

Speech: International Human Rights Day 2017 and the UK's role in promoting human rights

Due to time constraints in the debate, the Minister's speech was curtailed. This is the full version of that speech.

I thank the Rt Hon. Member, the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd MP) for initiating this debate, and I commend her for her work as Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Human Rights. I am grateful for the contributions of other Hon. Members and I will try to respond to all the points raised.

Why human rights matter

It is perhaps trite simply to observe that human rights matter, but human rights do matter because they – and they alone – are guardians of fairness and opportunity for all. They reflect a widespread belief in freedom, in non-discrimination, and in the innate dignity of every human being.

Human rights are more than simply articles of international law – though that in itself would be reason enough to defend them. They also protect collective opportunities and freedoms that are the key to achieving long-term prosperity and security.

UN Declaration on Human Rights

International Human Rights Day commemorates the adoption of the [UN Declaration on Human Rights](#).

That Declaration was signed threescore and 9 years ago last week, by 48 sovereign states, from Britain to Brazil, Chile to China, and India to Iran. Setting aside widespread cultural and historical differences, these countries came together to pledge their support for universal human rights.

The very diversity of the signatories disproves the notion that these rights are a set of values imposed by one part of the world on another. Instead, the Declaration represents a global consensus on the rights and freedoms that everyone should enjoy, wherever they live in the world.

Today, the UK remains as committed as ever to those universal principles, but the rights and freedoms we enjoy here in the UK are not enjoyed everywhere.

Recent events in Burma are only the most recent but shocking reminder of the gulf that continues to exist between the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration and the everyday reality for millions of our fellow humans.

We continue to urge all states to comply with the commitments they have made, not only by endorsing the UN Declaration on Human Rights – but also by ratifying the many fundamental human rights treaties that have evolved in the decades since the Declaration was first adopted. These treaties have codified the principles of the Declaration into international law and hence carry legal obligations.

Human Rights Day

In recognition of the importance of universal human rights to individuals and societies, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office marks International Human Rights Day on 10 December every year.

On that day we customarily reflect on how far the world has come, but we also remember all those whose human rights are still being violated and abused. We pay tribute to the human rights defenders who stand up for them, often at great personal risk, and we renew our determination to support them and to fight for universal rights.

Government policy on human rights

That fight is central to this Government's foreign policy. Indeed it would be unthinkable for UK foreign policy not to have human rights at its core. Promoting and defending human rights is integral to the work of our staff in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

We recognise that all rights set out in the UN Declaration on Human Rights, and in international law, are of equal importance, but to achieve maximum impact we prioritise certain issues. Our current priorities are:

- tackling modern slavery
- defending Freedom of Religion or Belief and Freedom of Expression
- ending inequality and discrimination, and
- promoting democracy

I would like to give Hon. Members an insight into some of the FCO's work in each of these key areas.

Tackling modern slavery

Modern slavery is one of the great human rights challenges of our time. It is appalling that it still exists in the 21st Century. Eradicating it, through concerted and coordinated global action is one of our top foreign policy priorities. That is why my Rt. Hon Friend the Prime Minister convened world leaders at the UN General Assembly in September to launch a [call to action to end modern slavery](#). We have also doubled our aid spending on the issue to £150 million, to address the root causes; strengthen law-enforcement capacity in transit countries; and support the victims.

Freedom of religion and belief

Freedom of religion or belief matters – not only because faith guides the daily life of more than 80% of the world’s population. It also matters because promoting tolerance and respect for all helps to build inclusive societies that are more stable, more prosperous, and better able to resist extremism.

We promote and defend it in a variety of ways:

- by directly lobbying governments – as I did, for example, during my recent visit to Pakistan
- by maintaining consensus on the issue through working with international partners (in UN, OSCE, EU), and
- by running projects that promote understanding and respect and celebrate diversity

Many of these projects are run in co-operation with civil society groups – we very much value the role that they and faith leaders play in promoting freedom of religion or belief. My noble Friend, the Minister for Human Rights (Lord Ahmad) and I have stepped up our engagement with them through regular roundtable discussions to seek their views and explore foreign policy issues from different perspectives. We are in close touch with our Embassies and High Commissions about their work to tackle the persecution of Christian, Ahmadiyya and other minorities.

Freedom of expression

The freedom of individuals and organisations to discuss, debate and criticise, or to hold governments to account, is an essential element of a successful society. That is why Freedom of Expression is another universal human right we work hard to uphold. We will be spending [£1 million over the next financial year](#) on projects which promote Freedom of Expression and the work of journalists around the world.

Ending inequality and discrimination

The government believes that all people should be able to live with dignity, free from violence or discrimination, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

At the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, we have renewed our focus on gender, with the [appointment of our first ever Special Envoy on Gender Equality](#). We want to target all forms of violence against women and girls, including sexual violence in conflict, and we want women to be at the heart of conflict resolution.

Through our work on [Women, Peace and Security](#) we are promoting the involvement of women in decision-making and peace building, and ensuring that military, peacekeeping and humanitarian operations take account of women’s needs.

