has strong legislation in the field of human rights, but selective implementation. There was, however, important progress on the prevention of sexual violence in conflict. Since June 2015, a series of landmark rulings have established the right of survivors of sexual violence to compensation, ordered payments by former soldiers and recognised the right to compensation for the first male victim of sexual violence in a court case in Bosnian history. Ethnic minorities, the Roma population, persons with disabilities, LGBT persons, and other vulnerable groups still suffer from discrimination.

[29] <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/11/16-conclusions-on-eu-support-to-transitional-justice/>

[30] <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/06/22-fac-human-rights-report/>

[31] http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2015/20151110_strategy_paper_en.pdf

[28] <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/07/20-fac-human-rights/>

In Kosovo, the entry into force of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement will provide an important framework for international engagement on reform. The UK continues to support a number of human rights-related projects in Kosovo. In particular, we have worked with the Kosovo Rehabilitation Centre for the Victims of Torture (to help improve care for victims of sexual violence), which Baroness Anelay, FCO Minister for Human Rights, visited last July. We continue to fund secondees to the EU's rule of law mission (EULEX) and to Kosovo institutions to strengthen the rule of law and minority rights.

Macedonia faced a political crisis in 2015, with revelations by the opposition indicating that the government engaged in the systematic wiretapping of over 20,000 people. This raised serious human rights and rule of law concerns. As a consequence, the European Commission brokered a political agreement in June 2015 to hold early elections in 2016 and accelerate rule of law reforms to get the country back on its accession path.

For Montenegro, while there has been further progress on fundamental rights, and improvement to the institutional framework, enabling the protection and enforcement of human rights, there is a continuing gap between legal alignment and implementation. The UK has funded various projects in Montenegro, primarily on fundamental rights and justice. We supported a project combating disability discrimination and the organisation of a Human Rights School. The British Embassy supported Podgorica's Pride parade. The UK also continues to work with Montenegrin judges on the application of the European Convention on Human Rights.

In Serbia, the opening of accession negotiations provides an important framework for international engagement on human rights and rule of law. We welcomed the staging of Belgrade Pride for the second consecutive year. The British Embassy supported several human rights projects in Serbia, including the establishment of a co-ordination mechanism between the Ombudsman and civil society. The UK supported The National Convention on European Union in Serbia (NCEU), a network that brings together civil society organisations to enable citizens to participate in and monitor Serbia's EU accession negotiations in respect of Judiciary and Fundamental Rights and Justice, Freedom and Security. The UK also continued to help the Serbian Judicial Academy develop its training curriculum on European human rights law.

Turkey's EU accession process provides a framework to deepen and broaden democracy. The Commission's 2015 Progress Report^[32] recognised that the record general election turnout was a sign of the strength of Turkish democracy. However, it also identified significant backsliding on freedom of expression and freedom of assembly and judicial independence. For 2015-16, the UK committed over £1.5 million to support human rights and other projects aimed at promoting EU human rights standards in Turkey. The UK also maintains links with NGOs and HRDs.

In 2016, the UK will, with like-minded partners, continue to use international fora and processes to press for the strengthening of human rights protections and the rule of law in the Western Balkans and Turkey.

European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)

The ENP offers a privileged relationship to 16 of the EU's neighbours in the east and the south. Human rights and democracy are a core element of the policy. The EU uses both "hard and soft instruments", such as its economic influence and financial aid, to promote political reforms in the countries of its neighbourhood in order to build and consolidate democracy, and establish and strengthen the rule of law and respect for human rights. The EU links its support to the level of democratic reform, offering more to those partners who make progress, whilst reconsidering support where reform is not forthcoming. In 2015, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, announced that a review of the ENP would be a priority. The UK strongly supported the review, and made clear it must take a substantive look at how the EU and the ENP could become more effective, flexible, and focused on delivering substantive change in a wide range of partner countries.

Following the review, the EU will engage with all ENP partners in inclusive dialogue on human rights and democracy issues. Human rights and democracy will continue to be an agenda item in the EU's political dialogue with all partners in mutually agreed formats^[33].

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

The OSCE recognises that human rights are an essential element of security and the rules-based international system. The UK strongly supports the work of the OSCE's institutions, including the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFOM), and the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM). Alongside this, we are committed to safeguarding and enhancing the vital role that civil society plays in holding OSCE-participating states to account, at a time when civil society and free media are under severe pressure in a number of OSCE countries.

The crisis in and around Ukraine continued to be the predominant focus of the OSCE's work in 2015. ODIHR undertook another large-scale election observation mission (EOM) for the local elections in October. The UK helped to ensure that ODIHR were able to assess the compliance of these elections with international standards by funding the deployment of 69 UK observers to the EOM (approximately 10% of the total). In September, ODIHR/HCNM issued a joint human rights assessment mission report on Crimea. The report identified widespread human rights violations and discrimination, and played an important role in keeping the international spotlight on the situation in illegally-annexed Crimea.

[32] http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2015/20151110_report_turkey.pdf

[33] http://www.eeas.europa.eu/top_stories/2015/181115_enp_review_en.htm

We encouraged last year's Serbian Chairmanship of the OSCE to focus work on freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly and association. We are a strong supporter of the work of the RFOM to protect media freedom, including for example a confidence-building programme to bring Ukrainian and Russian journalists together, and wider work on the safety of journalists in OSCE states. We encouraged Serbia to table draft OSCE Ministerial Decisions on these topics and regret that a minority of participating states did not join consensus on these or other human dimension decisions or declarations at the annual meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council in Belgrade. However, we secured a strong statement on Fundamental Freedoms supported by 44 of the 57 states.

Throughout 2015, we worked with like-minded partners to support the work of the OSCE's institutions and to resist the efforts of a small minority of participating states to restrict and undermine them. We received a working visit to London by ODIHR Director Michael Link in February, and the FCO Minister for Europe, David Lidington, met the ODIHR Director and the RFOM in the margins of the Ministerial Council meeting in Belgrade.

Looking ahead, safeguarding the OSCE's institutions will remain a high priority, in particular the institutions of RFOM and HCNM, whose mandates expire in March 2016. We will work with Germany as OSCE Chair for 2016 in its efforts to support the institutions and to encourage enhanced participation by civil society in OSCE events.

Council of Europe (CoE)

The UK uses its membership of the CoE to advance its human rights objectives in Europe and beyond. It engages with other member states and with CoE institutions to encourage implementation of standards on human rights, democracy and rule of law, to raise any concerns about developments, and to support the CoE's provision of technical and other assistance.

Thorbjørn Jagland, the CoE's Secretary General, continues to lead efforts to ensure that the CoE's standards are observed across Europe, including in areas of potential vulnerability such as Ukraine. He highlighted political, constitutional and human rights situations of concern in various member states. These included Russia and Azerbaijan – where he launched an inquiry under Article 52 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) into the continued detention of political prisoner Ilgar Mammadov – Turkey, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova. He also spoke out on issues such as corruption, human trafficking, racism, discrimination, antisemitism, violence against women, and LGBT rights. His annual report on the "State of Democracy, Human Rights, and the Rule of Law in Europe" was adopted in May 2015, and led to a review of the efficiency of justice systems in each of the 47 member states.

The CoE's Commissioner for Human Rights, Nils Muižnieks, continued to hold member states to account for human rights failures, and focused much effort in 2015 on the promotion and protection of the human rights of migrants and refugees.

The Venice Commission (the CoE advisory body on constitutional matters) supported member states in addressing

a series of potential constitutional reforms, in Ukraine and elsewhere.

European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR)

The UK continues to work for much-needed reform of the ECtHR, implementing the 2012 Brighton Declaration adopted by all CoE member states.

The UK ratified Protocol No. 15 on 15 May 2015. In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, the High Contracting Parties have the primary responsibility to secure the rights and freedoms defined in the Convention and, in doing so, they enjoy a margin of appreciation which is subject to the supervisory jurisdiction of the Court. Protocol No. 15 to the ECHR gives effect to certain amendments to the Convention agreed in the Brighton Declaration, notably the inclusion in the Convention for the first time of references to the principle of subsidiarity and the doctrine of the margin of appreciation. So far Protocol 15 has been ratified by 11 states, and signed by a further 29. Protocol 15 must be ratified by all 47 States Parties to the Convention before it can come into force.

The Court's case-load continues to be high, and its backlog of pending cases stood at 64,850 by the end of 2015, although the number of new cases allocated for consideration fell by 27%. Russia, together with Turkey, Ukraine, Romania and Italy, has the largest number of cases before the ECtHR. In 2015, there were 575 applications against the UK allocated for consideration by the Court. Out of these, the Court produced judgments in 13 cases, finding no violation in nine of them. This compares well with other similar-sized countries.

Committee of Ministers (CoM)

The CoM, comprising the governments of member states, is the CoE's principal decision-making body. It discusses issues of a political nature, and holds member states to account on human rights, democracy and the rule of law, including by supervising the implementation of ECtHR judgments.

In 2015, Ukraine dominated most country debates, although the CoM also spent time discussing developments in Turkey, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova. Thematic areas of debate included freedom of assembly and association, and freedom of expression – with the CoE noting the strong ground-swell of support for freedom of expression after the Paris attacks of January and November 2015. The CoM repeated condemnations of, and adopted declarations on, executions carried out in the United States, Japan and Belarus.

In its supervisory role, during 2015, the CoM's focus included cases involving journalists' freedom of expression in Azerbaijan; enforced disappearances in Chechnya; the operation of Latin-script schools in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova; protestors for LGBT rights in Russia; abductions and illegal transfers from Russia to some Central Asian states; and the inter-state Cyprus v Turkey case. UK cases debated included those relating to Northern Ireland (McKerr); and prisoner voting rights (Hirst), on which the Ministry of Justice has undertaken to pursue an enhanced dialogue. Supervision of a significant number of UK cases was closed.

The UK used all opportunities to hold Russia to account over human rights and the rule of law. We supported the Secretary-General's statements on further restrictions placed on civil society in Azerbaijan and expressed concern about the relationships between Moscow and the breakaway regions in Georgia, and the potential impact on human rights there.

The UK signed the Additional Protocol to the Convention on combating terrorism, adopted at the May Ministerial meeting in direct response to the January Paris attacks and threat posed to member states by returning foreign fighters.

Commonwealth

The UK worked with Commonwealth partners to achieve a greater degree of commitment to uphold the values enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter.

The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Malta in November was an opportunity to remind Commonwealth members of their human rights commitments. In meetings with other Commonwealth leaders, the Prime Minister stressed that all countries should uphold the Charter, which includes commitments to tolerance, respect, understanding, moderation and freedom of religion or belief. During a meeting with Heads of Government, the Prime Minister pressed for the Commonwealth to show greater tolerance and heal its divisions on LGBT&T issues.

In the CHOGM communiqué, leaders resolved to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including equality for women and girls. The UK played a key role in drafting this ambitious communiqué, which provides firm direction for the Commonwealth. The UK delegation also worked with Commonwealth leaders in negotiating the first ever Leaders' Statement. In this, Heads of Government recognised the economic potential that can be unlocked by tackling discrimination and exclusion. Whilst in Malta, DFID Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Baroness Verma, attended the first ever Commonwealth Women's Forum, and also chaired a session on LGBT&T issues at the pre-CHOGM People's Forum. She urged the Commonwealth to do more to defend LGBT&T rights.

CHOGM saw the appointment of a new Commonwealth Secretary-General. The Prime Minister welcomed the election of Baroness Scotland, and supports her goal to unite Commonwealth members behind the values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) took the Chair of the Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (CFNHRI) in November. The CFNHRI plays an important role in enhancing respect for human rights by member countries. The NIHRC is highly regarded on the international stage, and well-placed to work with Commonwealth members to ensure that they establish National Human Rights Institutions which comply with the Paris Principles. The FCO is providing financial support to the NIHRC to fulfil this role.

UK continued to work closely with members of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) to ensure

that it was able to work to its strengthened mandate for the protection of standards of governance and human rights. We value the work of CMAG in helping ensure that countries adhere to the Commonwealth Charter. In Malta, CMAG voiced serious concerns over recent developments in Maldives, which it agreed were deserving of formal consideration. We welcomed this decision and believe it is vital for the Commonwealth's integrity that it acts to uphold the values and principles of its Charter.

We will continue to work with the Commonwealth Secretariat and all members to strengthen adherence to Commonwealth values as we look ahead to hosting the next CHOGM in 2018. We also look forward to collaborating with Baroness Scotland on human rights issues in the Commonwealth.

International Criminal Justice System

The UK firmly believes that perpetrators of atrocities should be held to account for their actions, and that victims should see justice done. International justice does not stop with punishing the perpetrators – it goes further by helping victims of atrocities and their communities to come to terms with the past, starting the healing process and deterring those who might otherwise commit such violations in the future. International justice does not stop with punishing the perpetrators – it goes further by helping victims of atrocities and their communities to come to terms with the past, starting the healing process and deterring those who might otherwise commit such violations in the future.

