

# Press release: Sentences for animal cruelty to increase tenfold to five years

Animal abusers who commit the most heinous crimes could face up to five years in prison under new plans set to be unveiled by Environment Secretary Michael Gove.

Currently the maximum sentence is six months but the government will announce plans to bring forward new legislation that will increase that tenfold, sending a clear signal to any potential offenders that there is no place for animal cruelty in England.

There have been a number of recent shocking cases where courts have said they would have handed down longer sentences had they been available, including a case in April last year when a man bought a number of puppies just to brutally and systematically beat, choke and stab them to death. The new legislation will also enable courts to deal more effectively with ruthless gangs involved in organised dog fights.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

We are a nation of animal lovers and so we must ensure that those who commit the most shocking cruelty towards animals face suitably tough punishments.

These plans will give courts the tools they have requested to deal with the most abhorrent acts.

This is one part of our plan to deliver world-leading standards of animal welfare in the years ahead.

Cases of extreme cruelty are rare – while on average about 1,150 people per year are convicted for animal cruelty, fewer than five of them receive the current maximum sentence. The change in law will ensure that offenders are properly punished in those rare but shocking cases.

Under the government's plans, courts will retain the ability to hand out an unlimited fine and ban an offender from owning animals in the future, but crucially they will also have the ability to sentence the worst cases appropriately. The move will bring maximum sentences for animal cruelty in England into line with other countries such as Australia, Canada, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Some of the recent shocking cases in which courts commented they would have handed down longer prison sentences had the law allowed them include:

- A man who systematically abused and killed several puppies by beating, choking and stabbing them, sentenced to the maximum six months' imprisonment and banned from owning animals.
- A man who kicked his girlfriend's dog to death, given a custodial sentence of just over five months, fined £1,000 and banned from owning animals.
- A man who fed his dog aspirin and paracetamol to try to kill her, before beating her to death with a shovel, sentenced to four months in prison and banned from owning animals.

The move was widely welcomed by animal welfare groups and follows dedicated campaigning from Battersea Cats and Dogs Home and the RSPCA.

Claire Horton, Chief Executive of Battersea Dogs & Cats Home, said:

Battersea is thrilled that the Government plans to raise the maximum sentence for the most abhorrent cases of animal cruelty in England from six months to five years.

This shows that the political will is there to make the punishment fit the crime and so many innocent animals will benefit from their actions.

This news will be very positively received by the public, the majority of whom share Battersea's wish to see this change. Since we launched our campaign calling for five year sentences at Westminster in February, the momentum has clearly been building and the response has been tremendous, with close to 62,000 members of the public across the UK calling on their elected representatives to back this change – and 145 politicians already have.

Battersea stands ready to help in any way we can to support this move to five year sentences and make such shocking cruelty to animals a thing of the past.

RSPCA Head of Public Affairs David Bowles said:

We are thrilled that the Government has responded to calls from the RSPCA and members of the public to toughen up sentences for the worst animal abusers. We now feel that those who commit these acts will soon be receiving sentences that reflect the seriousness of their crime and hope this will act as a real deterrent against cruelty and neglect.

The RSPCA picks up the pieces of animal cruelty every day of the year. Our inspectors regularly rescue animals from horrific circumstances of mistreatment, brutality and neglect. It is only through the prosecutions that we take that many of the perpetrators are brought to justice.

The strength of feeling behind a move to toughen up these sentences is huge – but at the moment the courts are limited by the law under which the strongest sentence for animal cruelty is six months' imprisonment and an unlimited fine – but this rarely happens.

Michael Gove's promise to bring sentences in line with Northern Ireland – which has a maximum of five years imprisonment – should help to deter people from abusing and neglecting animals and will finally mean that the sentence fits the crime.

The government will publish draft legislation for consultation around the turn of the year.

These plans are part of an ambitious programme of reform that will cement the UK's position as a global leader on animal welfare as we leave the EU. Last month we announced plans to make CCTV mandatory in all slaughterhouses and we have committed to taking steps to control the export of live farm animals for slaughter as we leave the EU.

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## **Press release: Stop facilitating tax evasion or face criminal prosecution, HMRC tells corporations**

Corporations could be prosecuted if they fail to prevent staff from criminally facilitating tax evasion under a new HMRC law that comes into effect this weekend

It is already a crime to evade tax, or deliberately help another person to do so, but on behalf of the majority of taxpayers who pay what is due, the UK government is now taking an even firmer stance on corporate fraud in a move designed to drive a change in corporate culture.

From today, the Criminal Finances Act 2017 introduces two new criminal offences – one applying to the evasion of UK taxes and one applying to the evasion of foreign taxes.

