

36th Universal Periodic Review: UK closing statement



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The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a unique process, involving a peer review of the human rights records of all 193 UN member states. It is a unique tool of the Human Rights Council, aimed at sharing best practice. The UK strongly supports the UPR, having spoken at every session and about every country since the process began in 2006. This session reviewed 14 States: Andorra, Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Honduras, Jamaica, Liberia, Libya, Malawi, Maldives, Marshall Island, Mongolia, Panama and USA.

Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking

The UK continued to make recommendations on modern slavery to every country undergoing the review. Modern slavery is one of the greatest human rights abuses of our time, and if the international community is to fulfil its commitments to Sustainable Development Goals 8.7, 5.2 and 16.2 for the eradication of forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking, we must continue to improve our collective response to support victims and prosecute traffickers. The recommendations ranged from improved systems for the identification and support of victims to legislative development. We continued to press for greater ratification of the ILO's Forced Labour Protocol, as an important international instrument for combatting modern slavery.

UN Treaty Body elections

Since 2017, we have consistently made the recommendation to 'adopt an open, merit-based selection process when selecting national candidates for UN Treaty Body elections' to most states. These expert bodies are a central part of the UN human rights system, charged with monitoring the

implementation of human rights conventions in states which have signed up to them. The UK continues to advocate strengthening the quality, independence and diversity of Treaty Body membership.

Belarus

On the worsening human rights situation in Belarus, I remain deeply concerned by the ongoing and systematic human rights violations. I condemn the arbitrary detentions, violence and intimidation against peaceful protesters, independent journalists and members of the opposition.

The recent harassment and expulsion of two UK diplomats for simply monitoring the protests in Minsk is completely unacceptable. The UK will not be deterred from speaking out against Belarus's suppression of freedoms, including those who defend media freedom. We have implemented sanctions on Alexander Lukashenko and other members of the Belarusian senior leadership under the Global Human Rights sanctions regime for serious human rights violations linked to the presidential election in August. The UK will continue to hold the authorities to account for the rigged election in August and their ongoing use of violence to suppress the Belarusian people. I also urge Belarus to abolish the death penalty.

Libya

I welcome the ceasefire and political roadmap recently agreed in Libya and the positive steps taken by the Libyan Government, including support to the Fact Finding Mission. However, I remain gravely concerned by the indiscriminate attacks, unlawful killings, sexual and gender-based violence, risks to migrants and refugees and the silencing of journalists, activists and human rights defenders that have been taking place. I condemn the deplorable killing of lawyer Hanan Al-Barassi on 10 November in Benghazi and call for a full, immediate and transparent, investigation. I urge the Libyan Government to end exploitation of migrants and refugees; tackle sexual and gender based violence and cooperate fully with the UN Fact Finding Mission in Libya.

Maldives

I commend the Government of Maldives for the recent progress they have made in improving governance and promoting respect for human rights. I note that the Maldives have made a number of encouraging legislative reforms, which have further embedded democratic principles, although I remain concerned that women are underrepresented in Parliament. I also recommend the Maldives strengthen national legislation to ensure that all modern slavery crimes are fully criminalised in line with international conventions, including human trafficking, slavery as a standalone offence, child prostitution, forced marriage, and the involvement of children in armed conflict.

USA

I welcome the recent action taken by the US to tackle modern slavery - noting anti-trafficking legislation signed into law over the past four years. I am also pleased to see the recent steps taken by the US Government to develop and incentivise policing reforms via an Executive Order on “Safe Policing for Safe Communities’. I call on the US to work with state and local government on best practice for police use of force and improving the relationships between law enforcement and the communities they serve.

I urge all countries under review during this session to give full and serious consideration to the UK recommendations. I encourage them not only to accept them, but also to implement all the recommendations in a timely and comprehensive manner. I look forward to the formal UPR adoption at the UN Human Rights Council in 2021.

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