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In 2015, the UK's share of contributions to international criminal tribunals comprised the following: £8.16 million to the International Criminal Court; £1.8 million to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY); and £3.6 million to the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda; and £2.08 million to the Residual Mechanism. The latter will take on the essential functions of the ICTY and Rwanda tribunals as they complete their work. The UK also contributed £1 million in voluntary funding to the Special Tribunal for Lebanon and smaller voluntary amounts to the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia and the Residual Special Court for Sierra Leone.

International Criminal Court (ICC)

The ICC in The Hague is the world's first permanent independent international criminal court with jurisdiction over the most serious crimes of international concern.

At the end of 2015, there were nine situations before the ICC: Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Darfur, Central African Republic I, Kenya, Cote d'Ivoire, Libya, Central African Republic II and Mali. In addition, there were eight preliminary examinations: Afghanistan, Colombia, Nigeria, Georgia, Guinea, Iraq, Ukraine and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

The annual ICC Assembly of States Parties (ASP) took place in The Hague from 18-25 November. The focus was on enhanced co-operation with States Parties and finalising a budget which balanced the needs of the ICC and the financial constraints of states. The UK government welcomed the appointment of British nationals to the Board of the Trust Fund for Victims and the Advisory Committee on Nominations of ICC Judges.

Other International Tribunals

The UK continued to support ICTY as it moves towards closure at the end of 2017.

The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) finished its judicial work in December. Its residual work (appeals, witness protection, sentence enforcement etc) will be taken forward by the Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals (MICT).

The UK joined other donor states to secure UN funding for the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) and Residual Special Court for Sierra Leone (RSCSL) to supplement voluntary donations. In addition, we continued to support the RSCSL through the sentence enforcement in the UK of former Liberian president Charles Taylor.

The UK continued to support the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL).

International Humanitarian Law (IHL)

IHL is a body of law distinct from International Human Rights Law. As codified in particular in the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols and, as also established in customary international law, IHL regulates the conduct of armed conflict.

The UK participated in the 32nd quadrennial International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in December 2015 in Geneva. The focus included tackling sexual violence in conflict. The conference agreed a number of resolutions, including a renewal of the Swiss/ICRC initiative to strengthen mechanisms of compliance with IHL. The UK made a number of pledges on actions we intend to take in coming years, including jointly with the British Red Cross and our partners in the EU and Commonwealth.

Baroness Anelay delivered an address^[34] at the General Debate of the International Conference. She also hosted an event on sexual violence which explored linkages between work to investigate such crimes in armed conflicts and non-conflict settings such as humanitarian disasters.

[34] <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/foreign-office-minister-for-human-rights-visits-geneva>

CHAPTER IV: Human Rights Priority Countries

We have designated 30 Human Rights Priority Countries (HRPCs) using the following criteria: the human rights situation in the country; its human rights trajectory; and the UK's ability to influence change.

Barring significant change, we expect these countries to continue as HRPCs for the duration of this Parliament, which will give greater strategic direction and consistency to our human rights work.

This section contains our review of the human rights situation in the 30 countries identified. However, this does not represent an exhaustive list of countries where the UK will act on human rights. Although the countries on which we report here will remain our priorities for 2016 (and beyond), we continue to engage with all other countries on human rights issues, including through project work.

We will continue to report on developments in HRPCs online, and raise our concerns about human rights issues wherever and whenever they occur. Any human rights events that have occurred in these countries after the cut-off point for this report (31 December 2015) will be covered in the January-June 2016 updates, due to be published in July 2016.

Afghanistan

The overall human rights picture in 2015 remained poor. The insurgency continues to be the biggest threat to the human rights of all people in Afghanistan. A notable example was the 15-day occupation of Kunduz by Taliban forces in October. A report from the Office of the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights^[35] presented findings of arbitrary killings, abductions, and violence, including threats and widespread criminality, and the use of child fighters. The ongoing insurgency affected access to education, health, and freedom of movement. Taliban and Daesh affiliates actively targeted media outlets, schools, and polio vaccine workers. Daesh affiliates were reportedly responsible for sectarian attacks, including the beheading of seven Hazara in Zabul in November. The UN reported^[36] on allegations of extra-judicial killings by the Afghan national and local police in a number of provinces, including Kandahar, Farah, and Herat. The report also noted a 14% reduction in the use of torture and ill-treatment.

Against the background of insurgency and instability, the Afghan government made significant human rights commitments. On 5 September, through the Self Reliance for Mutual Accountability Framework (SMAF)^[37], the Afghan government committed to improve women's access to justice; to increase their participation in government; and to prepare

and implement laws on anti-harassment and the elimination of violence. On 30 June, Afghanistan launched the National Action Plan (NAP) for Women, Peace and Security^[38]. The government also worked to improve the number of women in government by appointing four female cabinet ministers, the first female Supreme Court Judge, and female Provincial Governors in Daikundi and Ghor provinces.

Documented cases of violence against women have risen, with 5,132 cases reported to the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC)^[39] including 241 murders. Strongly-held conservative values contributed to slow progress, as illustrated by the tragic murder of Farkhunda Malikzada, who was beaten to death by a mob in Kabul on 19 March following false accusations that she burnt a copy of the Qur'an. Four death sentences were handed down for those involved, which were later reduced to prison sentences ranging from 10-20 years.

In December, the UK, together with the UN Population Fund and the Ministry of Public Health, launched support for response services for women survivors of violence. This complements existing Afghan programmes on women's economic empowerment, education, security, and political participation. Following recommendations by the Special Electoral Reform Commission in December, we will continue to press for electoral reform to enable postponed parliamentary elections to take place.

In 2016, we will encourage the Afghan government to deliver commitments made in the NAP and SMAF, including a new priority programme for women's economic empowerment. We will continue to take action to support the EU+ strategy for human rights defenders (HRDs) to ensure that HRDs' rights are protected by state and non-state actors. We will also provide financial support to the work of the AIHRC. The Brussels Conference in October will allow the Afghan government to set out progress made in delivering its reform plans, and for the international community to set out the future size and scope of its support.

Bahrain

Overall, there was progress on human rights in Bahrain throughout 2015, although challenges remain. The government of Bahrain continued to take steps to implement its human rights and political reform agenda. The government also has a programme of socio-economic reform to promote and contribute to greater social inclusivity and cohesion across all communities.

The UK's package of technical assistance to support reform in Bahrain began in 2012. Much of it has focused on building effective and accountable institutions, strengthening the

[35] <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=16876&LangID=E>

[36] http://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/old_dnn/UNAMA/human%20rights/2015/UNAMA%20Detention%20Report%202015_revised.pdf

[37] <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/000102254.pdf>

[38] <http://mfa.gov.af/en/news/afghanistans-national-action-plan-on-unscr-1325-women-peace-and-security>

[39] <http://www.aihrc.org.af/>

rule of law and police and justice reform, in line with the recommendations in the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) and UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR). This co-operation will continue in 2016.

Beneficiaries of the UK's support include independent human rights and oversight institutions such as the National Institution of Human Rights (NIHR), Ministry of Interior Ombudsman, Prisoners' and Detainees' Rights Commission (PDRC) and Special Investigations Unit (SIU), who provide independent oversight of police behaviour and detention standards, and were established as a result of BICI recommendations. Whilst allegations of ill-treatment in detention continue, confidence in these organisations is increasing, and they are working more effectively. The NIHR's 2014 Annual Report, published in December 2015, states that it registered 88 complaints. Of these, 36 were upheld.

The Ombudsman's Annual Report, published in June, includes figures which indicate a 375% increase in the Ombudsman's activity over the previous year. Although there has been no official report into the 10 March Jau Prison riots, we welcome the Ombudsman's pivotal role in investigating the causes of the riots, the authorities' response, and the aftermath (his having received 196 requests for assistance from detainees' relatives).

The Special Investigation Unit (SIU) has increasingly investigated complaints of allegations of torture or ill-treatment. 70 police officers have been charged with mistreatment and/or torture/assault. In some cases, the SIU appealed lenient sentences given to police officers, including the two found guilty in the case against Fadel Abbas (reported in the BICI).

There are continued concerns regarding freedom of speech and expression and peaceful assembly. Deprivation of nationality is also an area of concern, and Bahrain is not a signatory to either the 1954 or 1961 UN Conventions on Statelessness. 206 Bahraini citizens had their nationality revoked, with most of these individuals convicted of terrorism-related crimes.

Despite a de facto moratorium on the death penalty, 14 people (including three in absentia) have been sentenced to death by the Bahraini courts for their roles in the death of law enforcement personnel. Five of these convictions have been confirmed by the Supreme Court. We continue to raise our concerns over the death penalty with the Bahraini government.

FCO Minister for the Middle East, Tobias Ellwood, hosted the sixth UK-Bahrain Joint Working Group on 25 November, which focused on reform and the UK's technical assistance.

Following its mid-term review in 2015, Bahrain will also undergo its third UPR process in 2017.

People's Republic of Bangladesh

There was no improvement in the overall human rights situation in Bangladesh in 2015. Tensions between the two main political parties, the ruling Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), remain unresolved. Confrontational actions during the first quarter of 2015, including the arrest of senior BNP leaders, an indefinite BNP-led transport blockade, and repeated hartals (labour

strikes) impacted on people's security and livelihoods. The relatively peaceful and participatory Municipal Elections on 30 December, held on party lines for the first time, were a positive development.

A rise in the number of extremist attacks against secularist writers and religious minorities during 2015 increased pressure on free speech, while the draft Foreign Donations Act risks becoming a missed opportunity to improve the regulatory regime for NGOs. Through its Human Rights and Democracy Programme, the UK provided safety training to bloggers in Bangladesh, and supported a review of the Information and Communication Technology Act 2006 to bring it into line with international standards.

An overloaded justice system and delays in processing through the courts contributed to a culture of violence where people take the law into their own hands. NGOs reported that excessive use of force, extra-judicial killings and enforced disappearances were conducted with impunity, while the death penalty remained a legal punishment for a wide range of offences. In 2015, at least five people were executed, including three war criminals convicted by the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT). NGOs continued to express concern over the process and independence of the ICT. During 2015, the Department for International Development contributed £3.7 million towards justice sector reform and £1.2 million for a police reform programme in Bangladesh.

Women make a considerable contribution to the Bangladesh economy; many are employed in the public service and the ready-made garments sector. However, women still do not enjoy the same social status as men, and gender-based violence remains a substantial problem. Child marriage also remains a significant concern.

Bangladesh has a growing economy and aspires to reach middle-income status by 2021. We encourage the Bangladesh authorities to ensure that this is matched by a positive human rights trajectory during 2016 and beyond. Positive indicators would include careful consideration of recommendations by the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief when his report is released in 2016. We will also encourage the government to engage constructively with the UN Human Rights Committee when it reviews Bangladesh in October 2016. We remain clear that an effective justice system, and a vibrant civil society and free media, able to challenge and hold authority to account, are fundamental to a successful democracy. Free, fair and participatory elections are also crucial; we encourage all political parties to work towards achieving this at the parliamentary elections in 2019.

Burma

There was progress on human rights in Burma during 2015, particularly in the areas of civil and political rights, but significant challenges remain. The 8 November parliamentary elections were an important milestone in Burma's democratic transition. For the first time in over 50 years, the people of Burma elected parliamentary representatives. Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) won with a substantial majority and a real mandate for further reform.

But, while the vote was peaceful, credible and competitive, there were several flaws: the Rohingya community was disenfranchised and prospective Muslim candidates were disproportionately excluded.

In 2015, the democratic space for freedom of expression and assembly contracted. March saw the violent break-up of student protests, political prisoners continued to be charged and detained and, as elections approached, there were a succession of arrests following social media posts mocking the military. Relations between Buddhist and Muslim communities became increasingly tense and politicised with the passing of four discriminatory “Race and Religion” laws. Instances of hate speech and arrests on religion-based charges increased. More positively, there were further discharges of child soldiers, and the government ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

UK human rights priorities in 2015 centred on encouraging credible elections as well as upholding political freedoms and maintaining stability, including in Rakhine, Shan and Kachin States. UK support helped the Union Election Commission deliver a credible election with strengthened integrity measures. UK funding also enabled the first systematic and nationwide domestic observation effort in Burma’s history. The UK remained an important supporter of the peace process, which saw substantive progress when the government and eight of the 16 main ethnic armed groups signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in October. However, fighting continued in Kokang and other parts of Shan and Kachin States, with the associated lack of humanitarian access, targeting of civilians, and acts of sexual violence. The UK continued to press for improvements to the treatment of the Rohingya community, both bilaterally and in multilateral fora. FCO Minister for Asia Pacific, Hugo Swire, visited Rakhine for the second time in July. While there was no repeat of the violence of 2012, there was no improvement in the situation for the Rohingya in 2015. The ongoing dispute over citizenship rights and desperate living conditions led to an increase in the number of Rohingya leaving Burma by boat for other countries, causing a regional refugee crisis in May and June.

