

Foreign Ministers' joint statement on arrests in Hong Kong

News story

Statement by the Foreign Ministers of Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom, and the United States Secretary of State on arrests of 55 politicians and activists in Hong Kong.



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We, the Foreign Ministers of Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom, and the United States Secretary of State, underscore our serious concern at the mass arrests of 55 politicians and activists in Hong Kong for subversion under the National Security Law.

The National Security Law is a clear breach of the Sino-British Joint Declaration and undermines the 'One Country, Two Systems' framework. It has curtailed the rights and freedoms of the people of Hong Kong. It is clear that the National Security Law is being used to eliminate dissent and opposing political views.

We call on the Hong Kong and Chinese central authorities to respect the legally guaranteed rights and freedoms of the people of Hong Kong without fear of arrest and detention. It is crucial that the postponed Legislative Council elections in September proceed in a fair way that includes candidates representing a range of political opinions.

Published 9 January 2021

New strategy to accelerate diagnosis and improve treatment of rare diseases

- Rare Disease Framework sets out vision to improve the lives of more than 3.5 million people with rare diseases in the UK
- The framework will speed up diagnosis, increase awareness and improve treatment and care
- The new strategy has been designed around the views and experiences of those living with rare diseases

Millions of people with rare diseases, like Huntington's disease or cystic fibrosis, will benefit from a new framework to raise awareness of rare diseases, speed up diagnosis and improve care and treatment.

The UK Rare Diseases Framework, signed and agreed by all four nations of the UK, builds upon the successes of the previous strategy and was developed in consultation with those living with rare diseases following the National Conversation on Rare Diseases.

Rare diseases often start through unusual patterns of common symptoms that can be hard for a GP to recognise, there can often be trips to multiple specialists before a final diagnosis is reached. This can take years and can have a big impact on patients, their families and the NHS.

The new framework sets four priorities across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland including:

- Helping patients get a final diagnosis faster
- Increasing awareness of rare diseases among healthcare professionals
- Better coordination of care
- Improving access to specialist care, treatments and drugs

Health and Social Care Secretary, Matt Hancock said:

People with rare disease deserve to get the best possible access to care and treatment. Many spend years trying to discover what is wrong so it's essential we ensure we take every step to accelerate diagnosis and our brilliant health and social care workforce have a thorough understanding of those living with rare diseases.

The UK Rare Diseases Framework has been developed in close collaboration with people with a lived experience. It will build on the UK's exceptional strength in life sciences, our genomic capability, and of course the huge benefit of having the NHS, to shape our policies on rare diseases in the years to come and improve the lives of so many people.

There are 3.5 million people in the UK with a rare disease, the equivalent of 1 in 17 people.

It is currently estimated there are over 7,000 rare diseases with new conditions continually being identified as research advances. The more well known among them include Huntington's disease, Ehlers Danlos syndromes, cystic fibrosis and systemic scleroderma, however there are many more which are not as well known or understood, which is why raising awareness is one of the key priorities of this Framework.

Health Minister, Lord Bethell said:

I want the experiences of those living with a rare disease to shape the priorities of government to make sure our policies work for them. We can harness the potential of new technologies, including genomics, to support earlier detection and faster diagnosis of disease, tailor and target treatments

With such a vast range of rare diseases out there, it is hugely important the rare disease community was at the centre of designing the UK Rare Disease Framework.

The National Conversation on Rare Diseases survey, launched by Baroness Blackwood, aimed to identify the major challenges faced by those living and working with rare diseases, and received an amazing 6,293 responses, including from over 5,000 patients, families and patient organisations.

It provided clear evidence diagnosis and awareness of rare diseases, and difficulty in accessing specialist care were some of the challenges consistently seen as the most impactful across patients, their families and patient organisations.

Jayne Spink, CEO of Genetic Alliance UK said:

We welcome the publication of this Framework and look forward to working with the four nations of the UK to develop action plans to deliver its aims. A framework for rare disease policy is necessary now more than ever.