The offences hold corporations and partnerships criminally liable when they fail to prevent their employees, agents, or others who provide services on their behalf from criminally facilitating tax evasion. This is a significant change from existing law under which they can only be found liable for criminally facilitating tax evasion if the most senior members of the organisation – typically the board of directors – are aware of the facilitation.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury, Mel Stride MP said:

Tax evasion is a crime and takes away from the money we need to fund our vital public services.

The vast majority of businesses play by the rules but we must ensure that those that don't are accountable for their actions.

The new offences will ensure that companies doing business in the UK take reasonable steps to prevent their staff from facilitating tax evasion.

## Notes to Editors

1. The new legislation comes into force on 30 September.
2. Where there is evasion of UK taxes, any company based anywhere in the world can be liable, regardless of whether it has a business presence in the UK.
3. Where taxes other than UK taxes are evaded, any company that is (a) incorporated under the law of the UK; (b) carrying out a business or part of a business in the UK; or (c) has staff criminally facilitate evasion from within the UK, can be liable under the UK criminal law for failing to prevent their staff from criminally facilitating the evasion of foreign taxes.
4. HMRC will be responsible for investigating offences in relation to UK tax. The Serious Fraud Office will be responsible for investigating offences in relation to foreign taxes. HMRC will work closely with the SFO to ensure a robust response to the facilitation of tax evasion.
5. HMRC uses the full range of both criminal and civil powers to investigate tax cheats, and is successful in more than 90% of the prosecutions undertaken. However, work doesn't stop there – HMRC always looks to recover the proceeds from any crime committed.
6. In 2016-17, HMRC collected and protected more than £26 billion of tax that would otherwise have gone unpaid, from those not following the rules.
7. If you know of anyone committing tax fraud, call our 24-hour hotline on 0800 59 5000 and help us stamp it out.
8. The Criminal Finances Act 2017 can be found [here](#).
9. The Government has published guidance on what corporations and partnerships can do to prevent the criminal facilitation of tax evasion. This guidance can be found [here](#).

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**[Speech: "Trafficking is a development](#)**

**issue, it's a human rights issue, and it's a security issue. It needs a coherent UN response."**

Thank you Mr President,

It's clear that people trafficking is a scourge that unites the membership of the United Nations. No country is immune from this awful crime, and so it is right that every country is united in our shared commitment, made in the 2030 Agenda, to end forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking.

Making sure the Global Plan of Action helps deliver on this commitment will require that we act across a number of fronts. Let me highlight four.

First, we must bring further political attention to the issue of human trafficking: the hidden nature of this crime makes it too easy to ignore. The United Kingdom launched a 'Call to Action to End Forced Labour, Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking' as world leaders and their representatives gathered in New York last week. This statement of political intent explicitly welcomes and aligns very closely with the Global Plan. Thirty-seven countries have endorsed this Call and I urge others to do the same.

Second, every country should develop and implement a national strategy that addresses the four key elements of prosecution, protection, prevention and partnerships. The UK's approach is underpinned by its 2014 Modern Slavery Strategy. To uncover the scale of the problem, every country could also consider producing an estimate of prevalence and statistics on trafficking. In 2013 we estimated there were up to 13,000 victims in the United Kingdom.

Third, we must ensure that trafficking is stamped out of our economies. The International Labour Organization estimates that forced labour generates \$150bn of illegal profits each year. We must better regulate labour policies and work with business to eradicate trafficking from supply chains. The UK's Modern Slavery Act requires every business with global revenues of over \$48 million to report on the action it is taking. Governments, too, must address their own procurement practices.

Fourth, our law enforcement and criminal justice systems need specialist capabilities. The UNODC's last report told us, the number of global convictions remains too low. The UK introduced a comprehensive legal framework in 2015 – and we are now seeing growing numbers of convictions for the new offences it introduced. We are also investing over \$11 million in the police and training over 300 new specialist investigators.

Mr President,

Trafficking is a development issue, it's a human rights issue, and it's a security issue. It needs a coherent UN response. But to date we have not seen

enough progress to address the scale and urgency of the problem. We need UN agencies cooperating and using ICAT effectively – not competing over resources and turf. We urge the Secretary-General to help resolve this persistent challenge.

Because whether we describe it as human trafficking, modern slavery, or forced labour, we must stand together if the exploitation of human beings is to end. We have reviewed our global plan, so let us now act.

Thank you.

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## **Press release: Alistair Burt visits Bangladesh**

International Development Minister Alistair Burt has led talks on the situation in Rakhine State with key individuals in Bangladesh to step up efforts to end violence against Rohingya and allow humanitarian access to those in need.

