

# Conference on Disarmament 2021

## Session: UK statement

Having already congratulated you on assuming the Presidency, and assured you of my delegation's support, when I took the floor at our meeting on Tuesday morning, let me begin by thanking everyone who has been involved in putting the arrangements in place to allow us to get this 2021 session of the Conference on Disarmament underway. The limitations of this virtual format are clear, and we eagerly look forward to being to resume in-person meetings as soon as the situation allows; but it is very important that we have been able to begin our work on schedule, even in the current exceptionally trying circumstances.

Let me also add my welcome to those new colleagues joining us for the first time today; I look forward to working with them.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my delegation's deepest sympathies to those who have lost loved ones and suffered hardships during the Covid-19 pandemic, and our solidarity with all countries that have been affected. The pandemic only serves to underline the importance of the international community working together to resolve global challenges; that goes for this Conference too. Mr President, I would like to take this opportunity briefly to set out the priorities for my delegation for the coming year.

Our focus is clearly on the delayed Tenth Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which we hope can go ahead in August. For fifty years, the NPT has provided the framework for the extension of the benefits of the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, for the minimisation of the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and for significant nuclear disarmament. At the Review Conference, we will celebrate this achievement and reaffirm our commitment to the Treaty in all its aspects.

While the NPT is the indispensable and irreplaceable framework for plotting a course to a world without nuclear weapons, it is this Conference that is charged with negotiating the instruments that will turn that aspiration into reality. Given its membership and its mandate, there is no alternative body that can do that. As such, perhaps the greatest contribution this Conference can make to the success of the Review Conference is to show that it is ready to fulfil that responsibility, notably by commencing negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty. My delegation continues to believe that there is no outstanding issue that cannot be resolved during the course of negotiations.

This Conference also has a crucial role to play in preventing an arms race in outer space. The United Kingdom was proud to be the original sponsor of UN General Assembly resolution 75/36, entitled 'Reducing space threats through norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours', and we were gratified and encouraged by the very broad support for it shown by Member States. That

resolution mandates the UN Secretary-General to produce a substantive report on the question as a basis for further discussions, and we encourage all members and observers of this Conference to contribute to it. The resolution also invites members and observers of this Conference to inform it of their national space security policies, strategies or doctrines, on a voluntary basis, in accordance with and in support of its mandate. We look forward to having the opportunity to do so during this session.

More broadly, Mr President, my Government will soon publish the results of its Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, which will define the long-term aims for our national security and foreign policy. We undertake to brief the Conference on the aspects of the Integrated Review that pertain to the UK's nuclear weapons policy and to disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control more generally once it is published.

Mr President, We warmly welcome the proposal you circulated already in December on behalf of the six Presidencies of this session for a package pertaining to a Programme of Work for 2021. My delegation has consistently supported the creation of Subsidiary Bodies to work towards negotiating mandates on the core issues, and consultations on issues related to the improved and effective functioning of the Conference. We also continue to support the proposal of the delegation of Australia to render the language of the Rules of Procedure gender-neutral. This is a specific, technical measure which has no bearing on wider questions of the improved and effective functioning of the Conference, and which should therefore face no impediment to swift adoption.

The events of Tuesday morning leave us under no illusions, however, that it will be easy to reach consensus even on issues which should be technical and procedural. I made my delegation's position on the blocking of applications for observer status by Iran and Turkey clear then, and do not intend to repeat it now. I would simply express the hope that our actions for the rest of this session, beginning with the swift adoption of a Programme of Work on the basis of your proposed package, can serve to rebuild the credibility of this crucial body, recognising the importance of the problems before us and the vital interest of all states in our success.

As we mark the 75th anniversary of the first meetings of the United Nations in London this month, I would like to finish by remembering the words of a man who was present at the creation, and went on to become a legendary UN official – Sir Brian Urquhart, who sadly passed away a few weeks ago at the age of 101. He once said of the UN, “three-fourths of the time, you achieve nothing, but every once in a while, it works just enough to make it worthwhile. From day to day, one thinks it hopeless, but cumulatively, it does work”. Let us use our time this year wisely, work tirelessly, respectfully and creatively to bridge the differences that persist among us, and make our Conference work just enough to be worthwhile.

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# [Companies House Direct and WebCheck services to close later in 2021](#)

News story

These services were due to close by February 2021, but a decision has been made to defer this closure to ensure a smooth transition for our customers.



[Companies House Service \(CHS\)](#) remains our prime company search function and this is where we're directing our customers.

Dissolved company records have been added to CHS. There are more dissolved records available than ever before with an additional 1.5 million company records uploaded. This information is free and includes the records for all companies dissolved since January 2010.

The government's response to the [Corporate transparency and register reform consultation](#) highlighted the need to balance enhanced corporate transparency with legitimate data privacy concerns.

We're also developing a dissolved company records index, and this will be available on CHS before the closure of CHD and WebCheck.

The dissolved company records index will hold basic summary details before 2010 up to 20 years from the date of dissolution. Further information and copies of documents for these companies will still be available on request from our contact centre for a fee.

See our [guidance on dissolved records](#).

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# Government publishes response to decriminalising TV licence evasion

Press release

Today the government has published its response to the public consultation on decriminalising TV licence evasion.



- Consultation showed significant opposition to criminal sanctions
- Decriminalisation remains under consideration and will form part of 2022-27 Licence Fee discussions
- Alternative licence fee enforcement schemes continue to be explored

The consultation asked whether the government should decriminalise TV licence evasion by replacing the criminal sanction with an alternative civil enforcement scheme. It looked at how far alternative schemes would be fairer or more proportionate, their cost and the challenges of implementation.