We also promote LGBT equality around the world, and helped set up the Equal Rights Coalition, a group of 35 countries committed to working together on this issue.

People living with disabilities around the world also suffer discrimination. We want to protect their rights and transform their lives. We will be [hosting the first ever Global Disability Summit](#) next year to encourage international action.

Democracy

Last, but by no means least, among our current priorities is the promotion of democracy as the best long term guarantor of stability and prosperity for any society. I am sure our rationale needs no further explanation for this audience.

We work with like-minded partners at home and abroad to support democratic values and protect civil society. We continue to support the work of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (UK) and the International Parliamentary Union in advancing parliamentary democracy and democratic institutions around the world.

We are delighted that the [Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting](#) that we are hosting next year will offer an opportunity to further promote the shared values of human rights, democracy and inclusion that are enshrined in the [Commonwealth Charter](#).

Conclusion

To conclude: in the seventieth year since its adoption, the UN Declaration on Human Rights remains a powerful statement of hope and aspiration for us all. There has been great progress since 1948, but there is still much more to do.

This government will continue to lead the way on promoting human rights, as it always has done, at home and overseas.

We shall stay the course. Our sincere hope is that one day – one Human Rights Day in the future – we can say, once and for all, that human rights are truly enjoyed equally in every corner of the globe by humankind.

[News story: Birmingham selected as host city for the 2022 Commonwealth](#)

Games

Karen Bradley joins Tracey Crouch signing the host city contract for the Commonwealth Games 2022

At a special media conference staged at the Arena Academy school in Birmingham, CGF President Louise Martin CBE applauded the city's ambitious and innovative vision to engage and benefit its local community, showcase the best of global Britain and warmly welcome and inspire athletes and fans from right across the Commonwealth.

Birmingham 2022, which is expected to take place from 27 July to 7 August 2022, marks 20 years since Manchester 2002, the last time the Games were held in England and follows a brilliant Commonwealth Games in Glasgow in 2014.

Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Karen Bradley said:

Birmingham will put on a fantastic Commonwealth Games in 2022 and I am delighted that the Commonwealth Games Federation has awarded us the right to host what will be a sporting spectacular. The Games will also give us a chance to show the best of Britain to the world, give great opportunities to the people and businesses of the West Midlands and beyond while inspiring many to get involved in sport.

I look forward to working with the Commonwealth Games Federation, Commonwealth Games England and Birmingham City Council over the coming years as we prepare for 2022.

Sports Minister Tracey Crouch said:

The UK has a brilliant track record for putting on the biggest sport events in the world and it is a great news that Birmingham has been selected to host the 2022 Commonwealth Games. I am sure that we will put on an event that will make the country proud, leave a strong sporting legacy and strengthen relationships with our friends across the Commonwealth.

Read the [Commonwealth Games Federation's press release](#)

Press release: November 2017

Transaction Data

The transaction data shows HM Land Registry completed 1,774,223 applications in November compared with 1,740,068 in October and 1,644,163 last November, of which:

1. Transaction Data is published on the 15th working day of each month. The December Transaction Data will be published at 11am on Monday 22 January 2018 at [HM Land Registry Monthly Property Transaction Data](#).
2. The monthly Transaction Data showing how many applications for new titles, leases, splitting titles, updating existing titles, official copies of the register and searches were completed, reflects the volume of applications lodged by customers using an HM Land Registry account number on their application form.
3. Completed applications in England and Wales shown by region and by local authority include postal applications as well as those sent electronically.
4. Transaction Data excludes pending applications, withdrawn applications, bankruptcy applications, bulk applications and discharge applications.
5. Transactions for value are applications lodged involving a transfer of ownership for value. Discharge applications remove a charge, for example a mortgage, from the register. For an explanation of other terms used, see [abbreviations used in the transaction data](#).
6. Most searches carried out by a solicitor or conveyancer are to protect the purchase and/or mortgage. For example, a search will give the buyer priority for an application to HM Land Registry to register the purchase of the property. This can give an indication of market activity.
7. Reasonable skill and care is used in the provision of the data. We strive to ensure that the data is as accurate as possible but cannot guarantee that it is free from error. We cannot guarantee our data is fit for your intended purpose or use.
8. Transaction Data is available free of charge for use and re-use under the [Open Government Licence](#) (OGL). The licence allows public bodies to make their data available for re-use.

9. If you use or publish the Transaction Data, you must add the following attribution statement:
Contains HM Land Registry data © Crown copyright and database right 2017.
This data is licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0.
 10. HM Land Registry's mission is to guarantee and protect property rights in England and Wales.
 11. HM Land Registry is a government department created in 1862. It operates as an executive agency and a trading fund and its running costs are covered by the fees paid by the users of its services. Its ambition is to become the world's leading land registry for speed, simplicity and an open approach to data.
 12. HM Land Registry safeguards land and property ownership worth more than £4 trillion, including more than £1 trillion of mortgages. The Land Register contains more than 25 million titles, which show evidence of ownership, covering more than 85% of the land mass.
 13. For further information about HM Land Registry visit www.gov.uk/land-registry
 14. Follow us on:
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[News story: More frequent cattle testing to boost fight against bovine TB](#)

An image of cows in a field.