April 2016 should see the historic transfer of power to a more democratic and civilian government. Constitutionally the military will, however, retain control of the key Ministries of Defence, Borders and Home Affairs, controlling the police, paramilitary groups and security forces, as well as the powerful General Administration Department. The incoming NLD government will face many serious challenges, not least in the field of human rights. Our policy will be to support and encourage the incoming administration across the whole human rights agenda. In particular, we will support a long-term sustainable plan to address the political and development issues in Rakhine and the plight of the Rohingya. We will also seek to build on the gains made in the peace process in 2015, encouraging the other armed groups to engage, and for all parties to work towards a political dialogue.

Burundi

The human rights situation deteriorated in Burundi in 2015. In July, President Nkurunziza ran for a third term, which was widely considered, including in the region, to be unconstitutional and against the Arusha Accords. This sparked a coup attempt and a subsequent government crackdown. It also marked the beginning of a downward trend in Burundi’s human rights situation, which currently poses a threat to the stability of the country and wider region.

Throughout 2015, there were reports of targeted killings, arbitrary arrests, indiscriminate attacks, torture, enforced disappearances, and violence against peaceful protestors, carried out by the police, Service Nationale de Renseignements (SNR – Burundi’s intelligence agency), and Imbonerakure, the ruling party’s youth militia. The trend was extremely negative on political space and media freedom. The government closed down all private radio stations and only one private newspaper was still operating at the end of 2015. The government introduced strict controls on NGOs, including those promoting human rights. Many opposition leaders fled the country and are currently subject to arrest warrants.

The UK’s human rights objectives in Burundi in 2015 were to promote freedom of speech and assembly, and urge the Burundian government to end the increasing violence by the police, SNR, and Imbonerakure. We pressed the authorities to allow civil society, including an independent media, to operate without impediment. We have increased our support to the thousands of refugees fleeing the situation, especially those in Tanzania and Rwanda, where the Department for International Development provided additional resources to humanitarian organisations. We also urged the government to engage in unconditional and inclusive dialogue, including with those who opposed the President’s third term. We supported engagement by the UN, EU, African Union, and East African Community. The Burundian government consistently blocked the efforts of the international community, including the UK, to improve the human rights situation. It used a series of bureaucratic procedures to delay or block the deployment of international human rights monitors, and refused to take the necessary steps to establish a political dialogue that would end the cycle of violence.

Looking to 2016, we are extremely concerned about the possibility of further deterioration in the political, economic and security situation in Burundi, additional displacement of people, and increased human rights violations and abuses. Recently there has been a small but significant increase in reports of sexual violence. We are concerned that in attempts to secure stability, the government will further constrain human rights. The Burundian government’s engagement in unconditional and inclusive dialogue is essential. We remain committed to assisting regional efforts to influence the Burundian government in order to avert an even deeper crisis. We continue to work with international partners, especially the UN, to develop contingency plans to protect civilians, should there be a dramatic deterioration in the security situation.

Central African Republic (CAR)

The overall human rights situation in CAR remained very poor throughout 2015. Extra-judicial killings, kidnapping, banditry, sexual violence, arbitrary detention, torture and the recruitment of child soldiers continued. Inter-communal tensions remained high throughout the year. Violence surged in September with a spate of killings and the wanton destruction of many properties across Bangui. This violence saw a backlash against enclaved communities, with heightened tensions and obstructions to their freedom of movement imposed by armed groups. More than 60,000 cases of gender-based violence were reported to humanitarian agencies in 2015. There were persistent allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) by UN, African Union (AU), French and EU troops (see Chapter II).

The UK's key human rights objective in CAR in 2015 was to secure an end to the impunity that encourages such widespread abuse, through support to both security sector reform and elections. To this end, we supported the EU Military Advisory Mission, which provides the government of CAR with expert advice to reform the military, and provided diplomatic and financial support to the UN peacekeeping mission (MINUSCA). UK aid also supported programmes addressing the protection and health needs of victims of violence, and aiming to prevent human rights abuse.

CAR made some limited progress during 2015. We welcomed the passing of a law creating a Special Criminal Court, and worked with CAR authorities and international partners to support it. In a significant development, presidential elections went ahead in a largely peaceful manner. However, human rights continued to be violated in CAR on a regular basis, and with impunity. Security sector reform has not significantly progressed, constrained by lack of political engagement. Allegations of SEA, committed by international peacekeeping troops undermined the international community's ability to lead change. The ease with which armed groups move in the ungoverned space outside Bangui and small arms proliferation made it difficult for aid and remedial services to reach those worst affected, or for international peacekeepers to be effective.

The humanitarian situation in CAR continues to be a cause for deep concern. More than 2.3 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, with 452,000 internally displaced people and 451,100 CAR refugees in neighbouring countries. The UK pledged an additional £7 million in humanitarian assistance, bringing the total UK aid contribution for the year to CAR and CAR refugees to £25 million. The UK remains one of the largest humanitarian donors to CAR, providing £58 million through NGOs and international organisations to assist CAR populations and CAR refugees since 2013. This money has helped provide essential healthcare, food and livelihood assistance, and protection to populations affected by the conflict.

It is imperative that the unacceptable levels of human rights violations and abuses in CAR are reduced during 2016. The new President-elect and his government will be key to reconciliation and the reintegration of refugees and internally displaced people, as well as bringing an end to impunity, while continued security sector reform will help strengthen

critical institutions. The peace-keeping mission MINUSCA will need to play a critical role alongside CAR authorities to address insecurity across the country. Successful legislative elections and efforts to rebuild the judiciary will facilitate progress. We will continue to work with the new government and international partners to achieve these goals, including by providing diplomatic and financial support through an EU Mission to train CAR armed forces.

China

China continues to face significant human rights challenges, but throughout 2015 improved social and economic rights, and implemented reforms to strengthen the rule of law. The UK supports these goals. We cooperated with China on projects in priority areas including torture prevention, the death penalty, women's rights, and civil society. We assess that our co-operation contributed to a reduction in the number of crimes subject to the death penalty. We also believe it led to greater legal protection for victims of domestic violence and rape.

In 2015 civil and political rights were subject to increasingly tight restrictions and space for civil society was constrained. There were restrictions on religious observance and cultural expression by minorities. Online and media censorship continued, with China reportedly jailing the largest number of journalists worldwide in 2015. A number of civil society organisations were closed, and EU nationals working in China detained and expelled. New laws and regulations, including National Security and Counter-Terrorism Laws, further restricted freedom of expression. Hundreds of human rights lawyers and associates were detained by Chinese authorities. The handling of these individual cases, as well as those of other human rights defenders (HRDs), such as Pu Zhiqiang, raised questions over China's commitment to transparency and its international human rights obligations.

Throughout 2015, the UK consistently raised its human rights concerns with China, including at the highest levels. The UK-China Human Rights Dialogue remained an important channel for relaying our concerns and exchanging views. The 2015 Dialogue focused on the role of the judiciary. We also acted on cases of concern, including working closely with international partners on specific cases. This was done through lobbying on legislation (such as a draft Foreign NGO Management Law), attempts to visit individuals under house arrest, attempts to observe trials, and maintaining contact with HRDs. We raised human rights in China at the UN Human Rights Council, making clear our concerns over a crackdown against human rights lawyers, including Wang Yu. We were particularly concerned about the case of British citizen Mr Lee Po. As the Foreign Secretary said in the most recent Six Monthly Report on Hong Kong, our information indicates that Mr Lee was involuntarily removed to mainland China from Hong Kong. This case undermines the principle of "One Country, Two Systems" which provides for Hong Kong residents to be protected by the Hong Kong legal system.

Barriers to achieving our aims included China's reluctance to accept meetings to discuss sensitive issues. Requests for human rights monitoring visits to Tibet were refused.

In 2016, the government's "stability maintenance" policies look set to continue. These are likely to target groups perceived as disruptive. Many of those detained in 2015 may face further legal action. Proposed laws on foreign NGO management and cyber security may further restrict political space. We will work with the grain of reform where we judge this will yield meaningful progress, for example on rule of law. We will continue to raise human rights issues through whichever channel is most effective.

Colombia

There was mixed progress on the human rights situation in Colombia in 2015, despite efforts by the government of Colombia to improve it. President Santos took several significant steps to address human rights issues as part of the process to end the conflict between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). On 23 September, a landmark deal was reached on transitional justice and reparations for victims. In October, both sides agreed an accord to trace disappeared victims of the conflict. On 15 December, agreement was reaffirmed to establish a truth commission, reparations for victims, and punishment for war criminals.



March opposing sexual violence in conflict and supporting survivors organised by BE Bogota's partner organisation in Colombia 'Corporación Mujer Sigue Mis Pasos'

The Land Restitution and Victims' Law (2011) continues to provide compensation for victims, although progress is slow. Furthermore, in July, the government approved Law 1761, which categorises femicide as a separate crime and increases the punishment to up to 50 years' imprisonment. The Presidential Adviser for Human Rights published a human rights report in December after a five-year hiatus. However, human rights violations and abuses across a number of sectors remain a concern, including sexual violence, internal displacement, forced disappearances, and targeting of human rights defenders (HRDs). 63 HRDs were killed in 2015, a 13% increase from 2014. Colombia also remains one of the countries in the world with the highest levels of impunity.

The UK has been a strong supporter of Colombia's improvement on human rights issues. Our overarching

human rights objectives are to reduce impunity for human rights violations and abuses, improve access to justice, and support strong government institutions. Through prioritising three issues – the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative (PSVI), business and human rights, and HRDs – the UK has made a tangible difference. The UK helped Colombia draft its National Action Plan (NAP) on Business and Human Rights, published in December 2015. This is the first of its kind outside of Europe. The UK continues to raise human rights concerns with the Colombian government on a regular basis, including on specific cases.

The peace process, which both sides are committed to concluding in 2016, will further help the government of Colombia to tackle human rights issues. The FARC's unilateral ceasefire and the government's suspension of aerial bombardments have reduced the intensity of hostilities. However, there is concern that security could worsen on the signing of a peace deal, as illegal armed groups and criminals may fill the vacuum left by FARC's demobilisation. Threats to land reform campaigners and HRDs may increase in the short term. Underlying drivers of the conflict, such as inequality and corruption, may lead to an increase in social protest.

For 2016, the UK's human rights priorities will include further support for the post-conflict stage of the peace process. In addition to comprehensive bilateral support, the UK is a significant contributor to the UN Post-Conflict Trust Fund and the EU Trust Fund for Colombia. The UK will also continue working bilaterally on the priority areas of PSVI and HRDs, as well as business and human rights.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)

The human rights situation in the DPRK showed no sign of improvement in 2015.

The DPRK government continued to reject the findings and recommendations of the UN Commission of Inquiry report, and to protest against resolutions passed by the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) and UN Security Council (UNSC). It persisted in rejecting serious engagement with the international community and did not undertake any notable measures to improve the domestic human rights situation. Whilst the DPRK accepted 114 recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process, they declined discussions on their implementation plans, despite the encouragement of the international community.

In 2015, human rights remained one of our policy priorities for the DPRK. We helped ensure the issue remained high on the international community's agenda, and raised concerns directly with the DPRK authorities. We also supported small-scale projects aimed at improving the lives of vulnerable groups in the DPRK.

We worked to focus attention on the DPRK's human rights record through international fora such as the UN General Assembly, the UNSC and the HRC, where lobbying by the UK government helped to secure strong resolutions. We also supported the 14th session of the EU-DPRK political dialogue

held in Pyongyang in June 2015, where the EU side raised human rights, including the use of prison camps, torture, and the lack of freedom of expression and political freedoms.

We took every available opportunity in 2015 to raise our serious concerns about DPRK human rights directly with the DPRK government in London and Pyongyang. Senior FCO officials met diplomats from the DPRK Embassy and visiting senior DPRK officials. These meetings were used to reiterate our concerns over the DPRK's failure to uphold its international obligations. The British Embassy in Pyongyang repeatedly raised our concerns on human rights directly with the DPRK government.

In 2015, the FCO funded a number of projects aimed at increasing awareness of international human rights standards and improving the provision of equipment available to disabled persons in the DPRK. We have also offered technical human rights training for DPRK officials but, at the time of writing, the DPRK authorities had yet to respond.

Human rights remain a priority for our DPRK policy in 2016. We will continue to work with like-minded partners to urge the DPRK government to accept the existence and extent of their human rights violations, and to demonstrate a willingness to take steps to address these issues – for example, by agreeing to a visit by the UN Special Rapporteur and other senior UN officials.

We will maintain pressure on the DPRK through international fora (such as the UN and EU), and look for ways in which we can support the work of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights through its office in the Republic of Korea. Alongside this, we will press the DPRK to deliver on the UPR recommendations they have accepted, and use bilateral and international engagement to keep pressure on the DPRK.

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

The human rights situation in the DRC deteriorated in 2015. There was some progress on efforts to tackle sexual violence but other human rights continued to be violated, especially related to the electoral process. There were arbitrary arrests and imprisonments, reports of torture of political activists, attacks on freedom of speech, and extra-judicial killings by state agents.

In 2015, the UK's human rights work in the DRC focused on protecting political space and preventing sexual and gender-based violence. We worked to build long-term stability in the east, through contributions to MONUSCO (UN Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the DRC), the work of the Department for International Development, and projects supported by the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund.