Along with Foreign Office Minister Mark Field the successful series of talks held yesterday (Thursday, 28 September) with government officials and aid agencies centred on how best to provide further lifesaving support to the large influx of refugees in Bangladesh.

Yesterday's discussions follow talks that Minister Burt held in Thailand with the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, where he pushed for a greater regional response to the violence in Rakhine state and issues of humanitarian access.

Since the violence erupted on 25 August more than half a million Rohingya men, women and children have been forced to flee Rakhine State and have sought refuge in neighbouring Bangladesh. The UK has announced an extra £30 million to meet urgent humanitarian needs and is determined to do its very best and what is necessary to help those that are displaced.

Alistair Burt, Minister for International Development said:

The violence in Burma in the last month has forced hundreds of thousands of Rohingya men, women and children to flee their homes, livelihoods and loved ones.

UK aid is already making a difference on the ground in Bangladesh, but I urge the Burmese authorities to allow aid workers immediate and full access so we can deliver vital support to those living in fear and desperation.

The UK government has so far provided food for 65,000 of the most vulnerable victims, health care for 50,000 of them, and emergency shelter for up to 26,355.

We are also helping 7,500 children, many of whom have suffered traumatic ordeals, including sexual violence.

The UK is leading the way in the humanitarian relief effort, and it is now up to the rest of the world to follow our lead in helping the Rohingyas, not just now but in the long-term.

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## [Speech: Lord Ahmad welcomes conclusions of the 36th Session of the UN Human Rights Council](#)

The UN Human Rights Council concluded its 36th Session today with important resolutions on Burundi, Yemen, Syria, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the death penalty. This session also saw the adoption of the UK's Universal Periodic Review, where we have been making good progress in important areas.

I am delighted to have attended the Council this session and to have reaffirmed the UK's strong commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights. I had a positive first meeting with High Commissioner Zeid to discuss human rights priorities and had the opportunity to meet members of the Syria Commission of Inquiry to set out our continued support to their work. I also met civil society and NGOs to discuss, amongst other topics, the plight of Rohingya Muslims in Burma and the humanitarian crisis in Bangladesh. Protecting human rights and individual freedoms is a priority for this Government, for our Prime Minister, and for me personally. It is our collective responsibility, and we will continue to use our membership of the Council to speak out about human rights violations and abuses around the world.

I am pleased to see that resolutions on Burundi, Syria, Yemen, DRC, have been adopted at this session, as well as a Council decision on Burma. It is essential we work together with other Member States to hold perpetrators to account.

### **Burma**

The UK welcomes the adoption of a Council decision on Burma, extending the mandate of the Fact Finding Mission. Given the deeply concerning human rights situation across the country, including in Kachin, Shan and Rakhine States, its work is crucial. We once again urge Burma to grant the Mission access to

the country, and to cooperate fully with its mandate. We also urge the security forces, under Commander in Chief Min Aung Hlaing, to stop the violence in Rakhine State, allow a rapid return for refugees, and support the swift implementation of the Annan Commission's recommendations by the civilian government.

## **Ukraine**

The UK continues to see the regular report into, and the discussion of, the human rights situation in Ukraine as essential. We are deeply concerned by the continued high numbers of civilian casualties, detailed by OHCHR, and urge all parties to the conflict to work urgently to achieve a full and sustained ceasefire. We also welcome the thematic report into the human rights situation in illegally annexed Crimea which was undertaken despite the refusal of Russia de facto authorities to allow access to the High Commissioner and his Office, as called for in UN General Assembly Resolution 71/205. We reiterate our call for the de facto authorities to grant access to Crimea for international monitors.

## **Syria**

The human rights situation in Syria remains deeply concerning. The horrific violations and abuses the Syrian people continue to face are carefully recorded by the Commission of Inquiry. Attacks on civilians, obstruction of humanitarian aid, and forced displacement of civilians continue to be carried out by the Syrian regime. It is vital that the Council maintains a strong and unified stance on Syria. An important part of our efforts must be to hold those responsible to account. We therefore welcome the Resolution the Council has adopted and call upon all parties to ensure that the rights of all Syrian citizens are upheld and respected.

## **Yemen**

The deteriorating human rights situation in Yemen was an important priority at this council. We remain deeply concerned by the large scale human rights abuses that continue. We welcome the Council achieving consensus to establish a group of eminent international and regional experts as a concrete step taken by the international community to address the crisis and bring relief to innocent civilians.