We have powerful genomic tools and exciting research breakthroughs on the horizon that are eagerly anticipated by people living with rare conditions. We hope that this framework can build the pathways that will allow these breakthroughs to realise their full potential in the NHS, across the whole of the UK.

Haseeb Ahmad, President of the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI) said:

Today's strategy sets out a welcome ambition for how people with rare diseases can get a fast diagnosis and access to treatments they desperately need.

Cutting edge research means that there will be even more exciting, new treatments developed for rare disease patients. We look forward to continuing our work in partnership with Governments across all four nations to make the ambition of this framework a reality for people with rare diseases and their families.

[More than 8,000 new businesses launched by jobseekers in Wales](#)

Press release

Thousands of jobseekers in Wales have used support from their local Jobcentre and the New Enterprise Allowance scheme to launch their own business.



New figures show between April 2011 and June 2020 more than 8,000 jobseekers in Wales used support from their local Jobcentre and the New Enterprise Allowance (NEA) scheme, to launch their own business.

The top counties in Wales with the most entrepreneurs include Cardiff with 960 start-ups; Swansea with 820; and Carmarthenshire with 670.

Launched in 2011, there has been over a quarter of million NEA starts by unemployed benefit claimants which has helped turn aspirations into reality, offering participants a personal business mentor, weekly living allowance and applicants can apply for financial backing of up to £25,000 to realise the ambitions for their start-up.

Wales Office Minister David TC Davies MP said:

The UK Government is committed to backing jobseekers and business and thousands of people across Wales have launched their own companies with our support.

Small businesses are key to our economy. Encouraging entrepreneurship and creating employment are priorities for the UK Government, driving the recovery as we build back better from the pandemic.

Minister for Employment Mims Davies MP said:

This remains a challenging time for families across the country but whether people are looking for a new job or a new source of income, there is hope.

Our Jobcentre staff are there to help and can open doors to new opportunities, like the support offered through our New Enterprise Allowance. I'm calling on all the budding entrepreneurs out there to contact their work coach and discuss how to make their business idea a reality.

Published 9 January 2021

UK Government announces major boost to coronavirus recovery through expansion of Dormant Assets Scheme

- Expansion will help unlock over £800 million for communities across the UK
- Dormant Assets Scheme to now include assets from the insurance and pensions, investment and wealth management, and securities sectors
- Move builds upon over £745 million already distributed from dormant bank and building society accounts that have benefited social and environmental initiatives to date

The UK Government has announced that dormant assets across the insurance and pensions, investment, wealth management, and securities sectors are set to be unlocked, with the potential for more than £800 million to be made available

to support the UK as it recovers from the coronavirus pandemic.

Funding raised through the expansion of the scheme will enable continued support of good causes, social investments and environmental initiatives.

This major expansion of the [Dormant Assets Scheme](#) marks the completion of a four year review and public consultation process. The responses showed widespread support for expanding the scheme from bank and building society accounts to include assets in these new sectors.

Led by the financial industry and backed by the UK Government, the expanded scheme will have consumer protection at its heart, with the priority continuing to be locating and reuniting people with their financial assets.

Where that is not possible, more businesses will now be allowed to participate voluntarily in transferring dormant assets into the scheme. People will still be able to reclaim their assets in full at any time.

Since 2011, 30 banks and building societies participating in the current scheme have enabled the release of over £745 million from dormant accounts that have been inactive for at least 15 years. These funds have been used to support a range of social and environmental initiatives across the UK, including helping young people on the path to employment, tackling financial exclusion, growing the social investment market, and supporting renewable energy solutions.

[£150 million was unlocked in May 2020 to support the UK's charity and voluntary sectors](#), as they continue to play a vital role during the coronavirus pandemic. The funding is supporting urgent work to tackle youth unemployment, expand access to emergency loans for civil society organisations and help improve the availability of fair, affordable credit to people in vulnerable circumstances.