We were concerned about the tightening of political space during 2015. There were a number of arbitrary arrests of journalists, civil society figures and human rights defenders (HRDs). The British Embassy in Kinshasa monitors trials of political detainees on a regular basis, and raises concerns at the highest levels of the DRC government. We officially raised the Filimbi activist case, involving young people arrested in

March and April 2015 at a workshop designed to encourage Congolese youth to perform their civic duties peacefully.

The DRC government made some progress in addressing impunity in the armed forces. In September the Military High Court delivered its verdict upholding the conviction of Colonel Mukalayi for the murder of HRD Floribert Chebeya. In December, the National Assembly adopted legislation updating the Military Penal Code, abolishing immunity for these crimes for the Head of State and other government figures. However, we are concerned that many in the security forces continue to enjoy impunity for human rights violations.

We remain deeply concerned about the massacres in Beni, and are supporting MONUSCO in preventing future incidences and reducing human rights violations in the east of the country. We are particularly disturbed by the recent escalation in Nande-Hutu ethnic conflict in North Kivu province.

The UK funds projects that help victims of sexual violence in conflict to obtain justice. We are working with the DRC government to encourage use of the International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict by legal and medical practitioners. This work includes translation of the International Protocol into Swahili and Lingala to enable its effective use at a local level.

In 2016, the UK will continue to focus on political and civil society space and abuses related to the forthcoming Presidential elections. We will monitor arrests, detentions and disappearances of opposition and civil society figures, and will raise any concerns with the DRC government. We will continue to encourage the DRC government to take concrete steps to improve respect for human rights, particularly by taking action against armed groups in the east. We will also continue our work on the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict initiative, funding a number of grassroots projects and working closely with Jeanine Mabunda, the DRC President's Personal Representative on the Fight Against Sexual Violence and Child Recruitment.

Egypt

In 2015, Egypt held parliamentary elections, completing the final institutional stage on its road map for political transition. At the same time, Egypt faced a significant terrorist threat, resulting in at least 366 deaths (in addition to the attack on the Metrojet aircraft that killed 224 people). Against this background, the human rights situation remained poor and continued to deteriorate.

Although 2015 saw pardons for a small number of prisoners, Egypt continued to detain activists, journalists and protesters. In February, 230 activists were sentenced to life imprisonment in a mass trial in relation to protests in 2011. In May, former President Mohamed Morsi was sentenced to death in a mass trial with more than 100 others. Pre-trial detention periods were long; photojournalist Mahmoud Abu Zeid (Shawkan) has been in pre-trial detention since August 2013.

In 2015, reports of torture, police brutality, and forced disappearance increased. A local NGO documented reports of 676 cases of torture and 137 deaths in detention. The National

Council for Human Rights submitted a list of 191 alleged forced disappearances to the Ministry of the Interior, which responded that 99 of those on the list were in detention and 15 had been released.

Restrictions on civil society further limited the ability of NGOs to register, work and obtain funding, and a number of prominent human rights defenders were banned from travelling.

Restrictions on freedom of expression also increased. A new counter-terrorism law banned publication of information about terrorism that contradicts official statements. The number of journalists jailed for their work rose to 23, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. Protester Shaimaa al-Sabbagh was killed by police during a peaceful protest in January.

During 2015 we worked to support implementation of the rights set out in Egypt's new (2014) constitution. We did this by:

- > raising concerns at senior levels about human rights and our desire to see political reform, including during the Prime Minister's meeting with President Sisi in November;
- > making public statements on issues of concern, including the trial of Al Jazeera journalists and the sentencing of political activists;
- > raising concerns about human rights in Egypt in multilateral fora, including in our national statements at the UN Human Rights Council and during Egypt's Universal Periodic Review (UPR);
- > funding projects promoting human rights and democracy in Egypt, including those that supported women's rights, freedom of expression and the Parliament;
- > raising the importance of freedom of religion or belief with the Egyptian authorities, and promoting religious dialogue, including by hosting a visit to the UK by the Grand Imam of Al Azhar; and
- > deploying a gender adviser to Cairo in support of work on women's rights.

In 2016, Parliament will be a key institution in implementing constitutional rights and improving accountability. 2016 will also be an opportunity for Egypt to make progress on recommendations accepted during its UPR. The UK will support Egyptian government and civil society initiatives to improve the human rights situation, by continuing to raise concerns both in public and private, and through project funding. Our focus will be on detentions of political activists, police abuses, and restrictions on civil society. Improving the current trajectory is fundamental to Egypt's long-term stability.

Eritrea

In 2015, the human rights situation in Eritrea remained of serious concern, although there were some limited signs of progress. FCO's human rights priorities in Eritrea focused on encouraging government action in three areas: to clarify, and, where necessary, amend the terms and conditions of prolonged national service (which is predominantly non-military); to implement the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) recommendations that it accepted and look positively at

implementing those it did not; and to implement its own constitution.

The government of Eritrea took some incremental steps forward in 2015. It gave assurances to international partners to limit national service to 18 months. We do not yet have evidence that this has been implemented, and continue to press Eritrea to fulfil its commitment. We welcomed, however, the government's announcement in early 2016 that it would increase salaries for all those performing national service. Eritrea also increased its international engagement on human rights by participation in the UPR process and developing a stronger relationship with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). The OHCHR was allowed to conduct the first independent visit to a place of detention since the late 2000s. We also welcomed Eritrea joining the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in November 2015. In January 2015, Eritrea released six journalists who had been detained since 2009.

However, concerns remain. There have been no elections in Eritrea since independence in 1993. Eritrea has not yet implemented its 1997 constitution, though the government reports that preparatory work on the drafting of a new constitution is under way. Freedom of association and expression continue to be severely constrained. Opposition political parties and independent press are banned. Eritrea remains at the bottom of the World Press Freedom Index for the 8th consecutive year. Constraints on freedom of religion or belief persist, and the rule of law and the judiciary remain weak and liable to be circumvented through informal and extra-judicial forms of justice. There remain numerous reports of individuals who have been extra-judicially detained for long periods of time for political reasons. We remain concerned about the Eritrean government's approach to LGBT issues. Homosexual activity in Eritrea is still classed as illegal. Eritrea declines to develop anti-discrimination legislation which would provide protection for the LGBT community.

Eritrea's national service system remains one of the drivers of migration from the country. Eritrea took part in the Valletta Summit on Migration (11-12 November 2015) and continues to engage with international partners through the African Union / EU Khartoum Process which looks to tackle forced migration and human trafficking.

We continue to press Eritrea to take further steps on human rights. In 2016, the UK's priorities in Eritrea will continue to be to urge the Eritrean government to work on implementing the constitution and to reform the national service system which acts as a driver of migration. We will continue to support Eritrea's engagement with UN human rights bodies, and encourage them to extend this co-operation to the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Eritrea, as well as the UN Commission of Inquiry into human rights in Eritrea.

Iran

2015 saw the welcome engagement of Iran with the rules-based international system, reaching a potentially historic agreement that will impose strict limits and inspections on Iran's nuclear programme. However, Iran's human rights

record continued to cause great concern. President Rouhani pledged to improve the rights and freedoms of the citizens of Iran when he was elected in 2013. He also promised reforms on discrimination against women and members of ethnic minorities, and on greater space for freedom of expression and opinion. However, there has been little evidence of positive change.

In some cases, the situation in Iran appears to have worsened. The high number of executions is of particular concern. The UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Iran believes that between 966 and 1,025 people were executed in Iran in 2015, a substantial increase on 2014 and the highest number in over a decade. The majority of those executed were convicted of drug-related offences. The majority of newspapers, TV and radio are government-controlled, and the internet and social media sites are heavily restricted. Journalists, bloggers and human rights activists are regularly arrested and detained. In November, over 170 individuals were arrested for messages they published on social media apps.

Women do not enjoy the same rights and privileges as men in Iran and continue to face discrimination. For example, married women need the consent of their husbands to leave the country and can be banned from travelling abroad if their spouses do not sign the paperwork needed to obtain or renew a passport. In September, one of Iran's best female football players, Niloufar Ardalan, was refused permission by her husband to travel to Malaysia for a tournament.

While some religious minorities are formally protected in the constitution, the reality is that many non-Muslims face discrimination and attempts by Muslims to change their faith may lead to criminal prosecution. For example, there are regular reports of the arrest of members of Christian "house churches" and in 2015 a number of Baha'i-owned businesses were reportedly closed by the authorities for observing non-sanctioned holy days.

The UK continues to lead international efforts to encourage Iran to improve its human rights record. We continue to raise individual cases with the Iranian government, in addition to concerning trends such as the increase in use of the death penalty, juvenile executions, and continued persecution of religious minorities. The UK has also helped to maintain the listing of over 70 individuals under the Iran human rights sanctions regime.

The UK helped secure adoption of the UN General Assembly Third Committee Resolution on the human rights situation in Iran. The UK co-sponsored the Canadian-led resolution, assisting in drafting and agreeing the text. The resolution was passed by 76 votes.

FCO Human Rights and Democracy Programme projects supporting HRDs and creating platforms to support freedom of expression helped strengthen the foundations for change in country. We welcome the renewal of the mandate for the UN Special Rapporteur in Iran. We will continue to support this mandate and hope that Iran uses the opportunity to engage with the UN.

Iraq

The human rights situation in Iraq remained of grave concern during 2015. Daesh still controlled large areas in northern and western Iraq and continued to commit atrocities against all communities. Reports suggested an increase in sectarian tensions and in allegations of abuses and violations committed by government security forces (including the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), Kurdish Security Forces (KSF), Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) and militias) as areas were liberated from Daesh. The UN estimate that there are now over 3.3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Iraq, and that as many as 10 million people may be in need of humanitarian support (see Chapter II).

The government of Iraq (GoI) has taken steps to address the human rights situation. This includes agreeing the Emergency National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. Prime Minister Abadi also reiterated commitments to holding to account all those responsible for human rights abuses and violations. Women and children, and religious and ethnic minorities do, however, remain at increased risk of persecution. The abolition of the positions of Minister of Human Rights and Minister of Women's Affairs as part of Prime Minister Abadi's efforts to streamline the Iraqi government has created further challenges, including the ongoing absence of a senior governmental lead for women's affairs. Iraqi citizens continue to face challenges accessing justice, and the rule of law remains weak.

During 2015 we continued to engage with the GoI on human rights issues, particularly combating violence against women and girls, preventing sexual violence in conflict, and freedom of religion or belief. Progress in all areas remains slow. The GoI is still struggling with a legacy of sectarian policies, but Prime Minister Abadi is working to promote reconciliation and recognition of the rights of all communities. The UK is supporting the GoI as part of the Global Coalition to Counter Daesh^[40]. Through the Department for International Development (DFID)^[41], we have provided £79.5 million to support the international humanitarian effort. DFID has deployed two technical experts to the UN to improve co-ordination of the humanitarian response and information picture on sexual and gender-based violence. We are also funding a project to support victims of sexual violence by providing medical and psychosocial support and documenting crimes of sexual violence. We are providing £750,000 to support the implementation of the Iraqi National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, and have funded a project to promote freedom of religion or belief, by empowering community and religious leaders to defend the religious freedoms of all communities.

Meaningful political reconciliation and reform remain critical to uniting all Iraq's communities against extremism and achieving long-term security, stability and prosperity. We will continue to support the GoI as they work to deliver inclusive governance for all Iraqis and realise their commitments to improved human rights. We will focus on areas where the UK has particular expertise and can add value. These include:

[40] <https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/daesh>

[41] <https://www.gov.uk/government/world/organisations/dfid-iraq>

addressing weaknesses within the judicial system and building judicial capacity; promoting legislative reform; preventing sexual violence in conflict; promoting freedom of religion or belief and minority rights; and working to build a sense of Iraqi nationhood through cultural projects.

The State of Israel and The Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs)

We remained seriously concerned about the human rights situation in Israel and the OPTs in 2015. We were concerned by the Israeli government's violation of international human rights and humanitarian law in the context of Israel's occupation of the OPTs. We also had concerns about human rights infringements by the Palestinian Authority (PA) and grave concerns over those by Hamas in Gaza.

There was a marked increase in violence from October 2015 onwards, with attacks on Israelis, and clashes between Palestinians and the Israeli security forces. This upsurge was characterised by uncoordinated random stabbing attacks, which the PA failed to condemn publicly. On 9 October, the Foreign Secretary issued a statement^[42] condemning the violence. Some of the measures Israel introduced in response (including punitive house demolitions, and restrictions on movement and access) exacerbated existing human rights concerns. Access to the Holy Sites in Jerusalem was restricted on several occasions. We also had concerns about the PA's approach to addressing the violence. For example, in September, PA security forces used excessive force to disperse a peaceful rally in Bethlehem.

