

39th Universal Periodic Review of human rights: UK closing statement

This session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the Human Rights Council reviewed 13 States: Suriname, Greece, Samoa, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Hungary, Papua New Guinea, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Antigua and Barbuda, Eswatini, Trinidad and Tobago, Thailand and Ireland. As a strong supporter of the UPR process, the UK has participated and raised priority human rights concerns in all reviews since the process began in 2006.

Modern Slavery and human trafficking

Recent figures indicate child labour figures have drastically worsened. It is very likely that there will be substantially more people subject to modern slavery and human trafficking worldwide by the time new data is published next year. While modern slavery and human trafficking persist, we will continue to work with our partners to tackle these horrendous crimes.

We remain committed to eliminating all forms of modern slavery by 2030 in line with Sustainable Development Goal 8.7 and continue to encourage and help others to do so. The Universal Periodic Review is an essential part of this work. During this review, the UK encouraged countries undergoing review to undertake a range of actions such as ensuring that legislation is implemented to address modern slavery crimes, that national action plans and dedicated officials to deliver them are put in place, and that criminal justice systems deliver more effective investigations and prosecutions. We continued to advocate that countries ratify and implement all necessary Protocols, including the 2014 ILO Forced Labour Protocol, which is an important tool to address forced labour and provide protection for victims.

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 a number of 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.

Hungary

I welcome Hungary's support for the Call to Action to End Human Trafficking, Modern Slavery and Forced Labour. I recognise Budapest holds the longest running PRIDE march in the region, but I am concerned by a series of measures introduced in Hungary in the past two years that appear to discriminate against the LGBT+ community. I welcome Hungary's National Roma Integration Strategy from 2011 to 2020, and encourage continued work to address Roma

discrimination, societal exclusion, and poverty.

Tanzania

I am pleased to see the re-opening of previously banned media organisations in Tanzania and urge the Government to prioritise media freedom and guarantee freedom of expression. I welcome the recognition of and progress in the Government of National Unity in Zanzibar. I urge the Government to remove restrictions on opposition parties and allow them to meet and operate freely. I call for the establishment of independent electoral commissions for Tanzania and Zanzibar. I recommend Tanzania to fully implement the provisions of the 2008 anti-trafficking law; end illegal pre-trial detention; and to amend the Media Services Act and the Political Parties Act and related legislation to ensure freedoms of expression and assembly are protected.

Ireland

I commend the progress made by Ireland to promote and protect human rights, in particular the establishment of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and ratification of the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. I commend Ireland on their first ever prosecution for human trafficking offences in September and recommend the Government develop and implement a National Action Plan to prevent and combat all forms of modern slavery including a budget, responsibilities and time frame, and reinstate a dedicated anti-trafficking unit.

Tajikistan

I welcome Tajikistan's implementation of legislation to reduce gender-based violence and the 2020 Election Assessment Missions by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). However, I remain concerned about restrictions on political opposition and urge Tajikistan to follow up promptly on ODIHR's recommendations, amend legislation which undermines the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, and ensure that media workers can operate freely, both online and offline. I also recommend that Tajikistan adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation to end discrimination on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation, end the practice of maintaining lists of LGBT+ persons and amend legislation which undermines the right to freedom of expression.

Thailand

Thailand's progress made on human rights, including the adoption of the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights is a positive step towards their transition to democracy. I encourage Thailand to take further steps to create an open and enabling environment for civil society. I recommend Thailand implement a National Referral Mechanism for modern slavery which adopts a victim-centred approach and ensure national guidelines for victim identification and ensure the protection of civic space and for Human Rights Defenders to be able to operate freely and fully exercise the rights to

freedom of expression, including online, and freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

Sudan

I note the decision to postpone Sudan's UPR to next year, and hope that Sudan's civilian-led Government will be able to participate fully in the review process at the rescheduled date.