

Speech: Lord Ahmad Speech at Amnesty International Annual Human Rights Day Reception

To my lords, ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon and welcome. I wish to thank Mr Speaker for allowing Amnesty to host this event, but also thank Kate and her team for organising the event today and to thank you for all you do; not just holding the government to account, because that is an important role, but equally for your dedication and devotion to this important agenda of Human Rights.

I am also delighted, as I came in I had a chance to speak to some students from Hillview School in Kent – and I understand their member of parliament has just arrived, Tom Tugendhat – talking of holding people to account, as you many of you know, he is the chair of the foreign affairs committee, so I assure you it is not just the members of the opposition who hold the government to account, but the work of our committees do. Particularly in my case as a Foreign Office Minister, the foreign affairs committee, assuring that we do stick to our principles, we do deliver upon our policies and our commitments.

The area of Human Rights is something I believe in very passionately and take very seriously, and therefore not withstanding other events – and there are a few others going on today – it is important that we show our commitment, not just through events like this, but through collaborative and collective action on this important agenda. It should not matter who you are, where you are, what country, what age, what gender, what faith, what creed, what colour – no matter who you are, wherever you are our collective responsibility on this important agenda is clear.

Therefore, I am delighted to support, amongst other human rights defender organisations, the sterling work done by Amnesty International around the world, and Kate, thank you for this opportunity to allow me to come and share some of my thoughts.

As I was walking over from the Foreign Office, there were many colours, there were many voices, there were many placards, and there were many views. But, as I reflected on this particular event, I am proud of the fact that those freedoms that we take sometimes for granted, are very apparent today amongst all days. It is important that we should respect, regard, protect and indeed strengthen those freedoms, not just here in the UK but around the world.

I am proud of the fact that we have passionate political debates on important issues of the day – not just in parliament, but around the country; on the streets, through our newspapers and press and indeed, as I know clearly from my own children – as my 13 year old or coming on to 35, keeps reminding me of her human rights – it is an important element that we continue to discuss these issues within our own homes.

But you know my lords, ladies and gentlemen, it is a cherished freedom. It is right we cherish it, but that we also stand up for those who are denied these freedoms – for which it is just a distant dream. For them, disagreeing with the government is not just difficult; it is dangerous – indeed, in parts of the world, tragically it is deadly.

Threats to Human Rights Defenders

Indeed, as we look at 70 years on from the Human Rights declaration, there are 300 Human Rights Defenders have been murdered this year alone. Why? For defending the human rights of others – that is crucial. That is 300 families shattered. 300 communities shocked and living in fear. And many thousands of ordinary people robbed of a brave and committed advocates, close friends and family.

For every one of those killed, there are many, many more thousands locked up, attacked and threatened.

Early this week, and I was delighted Kate Allen was there as well – both of us heard directly from two Human Rights Defenders; one from Kenya Wanjeri Nderu and Dina Meza from Honduras. It is was important as we marked that particular day that we should not forget the mental harm that is often done, the abuse Human Rights Defenders suffer, because they can be as damaging – those psychological wounds – as a physical one.

UK support of Human Rights Defenders

These incredibly courageous people – I salute them and look up to them – put themselves at risk to defend the rights that matter to us all, and that is why, here at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, I and others that work with me make it a priority that we put human rights and Human Rights Defenders at the heart of our work. We learn from them. We not only advocate for them, we seek to also protect and strengthen the work they do – we must continue to strengthen the work we do in this area.

We work with Human Rights Defenders on our campaigns, be it to end modern slavery which our Prime Minister, Mrs May has championed around the world, that scourge and crime of human trafficking; and as I know as her representative on preventing sexual violence in conflict, and I know again, talking to the students from Hillview, the importance of girl's education – that is why, amongst other things, I am proud of our government's collective shared commitment to ensure that every girl, no matter where they are around the world, receives 12 years of quality education – it is only through education that we will empower girls. Human Rights Defenders are essential to our work to promote good governance, media freedom, to deliver equality; whether it be gender or LGBT equality; and importantly to end the death penalty and torture.

I also, through my travels, meet many dedicated Human Rights Defenders, many of whom are faith leaders and faith communities on the front line. In the summer, I was honoured and humbled to be asked by our prime minister to also take on the additional role as her Special Envoy on the important issue of

Freedom of Religion or Belief.