Bovine TB will be caught and stamped out more quickly in England's cattle herds under plans to strengthen testing in the highest-risk areas of the country.

Six monthly routine tests will be introduced for all herds in the High Risk Area – mainly the South West and parts of the Midlands – with annual tests preserved for herds that have gone five or more years without disease, and farms accredited under the [Cattle Herd Certification Standards \(CHeCS\) scheme](#), requiring tougher biosecurity measures to be observed.

[Grants](#) to vaccinate badgers in the Edge Area of the country – the 'buffer'

between the High Risk and Low Risk Areas – are also available now for schemes to run next year.

These moves are part of the government's comprehensive 25-year plan to eradicate bovine TB in England and come as [recent peer-reviewed research](#) shows badger control in Gloucestershire (58%) and Somerset (21%) – where culling began in 2013 – has contributed to significant reductions in the disease in herds.

[Results](#) published today also confirm that all 19 licensed intensive badger control operations achieved the badger population reductions needed to realise disease control benefits.

Farming Minister George Eustice said:

Our comprehensive strategy to eradicate bovine TB is delivering results. We are introducing more frequent testing of cattle to find and stamp out disease more quickly than ever before, to add to our tough restrictions on cattle movements to stop disease spreading. We are also addressing the disease in wildlife and it is encouraging to see early research shows badger control is having the expected results in driving down levels of TB.

Chief Veterinary Officer Nigel Gibbens said:

This year's results show that badger control can be delivered successfully on a much wider scale, with all 11 new areas delivering effective operations. Expansion into further areas, alongside our robust cattle movement and testing regime, will allow us to achieve and maintain long term reductions in the level of TB across the South West and Midlands where the disease is widespread.

In the Edge Area of the country, testing frequency will become more risk-based from January 2018, with more herds undertaking six-monthly testing. This will help vets identify and address outbreaks more quickly, helping to stop the spread of disease to new areas.

The government is offering grants under the Badger Edge Vaccination Scheme, which recommences in 2018 and aims to create a buffer zone between the highest- and lowest-risk disease areas of England. The scheme is open for the first round of applications until 19 January and successful applicants will receive a government grant for at least 50% of their costs from a fund worth £700,000 over four years.

Dealing with Bovine TB in England costs taxpayers over £100 million a year, required the culling of more than 29,000 cattle in 2016 and causes devastation and distress for rural communities.

Other measures announced today as part of the government's 25-year strategy

to eradicate bovine TB are:

- New compensation arrangements for pigs, sheep, goats, deer and camelids which have to be slaughtered because of bovine TB. The changes will come into force on 2 January 2018 and will bring statutory compensation in line with arrangements in Scotland and Wales.
- Reduced compensation for animals which are unclean when presented for slaughter.
- Delayed slaughter of pregnant cattle which test positive for bTB.

Farmers can also access practical guidance on the TB Hub website, which brings advice from farming experts, vets and government together in one place.

Background:

1. The [recent research paper](#) referred to is Brunton et al (2017) Assessing the effects of the first 2 years of industry-led badger culling in England on the incidence of bovine tuberculosis in cattle in 2013-2015. Ecology Evolution. 7 (18). 7213-7230.
2. The vaccination grants application page can be accessed [here](#).
3. The cull results can be accessed [here](#).
4. In September, the government awarded a contract to the Origin Group to deliver a new bTB advisory service. The easily accessible service offers clear, practical advice to help farmers in High Risk and Edge Areas to protect their herds from the disease and manage the impacts of a TB breakdown on their farm.

[News story: Consultation on fees for marine licences](#)

Defra has today [launched a consultation](#) on proposals seeking to revise the marine licensing application fees applied to England and the Wales and Northern Ireland Offshore marine areas. Changes are needed in order to

maintain marine licence applicant fee rates in-line with the costs incurred by the Marine Management Organisation in determining a marine licence application.

This is being proposed to make sure the cost burden associated with administering licences for development lies with beneficiaries and not taxpayers.

Detailed information on the proposals is included in Defra's consultation document, but includes:

- availability of self-service licences
- a simplification of charges for a routine marine licence
- an increase in the hourly rate charged for routine and complex marine licences (from £94 to £122 per hour)

The proposals were previously discussed by the MMO's Chief Executive, John Tuckett, during a hearing of the [Environment Audit Committee in the House of Commons](#) in January 2017. They are also part of a wider [programme of improvements in marine licensing](#) to make sure that the process it is as efficient as possible and proportionately manages risks to the marine environment.

Businesses and industry representatives have been involved in this work and their views are being used to develop appropriate processes and services, such as a [self-service approach for some marine licences](#), which is mentioned in the consultation document.

The consultation runs until 2 February 2018. If any changes are agreed it is anticipated they will come into effect in March 2018. Further details will be provided in advance of any changes taking place.