Israeli demolitions of Palestinian structures resulted in the displacement of at least 400 Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The UK was deeply concerned by advancement of existing settlement plans and "legalisation" of existing settlement units. We continued to condemn publicly and privately settlement expansion as illegal under international law. We also continued to express our concern over settler violence; for instance, on 31 July, FCO Minister for the Middle East, Tobias Ellwood, condemned^[43] the arson attack in Duma that caused the death of three Palestinians, including a small child.

The number of Palestinians Israel held in administrative detention increased, with an average of 417 at any one time. We continued to seek improvements in the treatment of Palestinians in detention, notably children. The Israeli authorities took some positive steps, including the use of summonses in place of night-time arrests. We were also concerned by continued reports of mistreatment towards detainees by the Palestinian security forces in the West Bank.

We continued to have concerns about breaches of human rights under Hamas, the de facto authorities in the Gaza Strip. Nine death sentences were passed for criminal acts; journalists were reportedly arrested and prevented from operating; and Gazan police used force to disperse peaceful demonstrations.

[42] <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-condemns-violence-in-israel-and-opt>

[43] <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/fco-minister-comments-on-israeli-settler-terror-attack-in-west-bank>

We remained deeply concerned that Hamas and other militants were re-arming, re-building tunnels, and running training camps.

In 2016, we will support genuine efforts towards a negotiated solution to the conflict. We will encourage the PA to make progress on human rights, including on incitement. We will continue to oppose any aspects of the Israeli occupation that violate human rights and international law, including demolitions and settlement construction. We will press for further improvement in the treatment of child detainees; maintenance of the status quo at al Haram ash Sharif/Temple Mount; and reconstruction and improved rights of movement and access within Gaza.

Libya

Overall, the human rights situation worsened during 2015. Reports by the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and NGOs, including Amnesty International^[44] and Human Rights Watch^[45], documented that armed groups on all sides disregarded civilians and committed violations and abuses of human rights, including abductions, extra-judicial executions, unlawful killings, torture, and other ill-treatment.

In most of the country, the judicial system broke down. There were frequent reports of intimidation, detentions, and assassinations of journalists and human rights defenders^[46]. Street-fighting in Benghazi resulted in hundreds of casualties, including civilians. In the south, hundreds were killed in tribal clashes. Daesh committed atrocities including bomb attacks; beheading Egyptian, Ethiopian and Eritrean Coptic Christians; and executing local residents and Salafist Imams in territory under their control. In May, the International Criminal Court Prosecutor, Mrs Fatou Bensouda, reaffirmed to the UN Security Council its continued jurisdiction over Rome Statute crimes in Libya, including those committed by Daesh. There were grave concerns over abuse of migrants^[47] by militia groups as they attempted to transit Libya.

The political and security crisis made it difficult to make substantive progress on the ground. The UK proactively supported the Libyan political dialogue, facilitated by the UN, to end the conflict and establish a unified Government of National Accord (GNA). The UK and UNSMIL co-chaired an international meeting in London on 19 October to agree the most effective ways to support a new GNA. The UK welcomed local peace initiatives^[48], including ceasefires, prisoner exchanges, and the return of internally displaced persons.

[44] <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/02/libya-mounting-evidence-war-crimes-after-egypt-airstrikes/>

[45] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/02/24/libya/egypt-civilian-toll-derna-air-strikes>

[46] <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/LY/HumanRightsDefendersLibya.pdf>

[47] <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde19/1578/2015/en/>

[48] <http://unsmil.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=3561&ctl=Details&mid=8549&ItemID=2099411&language=en-US>

The UK co-sponsored an African Group resolution^[49] at the 28th UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva, adopted with overwhelming support on 27 March 2015. It established an OHCHR mission to investigate violations and abuses with a view to ensuring accountability. In her closing statement^[50] at the HRC, FCO Minister for Human Rights, Baroness Anelay, highlighted the serious human rights situation, and the urgent need for a political resolution. While the Libyan delegation engaged constructively with the Universal Periodic Review at the HRC in September, the UK noted with concern the limited capacity for investigating human rights violations and bringing perpetrators to justice.

The UK welcomed^[51] the signing on 17 December 2015 of the Libyan Political Agreement in Skhirat, Morocco, for the establishment of a GNA. In 2016, we will continue to play an active role and encourage the Libyan parties to implement the agreement in full and ensure that, as Libyan state authority is re-established across national territory, respect for human rights is considered as an important part of re-building governance. We have re-focused our support to Libya on political participation programmes, including providing expert advice to the Constitutional Drafting Assembly; supporting various women's civil society organisations to advocate for women's rights in the constitution drafting process; and supporting civil society organisations involved in transitional justice issues in Libya, including the mapping of human rights abuses.

Republic of Maldives

In 2015, the human rights situation in Maldives deteriorated, with a sustained decline in democracy and judicial independence as President Yameen's government tightened its grip on power. Political and civil freedoms were eroded, opposition and some government figures were arbitrarily arrested, the press resorted to self-censorship, and there were worrying moves to re-introduce the death penalty after a moratorium of more than 60 years. Growing religious conservatism was also a cause for concern.

In February, former President Nasheed was sentenced to 13 years on charges of terrorism following a trial that was internationally condemned. By the end of 2015, all opposition party leaders were in prison, detained, or in self-imposed exile.

In October, former Vice President Adeeb was detained: the eleventh senior government official to be arrested or dismissed since President Yameen came to power in November 2013. A few weeks later, the government declared a State of Emergency. It lasted six days and a number of basic constitutional rights, including the right to peaceful assembly, were suspended. The suspension of parliamentary process during the State of Emergency enabled the swift and

unchallenged impeachment of Mr Adeeb, making him the second Vice President to be impeached in a six-month period.

Throughout the year, various regulations were introduced which restricted democratic space. The Home Ministry insisted NGOs seek permission before receiving foreign funding; this hampered their ability to function independently. At the end of November, the Home Minister announced a ban on street protests, stating that they should take place in "confined public spaces". This raised serious questions about the ability to exercise freedom of assembly and free speech. The Supreme Court, in a move to centralise and consolidate power, took the responsibility for regulating lawyers away from the Attorney General. We do not believe that the concerns in a report in 2013 by the Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers have been addressed, including on the fact that many interventions by courts were arbitrary, and that due process was not being followed. The Anti-Terrorism Act, introduced in November, gave the government unfettered power to monitor people.

The UK was at the forefront of international efforts to encourage Maldives to improve its human rights record. On 30 November, following the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Malta, the Prime Minister welcomed the conclusion of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group that Maldives were worthy of formal consideration. He said, "the Commonwealth has an important role to play in helping its members adhere to its values". The FCO's Minister for Asia, Hugo Swire, and FCO officials regularly raised our human rights concerns with senior government officials.

In 2016, we will continue to remind Maldives of its commitment to protect human rights, using both quiet diplomacy and public messaging. We will also use coordinated international engagement to push for greater political plurality and inclusion; the protection of fundamental freedoms of expression and assembly; the independence of the judiciary; and the reversal of moves to reintroduce the death penalty. The Commonwealth, EU and UN will be important partners.

Pakistan

Serious human rights concerns persisted in 2015. Following the terrorist attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar, Pakistan lifted the de facto moratorium on the death penalty, first in December 2014 for terrorist offences, then in March 2015 for all capital crimes.

Throughout the year, over 325 people were executed, with an estimated 8,000 on death row. There were serious concerns over Pakistan's use of the death penalty, including fair trial issues and the execution of persons who were alleged to have been minors at the time of the offence. The Peshawar attack also prompted a constitutional amendment to enable military courts to try civilian terrorist cases. There is little information on these courts and no access to proceedings, making it impossible to assess their compliance with international obligations. The operating space for domestic and international NGOs narrowed considerably, driven in a large part by uncertainty over registration. This impeded their work and is

[49] <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session28/Pages/ResDecStat.aspx>

[50] <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/baroness-anelay-on-conclusion-of-un-human-rights-council>

[51] <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-responds-to-libyan-political-agreement>

yet to be resolved. Sectarian attacks continued but, relative to 2014, their intensity decreased in the last six months of 2015.

Ahmadiyya, Shia, Hazara, Christian, Hindu and Sikh minority communities continued to suffer discrimination and targeted violence. As in previous years, the blasphemy laws were misused to the detriment of Muslims and non-Muslims. The government of Pakistan took some steps to develop institutions mandated to increase compliance with international human rights standards, including finally establishing the National Commission for Human Rights.

FCO human rights objectives in 2015 for Pakistan focused on the death penalty, freedom of religion or belief, the promotion of the rule of law, and women's rights. At the highest level, the UK made clear to Pakistan its opposition to the death penalty. We urged Pakistan to reinstate the moratorium and comply with international commitments. FCO Ministers repeatedly expressed concerns about violations of freedom of religion or belief and encouraged Pakistan to reform its blasphemy laws. In Pakistan, British High Commission support for criminal justice reform was extensive, provided through programmes to improve civilian capacity to investigate, prosecute and convict criminals, including terrorists, in line with international standards.

Pakistan remained a priority for UK development assistance, with programmes designed to improve human rights. Within the framework of the EU's Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+), which promotes economic development and compliance with 27 international conventions (including seven human rights conventions), the EU completed its biennial assessment of Pakistan's progress. During the review period, Pakistan launched a Treaty Implementation Cell and roadmap.

In 2016, Pakistan can take further steps to ensure international commitments and constitutional provisions to safeguard human rights are honoured in practice. These include reinstatement of the death penalty moratorium, reform of the blasphemy law and discriminatory legislation, and action to empower women. Progress on judicial reform should enable the Pakistani authorities to respect the January 2017 sunset clause on the use of military courts to try terrorist suspects. GSP+ has helped to establish a framework for monitoring compliance with human rights commitments. With adequate political will, in 2016 that architecture can help drive tangible human rights improvements in practice.

Russia

The human rights environment in Russia continued to deteriorate in 2015.

The rule of law remained inconsistent and arbitrarily applied. The UK expressed serious concern publicly and to the Russian authorities about a number of judicial cases, including those of Ukrainian nationals Nadiya Savchenko, Oleg Sentsov and Oleksandr Kolchenko. Representatives of the British Embassy in Moscow observed hearings in these and other cases.

The space for civil society shrank further with the enforcement of restrictive legislation, notably the so-called "foreign agents" and "undesirable organisations" laws, which have

the effect of depriving NGOs of vital funding and subjecting them to unreasonably burdensome reporting requirements and disproportionate sanctions, up to and including closure. During the course of 2015, 81 Russian NGOs were added to the "foreign agents" register, 13 chose to close down, and four foreign organisations were labelled "undesirable". The UK is deeply concerned about this crackdown on civil society.

Freedom of expression remained under pressure. State-controlled media, particularly television, overwhelmingly emphasised a pro-government narrative. Although space for independent media continued to exist, most notably online, a small number of individuals faced criminal prosecution for posting critical comments. A number of independent journalists reported that they had experienced harassment, particularly in the North Caucasus region.

The UK's human rights work in Russia during 2015 focused on five priority themes: civil society and democracy; equality and non-discrimination; rule of law; the North Caucasus; and freedom of expression. We supported a range of projects within these broad themes, including on LGBT rights, disability rights, and media freedom. We raised our concerns about human rights regularly, including at senior official and ministerial level. In December, the FCO Minister for Europe, David Lidington, met leading Russian human rights defenders (HRDs) in Moscow, and raised our concerns during his meeting with First Deputy Foreign Minister Titov.

Recent legislation makes it more difficult for the international community to support human rights organisations in Russia. We judge it unlikely that the situation will improve in 2016, and anticipate increasing pressure on government critics as the Duma (parliamentary) elections in September 2016 approach. Nevertheless, the UK will continue to support the promotion and protection of human rights in Russia. In meetings with the Russian government and through our project funding, we will strive to highlight the vital contribution made by HRDs and independent journalists. We will attend trials when we have concerns that justice is not being served, and we will speak out when we believe rights are at risk. We will continue to work with EU partners and through multilateral organisations – such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the Council of Europe, and the UN – to keep the spotlight on Russia's deteriorating human rights situation, thus maintaining pressure on the Russian authorities to implement international human rights commitments. The UK will continue to offer practical support to those people working in increasingly difficult circumstances for the rights of all.

Russian Actions in Ukraine

Russia's actions in Ukraine led to a severe deterioration in the human rights situation in both Donbas and Crimea in 2015.

In the areas under Russian-backed separatist control in Donbas, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) continued to report killings, torture and other ill-treatment, illegal detention, and forced labour during 2015. Also deeply concerning are details of increasing restrictions being placed on civil society.

Following Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea, the human rights situation continued to deteriorate through 2015. Arrests, torture and other ill treatment, and intimidation against political opponents and minorities persisted, particularly the Crimean Tatar community, with the knowledge or participation of "law enforcement" or other affiliated groups. Crimean Tatar institutions and organisations were increasingly branded as "extremist" and members arrested as "terrorists". Access to international monitoring agencies continued to be denied.

Throughout 2015, the UK continued to call on Russia and Russian-backed separatists to respect international law and allow unimpeded access to international human rights monitoring agencies. We also continued to push for independent investigations into all serious allegations of human rights violations and abuses. Without improved access for international monitoring agencies and proper accountability for human rights violations and abuses, there is little prospect of the human rights situation improving in Donbas and Crimea during 2016.