Over the past year, I have done this on many occasions during overseas visits, including in Iraq, Algeria, Egypt and Indonesia, to name but a few. It is so important, as we are defending the right to Freedom of Religion or Belief, we should not do so alone; it is the responsibility of us collectively, to promote and respect those who hold different religious beliefs, or no religious beliefs whatsoever, but collectively stand up for their right to do just that – not just internationally, but when we see challenges at home, we should stand up. As we approach Christmas in a year of goodwill – good to remember at this particular time. It is important that we do, and it is an area that I have been looking at very closely, and as we look at Freedom of Religion or Belief, we also recognise that there are many people, because of their Christian faith around the world who won't be able to celebrate, who will not be able to have the family dinners, who will not be able to go to church to worship in the way they wish to do – a poignant moment to reflect on.

Tribute to NGOs

But we do value our engagement with organisations such as Amnesty and the many other human rights NGOs that share common aims and aspirations.

I should like to take this opportunity, if I may, to pay tribute to the work of Amnesty International in particular and other NGOs present here: because it is you who give a voice to those who are unheard; it is you who stand up for those who are knocked down; and, crucially, it is you who defend those who risk their lives to defend others. Simply put, thank you, for everything you do.

If anyone were in any doubt as to whether defending human rights was truly a global issue, I would suggest – if you haven't do so already – is to read Amnesty's report, which as I admitted to Kate I had when I saw her on Monday that I had just received and not yet read, but I have now, which details how their "Write for Rights" campaign has led to 5.5 million actions, in 208 countries and territories around the world.

In conclusion ladies and gentlemen, it is a great honour to be here with you this afternoon, but it goes without saying that the issue of human rights and Human Rights Defenders is significant. The challenges that Human Rights Defenders face around the world are widespread, but they can only be tackled effectively through working together on a global scale.

So as we mark that 70 years since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, on this Human Rights Day let us pay tribute, let us remember and those who have a faith let us pray for those brave Human Rights Defenders around the world, let us pay tribute to their courage, their incredible vision and tenacity, and ultimately let us commit to work together, even more closely than we have already, to ensure we play our part in helping them to deliver the change we all want to see. Thank you.

[News story: Non-executive director appointment to Ofgem](#)



This appointment takes effect from 1 December 2018 and lasts for 5 years.

[Ofgem](#) protects the interests of existing and future electricity and gas consumers, promoting value for money, security of supply and sustainability.

John Crackett has been a non-executive board member of the UK Office for Nuclear Regulation since July 2011. Before this he was Managing Director of Central Networks – the UK’s second-largest distributor of electricity – and also an E.ON UK Board member responsible for Safety, Health and Environment.

Published 12 December 2018

[News story: Cold weather health warnings issued by PHE](#)

Latest update

Tuesday 29 January 2019

An incoming band of cold weather, with the potential for snow, has prompted warnings from Public Health England (PHE) to look out for those most at-risk.

Over the past few weeks temperatures across the country have been low. Now Met Office forecasters say that this week some parts could see snow and everywhere will continue to see cold temperatures.

These warnings have prompted PHE scientists to warn people to prepare for the bad weather now and to keep a careful eye on forecasts. Every winter thousands of people die from illnesses linked to exposure to the cold when indoor and outside.

Dr Emer O'Connell, Public Health Consultant with PHE said:

With continued cold weather forecast, now is the time to prepare and look out for those most at risk of falling ill.

If you can, check on family, friends and neighbours who are older, have heart and lung conditions or young children as all these groups are particularly vulnerable to the effects of cold.

Steve Ramsdale, Chief Operational Meteorologist at the Met Office, said:

Snow and wintry showers are expected to affect many parts of the country on Tuesday 29 January. The main accumulations are likely to be over high ground in Wales and the north and west of England where 2 to 5 cm is likely in places.

Elsewhere, whilst some snow may fall there is less likely to be any significant accumulations though parts of East Anglia and the high ground of Surrey, Sussex and Kent may see 1 to 3 cm. It will remain cold and unsettled for the rest of this week, temperatures could fall quite widely to minus 3 or minus 4 degrees overnight, with a mix of rain snow and ice, particularly on Thursday (31 January).

Further information is included in PHE's [tips to help you to prepare for cold weather](#).

Previous updates

12 December 2018

With many parts of England forecast to receive their first bout of cold this winter, Public Health England (PHE) is today (12 December 2018) issuing weather warnings.

The [Met Office](#) has forecast a short spell of cold for the northeast, north west, Yorkshire and Humber, East Midlands, and West Midlands. The cold, which could drop below zero degrees in many places, could also trigger some snowfall, but it is not certain where.