The government remains concerned that a criminal sanction is increasingly disproportionate and unfair in a modern public service broadcasting system. However, it wants to ensure that any future changes to the TV licence sanction or enforcement scheme are not seen as an invitation to evade the TV licence requirement, nor privilege the rule-breaking minority over the rule-abiding majority.

Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden said:

A criminal sanction for TV licence evasion in the digital media age feels outdated and wrong, and many who responded to our consultation agreed. Whilst the delivery of decriminalisation right now is problematic, we intend to keep looking at this as we negotiate the next Licence Fee settlement and push for the reforms at the BBC that the new leadership has recognised are needed.

The consultation received more than 150,000 responses from individuals, campaigners and stakeholders. Responses revealed that a significant number of

people are opposed to a criminal sanction with some highlighting the considerable stress and anxiety it can cause for individuals, particularly the most vulnerable in society, such as the elderly.

Many consultation responses noted changing the sanctions could have wide-ranging impacts for licence fee payers including significantly higher fines and costs for individuals who evade the licence fee.

Decriminalisation will be considered alongside the licence fee settlement negotiations that began in November. The negotiations will set the level of the licence free for a period of at least five years from 2022 and will provide the context within which any future decision on decriminalisation will be taken.

ENDS

Notes to editors

- The consultation opened in February and closed in April 2020.
- There were 154,478 responses to the consultation, including from 81 organisations including the BBC.
- Responses from individuals were split with 17,652 for decriminalisation and 19,199 against. From campaign groups, there were 18,869 for and 92,831 against.
- TV Licensing found 174,416 people watching TV without a licence in 2019/20.
- The TV licence evasion rate is currently between 6.5 and 7.5 per cent.
- As at 30 June 2020, there were zero people in prison for failing to pay the fine in respect of the non-payment of a TV licence in England and Wales.
- Around 91 people have been given custodial sentences for failing to pay fines in respect of the non-payment of a TV licence from 2015 to 2018 in England and Wales.

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## **[Decriminalisation of TV licence evasion consultation response](#)**

The consultation invited views on whether the government should proceed with the decriminalisation of TV licence evasion by replacing the criminal sanction with an alternative civil enforcement scheme. It set out four criteria against which the issue of decriminalisation would be considered:

- whether an alternative enforcement scheme is fairer and more

proportionate;

- the cost and difficulty to implement any alternative scheme;
- the potential impact on licence fee payers, particularly the most vulnerable and those with protected characteristics; and
- the overall impact on licence fee collection.

The consultation closed on 1 April 2020 after receiving 154,737 responses from individuals, campaign organisations and other stakeholders. A summary of the responses is included in today's publication.

After carefully considering the responses received, the government remains concerned that a criminal sanction for TV licence evasion is increasingly disproportionate and unfair in a modern public service broadcasting system. The consultation responses showed that a significant number of people oppose the criminal sanction with some highlighting the considerable stress and anxiety it can cause for individuals, including for the most vulnerable in society, such as older people.

However, the government recognises that changing the sanction for TV licence evasion would have wide-ranging impacts for licence fee payers, including the potential for significantly higher fines and costs for individuals who evade the licence fee requirement under a civil regime. The consultation also highlighted significant impacts in terms of both the cost and implementation – particularly as the current system is very efficiently handled in the Magistrates Court – and challenges posed to the ongoing collection of the licence fee. The government remains determined that any future change to the TV licence sanction or enforcement scheme should not be seen as an invitation to evade the TV licence requirement, nor should it privilege the rule-breaking minority over the rule-abiding majority.

The government's consultation response, which we publish today, therefore sets out that the issue of decriminalisation will remain under active consideration while more work is undertaken to understand the impact of alternative enforcement schemes.

In particular, a future decision on decriminalising TV licence evasion would benefit from consideration in the context of wider reform to the BBC. The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport has a roadmap for reform of the BBC and this provides critical context for any future decision on decriminalisation.

The government will therefore take forward these considerations in the broader context of the next licence fee settlement, which will set the level of the Licence Fee for a period of at least five years from 2022, and where negotiations have recently formally begun.

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# HS2 Eastern Leg spot safeguarding

I am today publishing [additional safeguarding directions](#) for the High Speed Two (HS2) railway for the West Midlands to Leeds (known as the Phase 2b Eastern Leg) section of the HS2 route to reflect the latest design of the HS2 railway.

Please note that the final design of the HS2 Phase 2b Eastern Leg and its integration with Northern Powerhouse Rail will be determined by the government's integrated rail plan, that I aim to publish early this year.

The latest safeguarding update includes a site east of Leeds. The site required by the HS2 rail project would support the potential integration between HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail.

The developer of the site has been made aware of the safeguarding directions prior to their publication as has the local planning authority, Leeds City Council.

By protecting the site now, the government guards against potentially conflicting development, which could otherwise disrupt the construction of HS2, as well as the risk of increased costs of building the new railway.

This protects the public's interest in spending taxpayer money in a proportionate fashion. The government periodically reviews land requirements needed for the project and updates the extent of safeguarding accordingly.

It's anticipated that the land requirements for Phase 2b of HS2 for the Crewe to Manchester (known as the Phase 2b Western Leg) section of the route will be updated prior to the deposit of the relevant hybrid bill.

A copy of the safeguarding directions will be placed in the libraries of both Houses for record, and are publicly accessible online.