Saudi Arabia

Throughout 2015, the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia remained of concern, though there were incremental steps to improve women's rights.

In 2015, the UK continued to support the expansion of women's rights in Saudi Arabia. We welcomed the fact that the municipal elections of 12 December 2015 were the first in which women were able to stand for election and vote. In total, 38 women are now represented in municipal councils. The elections were monitored by the Saudi Arabian National Society for Human Rights, which declared them free and fair. However, we remain concerned about the inability of women to participate equally in society. Many of the barriers are cultural. We worked with a range of opinion-formers and activists to challenge entrenched attitudes and support those seeking to change them.

There was a continuing negative trend in the number of executions. In 2015, 158 people were executed, up from 90 in 2014. Part of the reason for this was the conclusion of a significant number of long-running legal cases. The UK, together with the EU, was vocal in our opposition to the death penalty, particularly in response to the execution of 47 people on 2 January 2016. We assess that, since the principle of the death penalty is enshrined in Saudi Arabia's Sharia law, abolition is unlikely in the near future. We continue to focus our efforts on reducing the number of death sentences and executions, including by encouraging Saudi Arabia to apply the minimum standards contained in the EU guidelines on the death penalty. In 2015 we regularly raised the cases of Ali al-Nimr, Dawood al-Marhoon and Abdullah al-Zaher. All three were convicted of crimes committed when they were juveniles, although under Saudi Law they are considered to have been adult at the time.

In 2015, the UK and the EU continued to support freedom of expression, including in relation to the cases of Raif Badawi, Ashraf Fayadh and other human rights defenders. We raised these cases privately with the Saudi authorities. We continue

to believe that raising issues in private is the most effective way of effecting change in this context.

In 2016, 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 continue to follow closely cases relating to freedom of religion or belief, and freedom of expression.

We will also continue to look for opportunities to work with the government of Saudi Arabia and NGOs to encourage further steps towards allowing women to participate equally in society.

Somalia

2015 was another year of serious concern for human rights in Somalia. Civilians continue to be killed, wounded and displaced by indiscriminate attacks and violations committed by various sides in the ongoing internal conflict. Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is endemic and access to justice is severely restricted, if not completely unattainable, for many of Somalia's most vulnerable people. The death penalty continues to be carried out, despite previous support at the UN by the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) for establishing a moratorium. Attacks on freedom of expression are on the increase, with the Committee to Protect Journalists' annual Impunity Index^[52] recently naming Somalia, for the first time, as the worst place in the world to be a journalist. Concerns have also been raised over the recently adopted Media Law, which, depending on its implementation, could see the freedom of journalists further restricted.

Somalia's broad human rights problems are underpinned by impunity, resulting from a lack of capacity to monitor and gather information, and to report, investigate and prosecute violations when they occur.

Though lacking capacity to effect wholesale improvement, the FGS continued to demonstrate a commitment to improving human rights throughout 2015. In May, the FGS endorsed an Action Plan for their Human Rights Road Map. Bills on establishing an independent human rights commission and on sexual offences made progress in Parliament. Somalia also increased its engagement with international human rights instruments by ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child in October.

In 2015, the FCO's human rights priorities in Somalia focused on addressing wider security and impunity; establishing effective human rights institutions and instruments; and empowering women. In 2015, the FCO funded five technical advisers to increase the capacity of the Ministry of Women and Human Rights Development to deliver its action plans, and provided support to a preventing sexual violence programme in Mogadishu. Given the deep-rooted nature of Somalia's human rights issues, the FCO's objectives are long term. Assessing whether the objectives are having a tangible impact upon human rights in Somalia will therefore take time.

[52] <https://www.cpj.org/reports/2015/10/impunity-index-getting-away-with-murder.php>

However, in the short term, the FCO will continue to focus on helping to build the foundation for long-term human rights protection.

2016 will be a pivotal year in Somalia's journey towards stability. The country's upcoming elections offer fresh opportunities for greater inclusion of women in decision-making processes. Federal and regional leaders have committed to a gender quota in both Houses of Parliament. Ensuring this happens in practice will be a FCO priority in 2016. Somalia's electoral process will, however, consume much of the country's limited capacity, potentially diverting attention from human rights commitments. A desire for a smooth electoral process may also see freedom of expression come under increasing pressure. The FCO will continue to encourage and support Somalia to fulfil and deliver upon its national and international human rights commitments throughout 2016.

South Sudan

The human rights situation in South Sudan deteriorated further during 2015. Both government and opposition forces continued to breach previous commitments to end hostilities, and widespread fighting resumed in April and May. While a peace agreement was signed in August, serious human rights violations and abuses, and breaches of international humanitarian law continued to be recorded, the majority of which were reportedly committed by government-backed forces. Sexual violence remained a significant concern and was reported in areas previously unaffected by conflict in the south. Gang rapes coupled with beatings and abductions of women were reportedly perpetrated by government-backed forces. Despite international pressure, there was little or no follow-up on long-awaited government investigations into human rights violations and abuses. The rights of the child continued to be violated with reports indicating the use of child soldiers by both sides.

The African Union Commission of Inquiry (AU-COI) report was published in October and found that there were reasonable grounds to believe that crimes against humanity and war crimes had been committed by all sides. A mission by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights undertook a comprehensive assessment of the situation and reported sexual violence had taken place throughout 2015. Civil and political space was severely restricted. The 2014 Security Bill gave the National Security Services enhanced powers to arrest and detain. Arrests, beatings and assaults on journalists and the closure of newspapers were reported throughout the year.

The UK's key human rights objectives in 2015 centred on conflict prevention, preventing sexual violence, and protecting political space. We took action in all these areas during the year. We played a significant and sustained role in helping to secure the peace agreement and continued to lobby both sides to advance implementation. With our Troika partners (the United States and Norway) we encouraged publication of the AU-COI report and have been active in calling for follow-up. South Sudan remained a priority country for the UK's Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI). We provided support at the grassroots level, as well as pressing the government to fulfil the commitments it had made in the 2014

Joint UN Communiqué on the Prevention of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence. Internationally, we successfully pressed for a strong resolution on South Sudan at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC). The Prime Minister also announced the UK would send up to 300 troops to South Sudan to support the UN peacekeeping mission.

Our priorities in 2016 will be to ensure the peace agreement is implemented, starting with the formation of the Transitional Government of National Unity. We will continue to press for action on human rights, support human rights organisations, and take a lead on PSVI. We will encourage the AU to establish the Hybrid Court for South Sudan so that perpetrators of abuses can be held to account. At the HRC we will press for a UN Special Rapporteur to be appointed.

Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

There was an improvement in the overall human rights situation in Sri Lanka in 2015, although some concerns remain. Reversing the downward trend of recent years, the government of Sri Lanka took positive steps to improve freedom of expression (including the media) and freedom of movement, reduce inter-community tensions, and restore the independence of institutions such as the Human Rights Commission. The government also signalled its willingness to address long-standing allegations of past human rights abuses and violations, co-sponsoring a resolution in the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in October committing it to reconciliation, accountability and the protection of human rights. In a positive change of approach, the government engaged constructively with the international community, including with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and other UN bodies.

In 2015, the UK worked to encourage and support the government's reform process. The UK lobbied for progress on key issues such as the return of military-occupied land, the lifting of bans on Tamil diaspora organisations, and the release of long-term detainees held without charge under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. The UK was a strong advocate for the OHCHR Investigation on Sri Lanka (OISL) and instrumental in the adoption of the HRC resolution in which the OISL recommendations were reflected. We supported this political effort through targeted funding that supported domestic monitoring efforts and increased participation for parliamentary elections in August. We also worked to improve police standards and police-community relations, and promoted interfaith dialogues across the country.

Some of these positive changes are less apparent in the north and east. Human rights defenders continued to report harassment and surveillance in 2015, a point raised by the UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances during their visit in November. The OISL report also highlighted a number of human rights concerns that still remain, including continued reports of torture, and sexual and gender-based violence. The UK has urged the government to investigate these and other allegations of human rights violations, and will continue to push for progress in these areas.

In 2016, we expect the positive trajectory to continue. This is a moment of opportunity for Sri Lanka, and the international community has an important role to play. The OHCHR will present its assessment of progress on implementation of its recommendations at the HRC's 32nd session in June. We will continue to encourage and support Sri Lanka to deliver on its commitments to the HRC, and to make early progress to build wider support for its efforts to address accountability. The Prime Minister has pledged £6.6m over the next three years to continue our support for reconciliation and human rights. Our work with the government of Sri Lanka will aim to continue strengthening democracy and the rule of law, and reform the security sector, sharing UK experience and expertise.

Sudan

Overall there was no significant improvement in the human rights situation in Sudan during 2015. Ceasefires later in the year led to less fighting compared to previous years. However, ongoing conflicts in Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile continued, with human rights violations/ abuses and international humanitarian law violations by all parties – the majority by the government of Sudan. Humanitarian access continued to be severely restricted, and aerial bombardments by government forces continued. By the end of 2015, there were over 100,000 newly displaced people in Darfur and 3.2 million long-term displaced nationwide. Whilst freedom of expression increased slightly around the launch of Sudan's National Dialogue, this followed earlier detentions of opposition politicians and record levels of newspaper seizures. Sudan ranks 174th out of 180 on the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index. Freedom of religion or belief, sexual violence, and the powers and immunity granted to the security services all remain concerning. The government remains unwilling to acknowledge many of these challenges and has demonstrated little commitment to reform.

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a major concern in Sudan, with 87% of women aged 15-49 reporting having undergone some form of FGM in a recent study. However, the national strategy to abandon FGM in a generation (2008-2018) is a positive step.

The UK's key human rights objectives for 2015 focused on conflict resolution, preventing sexual violence in conflict, humanitarian access, the widening of political space and upholding freedom of religion or belief. We continued to support the African Union-led peace talks, and regularly lobbied all sides to allow full access in Darfur for the peacekeeping mission UNAMID and for humanitarian actors across Sudan.

On 1 June, FCO Minister for Africa, James Duddridge, highlighted our concern over the situation in Blue Nile calling for an end to forced relocations and for humanitarian access. With our Troika partners (the United States and Norway), we also spoke out in April regretting the lack of a conducive environment for elections and calling for the National Dialogue to be comprehensive and inclusive. To help combat sexual violence in Darfur, UK-funded projects provided legal, medical and psycho-social support for over 150 survivors of rape, and

contributed to successful prosecutions of members of the police and armed forces. Sudan is also the biggest recipient of UK aid targeting the abandonment of FGM. In support of strengthened civil and political freedoms, we attended four trials and raised cases of concern with the government. Internationally, we supported the renewed mandate of the UN Independent Expert at the UN Human Rights Council. We continued to urge the government to facilitate his work, especially by granting access to Blue Nile and South Kordofan.

In 2016, our human rights priorities will remain conflict resolution and humanitarian access, pressing for greater civil and political freedoms, and tackling sexual and gender-based violence. We will also seek to use the opportunity of Sudan's forthcoming national strategy on ending child marriage to support improvements on the rights of the child, and continue to work on ending the harmful practice of FGM.

Syria

In 2015, the human rights situation in Syria continued to deteriorate as conflict intensified. The Asad regime continued to commit human rights violations on a large scale, persistently violated international humanitarian law (IHL), and failed to comply with numerous UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions. Regime forces continued to arbitrarily arrest, disappear, and torture detainees, many of whom have died in detention.

The Asad regime and its allies (including Russia) carried out indiscriminate attacks that directly targeted civilians, including bombardment of civilian residential areas, schools, market areas and medical facilities, with barrel bombs, artillery, aerial attacks and mortars, resulting in mass civilian casualties. Lengthy sieges, mainly by regime forces, led to severe malnutrition and even starvation. The UK believes that both the Asad regime and Daesh have used chemical weapons in Syria. Daesh has been responsible for systematic and widespread violations of IHL, including targeting civilians. IHL violations were also carried out by al-Qaeda's affiliate in Syria, Jabhat al-Nusra, and some other extremist groups. This violence and instability continued to force people from their homes and increased the numbers of internally displaced persons and those fleeing the country as refugees.

Ultimately, the terrible human rights situation in Syria will only be addressed through a political settlement that ends the conflict. Through its role in the UNSC and the International Syria Support Group, the UK is supporting a peace process which aims to end the violence and achieve political transition away from Asad. UNSC Resolution 2254, adopted 18 December 2015, calls for ceasefire planning and an immediate end to attacks against civilians. The UK has been at the forefront of promoting the participation of minority groups, and especially women, in the peace process. We support progress that has subsequently been made on the political track, including the start of intra-Syrian peace talks, cessation of hostilities, and some improvements in humanitarian access.

The UK led the adoption of three resolutions on the human rights situation in Syria at the UN Human Rights Council during 2015 and co-sponsored the UN General Assembly Third Committee Resolution on the human rights situation in

Syria, which was also successfully adopted. We support the UN Commission of Inquiry's investigations into human rights violations and abuses in Syria.