As a result, PHE is urging people all over the country to think about what they can do to keep warm and well during the cold.

Dr Owen Landeg of Public Health England, said:

This cold is likely to arrive late on Thursday and into Friday. Before then it's really important to think about what you can do to prepare and protect more vulnerable friends and family from the ill-effects of the cold.

It is best to wear lots of thin layers, have plenty of warm food and drinks to stay warm, and check weather forecasts before heading out. Also, wear shoes with a good, slip-resistant grip to prevent any accidental falls.

When indoors, stay warm, heat homes to at least 18°C, and keep up-to-date with the weather forecast – all of this is particularly important if anyone in the home is very young, 65 or over or has a long-term heart or lung condition, as they can feel the ill-effects of cold more than the rest of us.

Frank Saunders, Chief Meteorologist at the Met Office said:

It's going to be cold over the next few days, with temperatures for many parts limited to between 3 and 6°C through the day.

Many of us will wake up to a frost on Friday and Saturday morning, before wet and windy weather moves in later on Saturday.

To prepare for cold weather:

- look out for friends and family who may be vulnerable to the cold, and ensure they have access to warm food and drinks and are managing to heat their homes adequately
- try to maintain indoor temperatures to at least 18°C, particularly if you are not mobile, have a long-term illness or are 65 or over. When temperatures are at 18C we start to see changes in the body, when the blood starts to thicken and this can cause clotting. Clotting can cause problems and is one of the reasons we see more heart attacks and strokes in the days following colder weather
- stay up to date with the latest weather forecasts on the [Met Office website](#)
- if eligible, seek entitlements and benefits – [power and utility companies have schemes](#) have schemes which make at-risk groups a priority for reconnection following power cuts
- avoid exposing yourself to cold or icy outdoor conditions if you are at a higher risk of cold-related illness or falls
- discuss with your friends and neighbours the need to clear snow and ice from in front of your house and public walkways nearby

[Stay Well This Winter](#) contains useful advice on staying warm this winter.

News story: News from the Adjudicator

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On 1 November the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) announced that it had designated [two additional retailers to be covered by the Code](#). I welcomed this announcement and the opportunity to build on the strong progress I have made for groceries suppliers since 2013. I have already held an introductory meeting to which the Code Compliance Officers (CCOs) of the additional designated retailers were invited. Next steps will be to work with them on overall compliance with the Code.

I need suppliers to speak up and tell me about their experiences with these retailers so that I can pursue any specific issues. Email me at Enquiries@GroceriesCode.gov.uk or call 020 3738 6537. You can also speak to me at events I attend over coming months (details later in this newsletter). Any information I receive will be treated in full confidence. As with the original 10 designated retailers I encourage suppliers to raise issues with the relevant CCOs and you can find [details of how to contact the CCOs](#).

Following the progress made by the original 10 regulated retailers and the addition of two new ones I have decided to make a small change to my working so during 2019 I will hold three rather than four meetings with each CCO. Please continue to look out for the published record of those meetings.

The CMA will now consider designation on a yearly basis and I would encourage suppliers to contact the CMA directly if they believe there are other retailers that should come under the Code.

Meetings with audit chairs

I have just completed a round of meetings with the chairs of the audit committees of the original 10 regulated retailers. I view these as a significant part of my work because making progress on Code-related issues has meant securing culture change supported from the top. These meetings have proved very valuable and I am pleased with the level of support I have received from the audit chairs who recognise the risk to their businesses if they are not compliant with the Code.

During these meetings I also shared themes that emerged from the 2017/18 annual compliance reports which the retailers produce. I am pleased that retailers are doing more to capture potential Code issues within their businesses and I continue to encourage them to be more open and transparent about how they comply with the Code by putting more information in the public domain.

Training

As we are nearing the end of 2018, I want to ask suppliers to make a resolution for 2019 and that is to ensure they are fully trained in the Code.

Becoming Code Confident by understanding the Code and how I interpret it is so important for grocery suppliers and yet there are still too many who have not undertaken training. It could prove to be one of your best investments next year. I publish a list of all the training providers I am aware of on my website.

Warmest wishes for a successful holiday season.

Christine Tacon

Top Issues

The GCA continues to monitor the progress being made by the original ten designated retailers on the issues of delay in payments, forecasting and promotions.