## **Democratic Republic of Congo**

The resolution on the Democratic Republic of Congo builds on the international investigation mandated at the last HRC into the violence in the Kasai region. The Council is right to be seriously concerned by heinous human rights abuses and violations that have taken place there. It is important that we have agreed to have a comprehensive OHCHR report on the human rights situation as well as enhanced dialogues through the HRC calendar year to make sure responsibility is determined. I trust that the authorities in DRC will grant the access to the investigation, mandated in June, to ensure that those

who bear responsibility will be brought to justice.

## **Somalia**

The UK welcomes the adoption by consensus of the renewed resolution on Somalia. The resolution acknowledges the progress Somalia has made in strengthening the protection of human rights, and the commitment of the Federal Government of Somalia to continuing this progress. It is now vital that Somalia, together with support from the international community, takes forward the steps laid out in the resolution. This includes the establishment of the Human Rights Commission to end the culture of impunity and hold accountable those who commit human rights violations and abuses.

## **Sudan**

I welcome the resolution that the Human Rights Council has adopted on Sudan. We are encouraged by the Government of Sudan's increased willingness to engage with the international community on human rights issues, including with the Independent Expert. However, regrettably, fundamental freedoms continue to be restricted across Sudan. I therefore welcome the unified stance that the Council has taken. We urge the Government to increase accountability for human rights violations, and to cooperate with the UN/AU Mission in Darfur to increase protection for civilians.

## **Burundi**

The UK remains deeply concerned at the human rights situation in Burundi and is disappointed at the Burundi Government's response to the Commission of Inquiry's report, and in particular, their rejection of the report's conclusions that there were reasonable grounds to believe that crimes against humanity had been committed. Our national statement outlined worrying reports that gunmen entered the office of the UN OHCHR in Bujumbura. The Government of Burundi has a duty to protect diplomatic staff and premises. To this end, I welcome the resolutions on Burundi, and urge the Burundi Government to engage with the international community to bring an end to the violence and to hold the perpetrators to account.

## **Central African Republic**

The UK thanks the Independent Expert on CAR for her report to the Council and welcomes the extension of the mandate of the Independent Expert. The UK is concerned at the increase in human rights violations and abuses due to a resurgence of violence between armed groups. Reports of deliberate targeting of civilians by armed groups, in some cases based on ethnicity or religion is deeply troubling. The continued violence has seen significant numbers of displaced people who are without access to basic humanitarian needs. The UK urges the international community to provide essential assistance to the people of CAR to prevent the onset of a humanitarian crisis.

## Modern Slavery

I spoke at the start of this session about the importance the UK places on tackling the crime of modern slavery and our Prime Minister's personal commitment and leadership to eradicating human trafficking, modern slavery, and forced labour. The newly published "Global Estimates" further highlight the enormous scale of the challenge. At the UN General Assembly this month, I also had the honour to speak at a ["Why Slavery?"](#) event, launching a campaign to raise awareness of modern slavery. Tackling modern slavery requires the concerted effort of us all but government leadership is crucial. The UK's [Call to Action](#), launched at an event chaired by our Prime Minister and UN Secretary General Guterres on 19 September, has been endorsed by 37 countries and we will continue to work tirelessly to get more to sign up. I also encourage all governments to ratify the International Labour Organization's protocol on forced labour and to work with us in supporting the ["50 for Freedom"](#) campaign. We will continue to work with the international community and use opportunities such as the UPR to press for further action on this critical agenda.

## PSVI

At the UN General Assembly, together with Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict Pramila Patten, I also launched the [Principles for Global Action](#) on preventing and addressing stigma affecting victims of sexual violence in conflict. The Principles for Global Action is a key tool for policymakers and practitioners and aims to provide a survivor-centred approach to working to end stigma associated with conflict-related sexual violence. This document incorporates the expertise of 13 UN Agencies, NGOs, civil society, academics, international organisations and donor countries. The guide was also informed by experiences of survivors and practitioners from 16 conflict affected countries, and is a truly global document to help tackle stigma worldwide.

## UK Universal Period Review Adoption

In May this year the UK underwent its 3rd cycle of the Universal Periodic Review. Last week, we set out our position on all 227 recommendations we received from Member States in May during the UPR dialogue. We also voluntarily committed to providing an update on up to 5 recommendations by May 2018, and an update on all recommendations via a Mid Term Report in 2019. We are clear that the UPR is not just a three and a half hour dialogue that occurs for all States every four years. Each cycle builds on the last, with Mid Term Reports and other updates being an important way to demonstrate ongoing commitment to the UPR.

The Human Rights Council is a crucial platform, allowing Member States to support and uphold universal rights around the world. As an outward-looking, globally-minded, and inclusive country, the UK has always played an active role in the Council and other UN human rights fora. The UK will continue to promote universal human rights as a foundation for development and a vital

tool for conflict prevention, resolution and reconciliation.