Syrian girls, carrying school bags provided by UNICEF, walk past the rubble of destroyed buildings on their way home from school on 7 March 2015 in Aleppo.

More widely, the UK continued to play a leading role in addressing the humanitarian situation in Syria. We have now pledged a total of £2.3 billion in humanitarian assistance to support Syrian refugees up to 2020. This is our largest ever response to a single humanitarian crisis.

The UK supported a range of projects focused on human rights and accountability amounting to £10.3 million as at the end of 2015. These programmes included the provision of capacity building for Syrian human rights activists to gather evidence of violations of international criminal and humanitarian law. This evidence is intended for use in future international and/or Syrian-led criminal and accountability processes. We also provided IHL and Law of Armed Conflict training, and supported women's empowerment in policing, civil defence, and local councils inside Syria. In addition, we are working to improve local capacity to document sexual violence in order to strengthen future justice mechanisms and reconciliation processes. We will continue this programme of work in 2016.

Turkmenistan

The human rights situation in Turkmenistan throughout 2015 remained of significant concern. Little progress was made towards the implementation of its international obligations. Movement on the reform programme, to which the government has said it is committed, was slow. The reform programme includes an amended constitution, the adoption of a Human Rights Action Plan, and the appointment of an Independent Human Rights Ombudsman. Against a backdrop of a worsening economic situation, due to loss of revenue from gas, 2015 saw restrictions on the internet tighten, and space for civil society shrink still further. Widespread corruption and the lack of freedom of assembly or religion remained serious problems in 2015, as did an absence of government transparency or an independent media. Turkmenistan is yet to demonstrate that it is committed to genuine reform.

In 2015, our objectives remained consistent in continuing to use every suitable opportunity, both bilaterally and through international partners, to encourage the Turkmen government to comply with its international human rights obligations and to underline the importance of human rights reform. Bilaterally, human rights were raised during the visits made to Turkmenistan by the FCO Minister for Central Asia, Tobias Ellwood, in July and December. The British Ambassador regularly made representations to the government on human rights issues, including on individual cases. In one case, following lobbying over several years by the British Embassy and other organisations, a former Turkmen Minister, who had been barred from travelling overseas following several years of imprisonment, was finally given permission to leave the country for medical treatment. The British Embassy supported projects with the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in the areas of judicial independence, racial discrimination and educational reform, and we expect the results of these projects will be reflected in the Human Rights Action Plan due in early 2016.

Some limited progress on human rights was discernible. For the first time in 12 years, Turkmenistan attended the OSCE Human Dimension meeting in Warsaw, and a long-awaited visit to a prison by EU Ambassadors took place. However, there is much to do, and reform needs to focus on implementation of current human rights policies, rather than new laws.

In 2016, we will continue to press for the range and pace of reform to increase, including through the new constitution and the Human Rights Action Plan. The British Embassy will support the work of the UN and OSCE through the funding of human rights projects. Presidential elections are due in 2017 (last held in 2012 when the EU noted its concern about their conduct). The hosting of the Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games will be an opportunity for Turkmenistan to demonstrate progress on human rights at a time when the sporting spotlight will be on them.

Uzbekistan

In 2015, we continued to have significant concerns about the overall human rights situation in Uzbekistan. In July, the UN Human Rights Committee considered Uzbekistan's 4th Periodic Report on its implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The committee found that Uzbekistan had not taken sufficient steps to address outstanding concerns since it underwent its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2013. These included the lack of freedom of expression, poor criminal justice procedures, and the use of torture against detainees.

Violations continued to be reported in 2015 by human rights organisations, and a number of human rights defenders were reportedly detained or harassed by the authorities. In March, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) observed Uzbekistan's Presidential election. It concluded that voters were not able to make informed choices given that freedom of expression and association remain curtailed. Restrictions on the activity of NGOs further reduced

space for constructive and open discussions on addressing human rights problems.

However, some progress has been made, such as on child and forced labour. The World Bank published a report^[53] in November on the 2015 cotton harvest. The report concluded that the Uzbek authorities had taken measures towards eliminating child labour, and that it was now socially unacceptable and rare. The report also concluded that, whilst the risk of forced labour remained, the Uzbek government had agreed to address this as part of its co-operation with the World Bank and International Labour Organisation.

Further progress was seen in the implementation of 2013/14 legislative changes aimed at improving communication between civil society and government bodies. The FCO's Human Rights and Democracy Programme continued to fund a project implemented by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and Uzbekistan's Academy of Public Administration. It helped to reform public administration by improving public access to information through e-governance portals and by establishing 200 public information centres across pilot regions. However, despite our sustained focus on ensuring full implementation of the Convention against Torture, we saw no substantive progress in 2015, and the Uzbek authorities refused permission for an FCO-funded project on torture prevention.

Our key human rights objective in 2015 was to encourage further implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP) which was drafted to take forward 121 recommendations following Uzbekistan's UPR in 2013. We see the NAP as the most practical vehicle for addressing a range of human rights challenges in Uzbekistan. It was formally adopted by the Uzbek government in early 2015, but agreement has not yet been reached between the government and UNDP on building a monitoring and evaluation mechanism into the plan.

In 2016 we will continue to encourage progress on this and frame our human rights advocacy around the NAP, ahead of Uzbekistan's next UPR, in 2017.

Venezuela

In 2015, the human rights situation in Venezuela was challenging.

There were some efforts by the state to improve this. In July, it announced a 2015-2019 Human Rights Plan, including proposals to reform the judiciary, prisons and security forces, to end discrimination, and to protect vulnerable groups. It also launched a Human Rights Commission to oversee the plan's implementation. In December, despite concerns over the lack of international election monitoring, Venezuela held peaceful parliamentary elections with the highest voter turnout ever recorded. The elections were won by the opposition Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD) coalition. However, a continued political, economic and institutional crisis prevented wider progress.

During 2015, UN and regional human rights bodies expressed concern at the state of civil and political liberties and economic and social rights in Venezuela. There were wider concerns about institutional independence, transparency, and access to public information. Violence remained a central issue. There are an estimated 14 million illegal weapons in Venezuela. The high level of impunity has encouraged worsening criminality. Over 27,000 murders were reported in 2015.

Venezuelan society is politically polarised. This affects the work of the public sector, NGOs and other civil society organisations. Human rights defenders have reported intimidation and physical attacks. Local NGOs estimate that there are over 80 political prisoners in Venezuela (the government maintains there are no political prisoners, only politicians in prison) and that more than 800 people have fled the country for fear of persecution. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has demanded the release of prominent political leaders and has expressed serious concerns about respect for due process and the rule of law.

The UK's objective is to promote human rights and democracy in Venezuela, with a focus on working with all sectors of society to promote dialogue and reduce violence, strengthen democratic governance and civil society, and promote the rights of women and girls. The UK aims to work constructively to address our human rights concerns through public and private channels, including on areas of disagreement. The challenge has been to build consensus on action with the Venezuelan government. Since 2012, the UK has funded 22 human rights and democracy projects in Venezuela with local organisations and government institutions. These projects include protecting indigenous rights, supporting political dialogue and promoting electoral reform.

A worsening economic situation, increasing violence and escalating political confrontation increase the probability that conditions will toughen in 2016, making tackling human rights issues more difficult. Project work with civil society may also become more difficult. From January to June, the UK will lead the local EU Working Group on Human Rights and Democracy. We will also work with official and non-official entities in the run-up to Venezuela's second Universal Periodic Review at the UN Human Rights Council in October 2016.

Yemen

The overall human rights situation in Yemen significantly deteriorated in 2015. Human rights violations and abuses in Yemen took place on a large scale, including: the use of child soldiers; attacks on journalists and human rights defenders (HRDs); arbitrary detentions; destruction of civilian infrastructure; damage to Yemen's cultural heritage; and the lack of progress on improving the rights of women. Internal conflict further impeded the legitimate Yemeni authorities and undermined the protection of universal rights. On 1 July, the UN declared Yemen to be a Level Three Emergency, making Yemen one of the four most severe, large-scale humanitarian crises in the world.

[53] <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/pubdocs/publicdoc/2015/11/307241448038866033/Uzbek-2015-TPM-Report-20112015.pdf>

The conflict has had a significant impact on civilians. The International Committee of the Red Cross warned that civilian suffering in Yemen had reached “unprecedented levels”. Civilians were also the victims of terrorist attacks in Yemen. The UN reported that the use of children in armed conflict increased in 2015. Reports of gender-based violence were twice as numerous in December as in March.

There have been continued reports that the Houthis and forces loyal to ex-President Saleh have arbitrarily arrested, detained and abducted government supporters and HRDs. The NGO Reporters Without Borders reported that the Houthis and Al-Qaeda-linked armed groups were holding around 17 journalists hostage.

The UK supported a UN Human Rights Council resolution in October, which called on the UN to provide technical assistance to the government of Yemen, assist the Yemeni National Independent Commission of Inquiry, and report back to the next session of the HRC.

Throughout 2015, we raised the importance of respect for human rights law with the Coalition, the government of Yemen, and the Houthis. The UK has emphasised repeatedly to all parties, throughout the conflict, the importance of protecting civilians. We have supported the UN in their lobbying of the Houthis to stop using child soldiers.

The UK continued to support the UN-led peace process in 2015, politically and financially, recognising that a political solution is the best way to bring about long-term stability. UN-convened peace talks were held in June and December, where progress was made on confidence-building measures. The UK supported the UN Special Envoy in including women in the peace process. There was 20% female representation in both delegations at the December round of talks.

In 2016, the UK will continue to support the UN-led peace process to bring a political solution to the conflict, and call for all parties to improve humanitarian and commercial access. The UK is the fourth largest donor in response to this crisis, having more than doubled humanitarian aid to Yemen in 2016 to £85 million. The UK will continue to raise the importance of human rights law and protection of civilians with all parties.

Zimbabwe

In 2015, the human rights situation in Zimbabwe remained fragile. Although conditions have improved since 2008, violations still occur. Harassment and discrimination continue to make up more than 60% of reported incidents. There have been increasing reports of discrimination in the implementation of government-controlled food aid programmes. There is periodic use of violence by the state, especially during election periods. However, due to some improvement in citizens’ civil liberties, Freedom House recently improved Zimbabwe’s status from “Not Free” to “Partly Free” in its Freedom in the World report. Ahead of the 2018 elections, it is essential that reforms are made to the electoral system, including ensuring the full independence of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission.

In 2015, the UK’s human rights work in Zimbabwe focused on monitoring and reducing the overall number of recorded

human rights violations, encouraging effective implementation and compliance with the 2013 constitution, improving property rights, and further developing democratic space. UK funding supported improved access to justice for vulnerable people, helped provide child protection services and contributed to a successful constitutional court challenge to the legality of child marriage. We spoke out through statements and in private meetings with the government of Zimbabwe about the importance of state institutions complying with the 2013 constitution, particularly with regard to evictions and demolitions.

Progress in 2015 was patchy and a number of issues remain. Citizens’ ability to enjoy their rights continues to be defined by their political affiliation. Intra- and inter-party violence continues at a low level, with worrying peaks around by-elections. Compliance with court decisions by police is inconsistent, and there have been repeated violations of constitutional protections in regard to eviction and demolition of properties, affecting both black and white communities. Remaining issues of concern include slow progress to revise repressive legislation in line with the 2013 constitution, restrictions on the freedom of the media, and preferential treatment of ruling party supporters in the distribution of food aid. The government of Zimbabwe has still not properly investigated the disappearance of political activist Itai Dzamara. LGBT rights are not protected under the Constitution. The death penalty remains on the statute book, although there is a de facto moratorium in place.

In 2016 the UK government will continue to encourage timely revision of repressive Zimbabwean legislation to align it with the 2013 constitution; support the efforts of local civil society organisations to have constitutional provisions enforced; monitor trends in frequency and severity of rights violations, including political violence, intimidation and politicised access to humanitarian aid; and support access to justice programmes. We will call on the government of Zimbabwe to respect the provisions of the Constitution, particularly regarding eviction and demolition of property, and support those who seek to have these protections enforced. The UK government urges the government of Zimbabwe to follow the decisions of its courts in disputed land seizure cases. We will continue to support efforts to build a more democratic, stable and prosperous Zimbabwe.

ANNEX A: Three Human Rights Themes: Vision And Goals

Democratic Values and Rule of Law

We will promote and defend the core values of successful societies, specifically the democratic freedoms and equalities which encourage public participation and support human dignity. The core message is that promoting the “golden thread” of democracy, the rule of law, property rights, a free media and open, accountable institutions can contribute to stable, progressive and prosperous societies.

Work in this area will aim to:

- > promote open societies, reverse the trend towards “shrinking civil society space”, and support public participation in democratic decision making;
- > support the role of human rights defenders;
- > ensure increased representation of women in political and public life, especially in leadership positions, and global reduction in violence against women and girls; and
- > tackle intolerance and discrimination of all kinds, including against LGBT people.

