

The All Belarusian People's Assembly: UK statement

World news story

Nicola Murray, Deputy Head of Delegation, delivers a UK statement on the All Belarusian People's Assembly to the OSCE Permanent Council.



Madam Chair,

The All Belarusian People's Assembly, which opened on 11 February, claims to include representatives of all sectors of Belarusian society, brought together to determine Belarus' priorities for the next five years and possible amendments to the constitution. In reality, the Assembly is neither inclusive nor representative. The 2,000 delegates have been vetted and handpicked by the authorities. No opposition voices will be allowed to attend or contribute.

Meanwhile, the authorities continue their sustained campaign of repression against all those campaigning for genuine democratic change, and the independent media actors who are reporting these events. Human rights groups now list 246 political prisoners, including all significant opposition leaders. Over 33,000 demonstrators have been detained, false charges of tax evasion or phytosanitary breaches are being brought against civil society organisations and there is no progress on investigating the hundreds of complaints of brutality by the security forces.

The UK is clear that repression, brutality and stage managed assemblies will not resolve the political and human rights crisis in Belarus. This can only be achieved through genuine inclusive dialogue. We call on the Belarusian authorities to implement and adhere to the recommendations in the Moscow Mechanism report as a route to a lasting and peaceful solution to the crisis, one which meets the democratic rights of its people.

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Lastminute.com faces legal action unless it pays outstanding refunds

Press release

Lastminute.com will face legal action unless it repays over £1 million to customers it committed to refund after their package holidays were cancelled.



On 1 December 2020, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) announced that Lastminute.com had signed formal undertakings which committed it to pay out over £7 million to more than 9,000 customers when their holidays were cancelled due to the pandemic.

All those affected were due to get their money back by 31 January 2021 at the latest, however, Lastminute.com still owes over £1 million to 2,600 customers.

The company has also failed to meet its ongoing commitment to repay all customers entitled to a refund within 14 days of their package holiday being cancelled on or after 3 December 2020.

On top of this, Lastminute.com told some package holiday customers to go directly to their airline to get the cost of their flight back. This is also in breach of its commitments and against its obligations under the Package Travel Regulations.

The CMA has informed Lastminute.com that it will take court action if it does not repay the outstanding refunds within 7 days. To avoid court action, Lastminute.com must also ensure that customers who book their package holidays from now on will receive a full refund within 14 days where they are legally entitled to their money back following the cancellation of their package holiday.

Andrea Coscelli, Chief Executive of the CMA, said:

It is wholly unacceptable that thousands of Lastminute.com customers are still waiting for full refunds for package holidays despite the commitments the company signed with us.

We take breaches of commitments extremely seriously. If Lastminute.com does not comply with the law and pay people their outstanding refunds quickly, we will take the company to court.

Today's announcement follows significant action by the CMA in relation to holiday cancellations during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The CMA has [written to over 100 package holiday firms to remind them of their obligations to comply with consumer protection law](#), and has already secured refund commitments from [Virgin Holidays](#), [TUI UK](#), [Sykes Cottages](#) and [Vacation Rentals](#).

Further information on this case can be found on the [COVID-19 cancellations: package holidays web page](#).

Notes to editors

1. [Lastminute.com committed to repay](#) at least half of customers by 16 December 2020 and to pay the remaining refunds by no later than 31 January 2021. It signed undertakings on 27 November 2020 and the CMA announced this on 1 December 2020.
2. The CMA sent a letter before action to Lastminute.com on Friday 12 February 2021. This outlined that the CMA intends to apply to the court for an order under section 217 of the Enterprise Act 2002 requiring Lastminute.com to comply with its obligations under [the Package Travel and Linked Travel Arrangements Regulations 2018](#).
3. The commitments signed by Lastminute.com relate to package travel holidays, not flights alone.
4. Where package holidays are cancelled and consumers are entitled to a full refund under the Package Travel Regulations, those refunds must be provided within 14 days of the cancellation.

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Human Rights Council organisational meeting: UK statement

We have convened this special session, alongside the European Union, with the support of over 20 other Council members. We are grateful for the support of Council members, the President and the Secretariat in making this session possible.

Madam President – we have spoken about our concerns about the human rights situation in Myanmar in the Council on many occasions in regular and in Special Sessions. Our longstanding concerns remain, including about the situation in Rakhine state and of the massive-scale-violations committed against Rohingya Muslims and members of other minorities. We are alarmed by concerned by a recent increase in violence in Kachin, Shan and particularly Kayin, where the Tatmadaw has repeatedly violated the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in recent months.

But our reason for calling for this special session is due to the extremely serious events which have unfolded in Myanmar over the last 10 days.

In the early hours of the 1st of February, Myanmar's military seized power in a coup and detained State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Myint, as well as other members of the democratically elected government and civil society. A state of emergency has been declared.

Since the military launched their coup, numerous human rights violations and abuses have been documented. These include but are not limited to arbitrary detention, restriction of access to communications, and restrictions on freedom of expression and the right to protest. There has been violence against peaceful protestors. Mass protests continue, the risk of further abuses of human rights remains high. The draft cyber security law raises the spectre of a further clamp down on freedom of expression and access to information.

The Security Council met on the 4th of February and unanimously agreed a statement which stressed the need for human rights to be fully respected. The Security Council also stressed the need to uphold democracy, refrain from further violence and allow safe and unimpeded humanitarian access.

Efforts to urge the Myanmar military to reverse the coup, restore democracy and respect human rights have not yielded results.

As the UN's principal human rights body, it is now essential that the Human Rights Council responds with due attention to the human rights emergency which is unfolding in the country.

In its founding resolution, this Council has a clear duty to promote universal respect for the protection of all human rights.

Therefore, given the imminent and ongoing threat to human rights in Myanmar

is it essential that we convene a Special Session on the human rights implications of the crisis in Myanmar, and seek a resolution responding to the concerns of Council members and observers.

We hope that all delegations will take part in the session and that the Council will support a resolution tomorrow to express our common concerns. We will continue to work with all delegations to this end.

Thank you

[£125 million allocated to councils to support domestic abuse victims and their children](#)

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[Joint statement by the UK Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Gove and European Commission Vice-President Šefčovič](#)

Press release

Statement following a meeting in London between the UK Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Michael Gove and European Commission Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič.



The co-chairs of the EU-UK Joint Committee on the Withdrawal Agreement – European Commission Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič and the UK Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Michael Gove – met to prepare the upcoming Joint Committee on the implementation of the Protocol on Ireland / Northern Ireland and the outstanding issues.

After a frank but constructive discussion, and taking into account the views expressed on 3 February by the First Minister and deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland, the two co-chairs agreed to:

- reiterate their full commitment to the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement, and to the proper implementation of the Protocol – protecting the gains of the peace process, maintaining stability, avoiding a hard border on the island of Ireland and impacting as little as possible on the everyday life of communities in both Ireland and Northern Ireland
- spare no effort to implement solutions mutually agreed on 17 December, as they form a foundation for our cooperation
- intensify the work of the Specialised Committee on the Protocol in order to address all outstanding issues, with the shared objective to find workable solutions on the ground
- underpin this work by further joint engagement by the UK and the EU with business groups and civic society in Northern Ireland
- convene the Joint Committee no later than 24 February to provide the necessary political steer and approval to this work in the spirit of collaboration, responsibility and pragmatism

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