Retailers have done a lot of work in this area but delay in payments was the most reported issue by suppliers in the last annual survey. The GCA has worked with them to implement the changes required following the investigation into Tesco plc as well as encouraging them to put in place systems and processes to minimise the risk of delay in payments arising from drop and drive. Other changes to systems and supply chain practices have been made based on anonymous feedback from suppliers that the GCA has received. The GCA needs to hear from suppliers whether these changes are making a difference or if they are experiencing any new issues.

In June this year the GCA published a revised best practice statement on forecasting; this also included the issue of promotions. The revisions reflected the GCA's previously stated view that there will almost always be some circumstances in which compensation for inaccurate forecasting is appropriate, so a blanket exclusion in a supply agreement would be unlikely to be compliant with the Code. The GCA has also made clear that the due care test is unlikely to have been met if a retailer did not provide a way for a supplier to contribute to the forecasting process and also encouraged retailers to consider the extent to which they might offer compensation for inaccurate forecasting. The points in relation to the issue of promotions largely reflect where retailers could improve their processes and are based on the practical experiences that suppliers have shared with the GCA. Again, please let the GCA know how this best practice statement is being followed by the retailers.

We will also be working with the two additional designated retailers on all the Top Issues which the GCA has considered.

Save the date

- 17 to 20 March 2019 – International Food & Drink Event at ExCel, London

The GCA will be attending the International Food and Drink Event at London's leading exhibition centre. Come and meet Christine Tacon and the team and hear Christine speak on 19 March. Check out the programme on www.ife.co.uk.

- 20 to 21 March 2019 – TasteWales Conference in Newport Members of the GCA team will attend the TasteWales Conference held at the Celtic Manor Resort in Newport between 20th and 21st March and will be happy to answer your questions about the Groceries Code.
- 24 June 2019 – GCA Annual Conference in London The GCA will present her annual report and new work programme at the 2019 conference at Church House in Westminster. As in previous years YouGov will also announce the results of the GCA's annual survey. Further details including a registration form will be published on the GCA website in spring 2019.

Invite the Adjudicator and her team to your event

The Adjudicator and her team are keen to attend as many supplier events as our diary allows. If your organisation is planning an event then please contact Enquiries@GroceriesCode.gov.uk to discuss whether we can attend. It would be helpful if you could provide full details of the event including timing and location as well as the audience involved.

New email address

The GCA's email has changed. Please make sure you use the new address that ends in @GroceriesCode.gov.uk. Enquiries should be directed to Enquiries@GroceriesCode.gov.uk. At the end of 2018, emails sent to the old address will no longer be forwarded.

News story: New chair and chief executive of the GLAA announced

Michael Rich, currently an executive director at Chesterfield Borough Council in Derbyshire, will lead the national law enforcement and compliance agency charged with protecting vulnerable people from exploitation when he takes up his post in early January.

He will be charged with:

- the delivery of the GLAA's responsibilities for the national modern slavery agenda, providing leadership and direction to the workforce
- working co-operatively at a senior level with other enforcement agencies and a wider range of bodies, including the police and local authorities, to address offending behaviour by rogue businesses
- working with other enforcement bodies and the Director of Labour Market Enforcement to improve enforcement bodies' coordinated handling of enforcement work

Michael Rich said:

I am hugely excited to be joining the GLAA, it's an organisation that is doing phenomenal work to protect vulnerable people. I am looking forward to joining colleagues and playing my part in helping prevent and detect labour exploitation.

His previous experience includes, spending 4 years with the Homes and Communities Agency that funds government housing programmes.

Meanwhile, Margaret Beels will take up her role as chair today (Wednesday 12 December). She has been in the position since 2011 and has been appointed for a further 2 years following a competitive recruitment process.

Her responsibilities include:

- providing strategic leadership for the operation of the GLAA
- ensuring the GLAA and its staff maintain the capability to deliver the organisation's statutory responsibilities
- maintaining and developing effective partnerships at a strategic level with key bodies

She has previously overseen the expansion of the GLAA into a body with powers to investigate a wide range of labour market offences including non-payment of the minimum wage and modern slavery.

Margaret Beels said:

The GLAA's mission to protect vulnerable and exploited workers is increasingly important. I am proud to have been asked to continue as Chair of the Board which has oversight of this vital work.

The GLAA is a national law enforcement and compliance agency charged with protecting vulnerable people from exploitation. Its broad remit covers the entire labour market and it works closely with the Police, law enforcement and other agencies and strategic partners to protect vulnerable and exploited workers.

For more information visit the [Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority website](#).