In practical terms, this will include:

- > working with international partners, including through the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) and the Community of Democracies, to increase the number of states opting to strengthen democratic processes and build accountable institutions. **Goal: (i)** During 2016, we will increase support for WFD’s capacity to deliver integrated projects (which combine “sister party work” with other forms of institution-building), and to collaborate with practitioners and academia on research and policy initiatives. **(ii)** Also during 2016, we will collaborate with the EU Special Representative on Human Rights to strengthen the impact of the EU’s new Human Rights Defenders Mechanism. **(iii)** We will use International Women’s Day and World Press Freedom Day to showcase UK values and leadership on connected issues, employing network-wide activities to focus our international partners on relevant obligations and opportunities;
- > continuing to promote an open and secure internet, as a founding member of the Freedom Online Coalition (FoC), working to increase the number of countries which subscribe to the Coalition’s aspirations. **Goal: (iv)** During 2016 we will join the Governing Council of the Community of Democracies and focus the organisation on global threats to civil society, as well as opportunities for mutually reinforcing initiatives with the FoC. Four additional countries identified and invited to apply for FoC membership; and
- > engaging with a targeted number of priority countries to support the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs); and work with Home Office and other Departments to build on the UK’s leadership against Modern Slavery. **Goal: (v)** During 2016, we will use the republished UK National Action Plan (NAP) to strengthen international consensus around the UNGP voluntary approach, including by encouraging the production of NAPs by EU and non-EU countries.

Human Rights for a Stable World

We will work to prevent extremism by tackling some of its root causes and the environments that enable it to prosper. We will do this by standing up for universal human rights in all the UK's efforts to prevent and resolve conflict, terrorism and extremism, and by making the protection of human rights a tool for preventing extremist views from taking root.

Work in this area will aim to:

- > promote respect for human rights, including freedom of religion or belief as part of the answer to tackling terrorism and the ideology which drives extremism;
- > embed human rights in UK approaches to conflict, security and stability. Defend the freedom of all people to have, adopt and manifest a religion or belief in peace and safety;
- > ensure that the lessons of the Holocaust and other genocides about the dangers of letting prejudice continue unchecked are not forgotten, including by future generations;
- > use UK overseas interventions on security and justice to promote human rights, and ensure our assistance does no harm; provide human rights expertise to the arms export licensing process; and
- > support effective multilateral initiatives, in particular those under the UN Secretary General's Preventing Violent Extremism Action Plan to combat extremism and promote stability;

In practical terms, this will include:

- > working bilaterally (and through the multilateral system, below) for global abolition of the death penalty and prevention of torture. **Goal: (vi)** On the death penalty, we will respond to imminent executions with diplomatic activity tailored for greatest local impact, while building pressure in favour of moratoria / abolition, using best available data for the number of executions (Amnesty International reports for most countries, supplemented by Embassy reporting elsewhere, e.g. China); and votes for the moratorium cast biennially at the UN General Assembly. **(vii)** On torture, we will focus on securing ratifications of the Convention against Torture and its optional protocol, while responding to Embassy and NGO reporting (e.g. Association for the Prevention of Torture database of prison issues). **(viii)** In support of these and related objectives, we will champion – across Whitehall and the FCO network abroad – use of the Overseas Security and Justice Assistance (OSJA) guidelines as a programmatic tool and an effective way to mitigate risks associated with engagement in countries with poor human rights records;
- > focusing the FCO network to report trends, consider projects, raise individual cases and help host countries develop Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) action plans to combat the root causes of extremism and tackle prejudice, especially through promoting freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) and associated human rights. **Goal: (ix)** We will ensure that more UN member state PVE Action Plans incorporate human rights elements. The Human Rights and Democracy Department (HRDD) will convene a conference during 2016 entitled: "Combating Violent Extremism by building inclusive and pluralist societies: How protecting Freedom of Religion or Belief can help";
- > extensive multilateral work, including through the International Contact Group on FoRB, UN mechanisms and the Istanbul Process, working through the EU, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and Commonwealth, including by explaining the UK government's pioneering work to combat hate crime. **Goal: (x)** We will help international organisations focus on practical solutions, as opposed to ideological differences (e.g. no return to polarisation around "defamation of religions");
- > contributing to the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) and ensuring that it tackles human rights issues through some of its projects;
- > supporting projects that tackle causes of discrimination against individuals on the basis of their religion or belief (see Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy strategy, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/human-rights-and-democracy-programme>);
- > supporting Sir Eric Pickles, UK Envoy for Post-Holocaust Issues, as he seeks to build greater international consensus on learning the lessons of the Holocaust and tackling prejudice;
- > supporting our network to raise issues bilaterally by providing guidance, toolkits and "How to..." notes;
- > raising the religious literacy of our staff to help them understand the religious roots of extremism through training in religion and foreign policy. **Goal: (xi)** Per annum, we will provide two two-day training courses hosted by the Diplomatic Academy on religion and foreign policy for FCO staff and other Whitehall practitioners; and at least four lunchtime seminars. We will play an active role in the Transatlantic Policy Network on Religion and Foreign Policy; and
- > organising events such as the Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration in the FCO.

Strengthening the Rules-Based International System

We will continue to protect and advance universal human rights in multilateral fora.

Work in this area will aim to:

- > encourage better fulfilment by states of their international human rights obligations, increasing pressure on repressive states and holding member states to account for human rights violations; help states through transition by supporting stability and reform efforts; and work to increase international willingness to act early, including in the field, to ensure faster international response to severe human rights violations and abuses;
- > work with the UK's Missions in New York and Geneva, UKREP Brussels and the UK's delegations in Strasbourg and Vienna to promote our values and support positive reform of international human rights mechanisms;
- > deliver on our pledges for UN Human Rights Council (HRC) membership: strengthening the protection of human rights in the UN's work; translating the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development into action, leaving no one behind; making a stand for freedom of religion or belief at a time when too many are persecuted for their beliefs; working to end violence against women and promote their full participation and leadership in political and economic life; and promoting open societies and challenging the threats to civil society. We will continue to be one of the top donors to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR); and
- > deliver UK human rights and democracy objectives through the EU (external human rights Action Plan), the Council of Europe, and OSCE (Human Dimension).

In practical terms, this will include:

- > campaigning for re-election to the HRC for a second consecutive term, 2017-19 (pledges available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/un-human-rights-council-united-kingdom-2017-2019-candidate>). **Goal: (xii)** re-election in autumn 2016;
- > engaging regularly with NGOs and National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), for example by holding a briefing event prior to each HRC and attending NGO side events during HRCs where possible;
- > making best use of expertise across HRDD and the UK's Missions in New York and Geneva in deploying negotiators to support the UK delegation at HRCs and UN Third Committee sessions;
- > working in close partnership with other Government Departments and Devolved Administrations, acting as a source of expertise on the UN system, especially in preparing the UK for UN inquiries into our implementation of human rights treaties; facilitating visits to the UK by UN Special Rapporteurs and Committees;
- > supporting UN treaty bodies and mechanisms, for example on best practice for Universal Periodic Review (UPR). **Goal: (xiii)** We will increase the number of states seeking technical assistance from the OHCHR, and OHCHR's ability to respond. We will provide direct financial assistance to OHCHR, and indirect assistance: by coordinating donor initiatives, helping OHCHR to diversify its donor base, and by supporting the UN Secretary General's Rights Up Front initiative. **(xiv)** We will help the Commonwealth lead by example on implementation of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, including by helping Commonwealth partners engage wholeheartedly with the UN process of UPR. **(xv)** We will enhance the influence of NHRIs, in the Commonwealth and beyond, including by funding the provision of secretariat services to the Commonwealth Forum of NHRIs by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission;
- > representing the UK in the EU human rights working group (COHOM); and
- > working through the EU, Council of Europe, OSCE, and Commonwealth to secure UK objectives. **Goal: (xvi)** We will reinforce the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, with material support for the Representative's office and political support for the Representative's mandate.

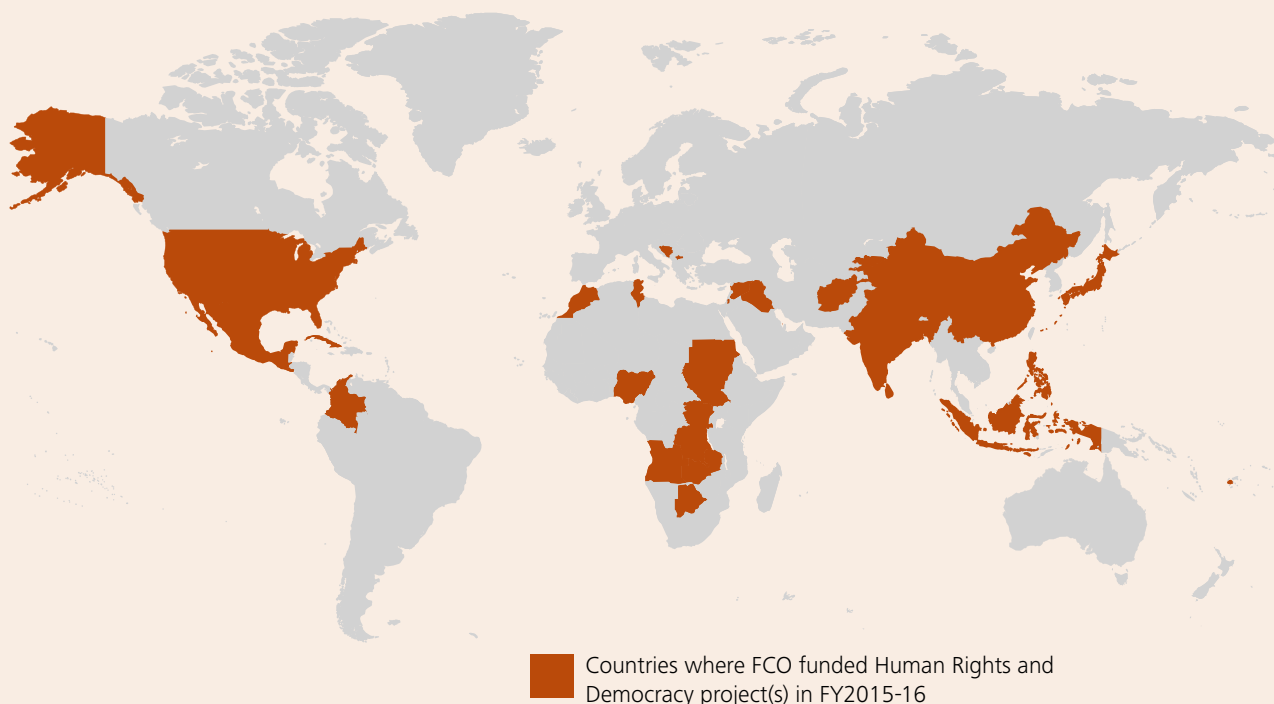


We are campaigning for re-election to the Human Rights Council for a second consecutive term

ANNEX B: FCO Human Rights Programme Funding

In 2015, the majority of the FCO's human rights projects were funded through the Human Rights and Democracy Programme (HRDP), the FCO's dedicated strategic programme to promote and protect human rights overseas. Since 2011, the HRDP has funded over 300 projects in more than sixty countries worldwide, to a value in excess of £20 million. This figure does not include FCO human rights activity funded through the cross-government Conflict Stability and Security Fund, which also helps to promote democracy and the rule of law in National Security Council (NSC) priority countries; nor does it include expenditure on human rights work from the bilateral funds administered by Embassies and High Commissions.

At a glance: the geographical spread of our 2015-16 Human Rights and Democracy Programme projects



In the financial year 2015-16, the HRDP spent approximately **£5.5 million** on **75 projects** in over **40 countries** across the globe*.

These projects supported local and international civil society organisations to build capacity, press for change and engage in constructive dialogue on human rights with host governments. The countries covered by our 2015-16 programme are shown in the above map and examples of HRDP-funded projects can be found throughout this report.

**NB: this map does not include any sensitive or multi-country projects*



Baroness Anelay at the launch of the 'Magna Carta Partnerships' fund in London, 15 September 2015.

Financial Year 2016-17: Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights & Democracy

Project proposals are considered annually by the Human Rights and Democracy Department through a competitive bidding process. The bidding round for 2016-17 projects launched on 18 January 2016, at which the Minister for Human Rights, Baroness Anelay, announced that the programme would be renamed the Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights & Democracy (MCF) and that the programme budget would double to £10.6m – its highest ever level. This outcome is the result of the FCO's bid for additional programme resources in the 2015 Spending Review; a bid based on the programme's record of successful projects, its utility for the global FCO network, and its strategic potential. The increased size of the fund for 2016 will enable the FCO to achieve greater impact across its three new human rights themes. We will do this by fully implementing the strategy^[54] for this Fund. Projects for 2016-17 will begin in May 2016. We set out how we ensure this fund delivers value for money in Baroness Anelay's letter to the Foreign Affairs Committee^[55].

[54] <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/human-rights-and-democracy-programme>

[55] <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/foreign-affairs-committee/the-foreign-and-commonwealth-offices-administration-and-funding-of-its-human-rights-work-overseas/written/30935.pdf>



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