Oliver Dowden, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, said:

Funds raised through the existing Dormant Assets Scheme have already made a huge difference to vulnerable people and communities across the UK, especially during the pandemic.

Expanding the scheme will mean hundreds of millions more for good causes, helping us to build back stronger in the years to come.

Baroness Barran, Minister for Civil Society, said:

Expanding the Dormant Assets Scheme provides us with two positive opportunities to highlight the importance of people tracing their lost financial assets. Firstly it will highlight the potential importance for people to trace their lost financial assets.

Secondly, where that is not possible, it will release over £800 million for social investment that will make a real difference to people – both young and old – experiencing challenging circumstances across the UK as we work hard to recover from this pandemic.

John Glen MP, Economic Secretary to the Treasury said:

Banks and building societies across the UK are working tirelessly to reunite people with forgotten assets. But on occasions where this isn't possible, it's right that these funds are used to tackle some of the UK's most pressing social and environmental challenges.

The expansion of the scheme will mean more people are reconnected with their assets, whilst also making more money available for good causes.

To date, funding released through the Dormant Assets Scheme has been used in a number of ways, including:

Over £425 million has been used to establish [Big Society Capital](#), an independent financial institution, launched in 2012, with the aim of growing the social investment market in the UK. To date, over 1,200 social enterprises and charities have received investment from Big Society Capital and the social impact investment market has grown from £830 million in 2011 to £5.1 billion.

£96 million has been provided to [Fair4All Finance](#) to increase the financial resilience and wellbeing of people in vulnerable circumstances through improving availability of fair and accessible financial products and services. Fair4All Finance has provided over £15 million in financial support to the community finance sector so far, including £12 million of equity investments in community finance providers and £3.6 million in Covid-19 grants.

£90 million has been provided to [Youth Futures Foundation](#) to break down the barriers to work for young people across England, with a focus on responding to the findings of the Racial Disparity Audit. It includes investing £6 million into targeted support for young people who are not in education, employment or training, and deploying £8.7 million in coronavirus grants to frontline charities, social enterprises and infrastructure bodies tackling youth unemployment.

£40 million has been provided to [Access – The Foundation for Social Investment](#). In response to Covid-19 Access has made up to £10 million available for emergency support through social lenders, while also developing a wider £18 million programme of flexible long-term recovery finance for the social sector.

£10.4 million of funding has been provided to the [‘Engage to Change’](#) project

in Wales since 2016, to break down barriers and stigma around disability by supporting 16-25 year olds with learning difficulties and/or autism into employment. Working with over 800 employers in Wales, in the past five years the project has enabled 959 young people to develop new skills, 381 young people to secure a paid work placement, and 272 young people to move into secure employment after their work placement.

In June 2020, more than £800,000 of dormant assets funding was provided via the Young Start programme to 12 youth-led groups in Scotland, including Leonard Cheshire and Can Do Dumfries, to help young people develop their personal skills, gain accredited qualifications that will boost their chances of future employment, and reach their full potential – often through digital platforms to keep them engaged during the pandemic.

Northern Ireland has recently used dormant assets funding to establish a £20.5 million [Dormant Accounts Fund](#) for the voluntary, community, and social enterprise sector, which will open for applications on 12 January.

The UK Government intends to legislate for the scheme expansion and will continue to work with industry, regulators, and Reclaim Fund Ltd to ensure its success.

Notes to editors:

The definition of a dormant asset varies according to the type of asset in question. In general it means a financial product, such as a bank account, that the customer has not used for many years and which the provider has been unable to reunite them with, despite efforts based on industry best practice.

The Dormant Assets Scheme has so far unlocked the following amounts to benefit social and environmental initiatives across the UK. All figures are approximate:

England	£650 million (of which £622 million has been released)
Scotland	£62 million
Wales	£36 million
Northern Ireland	£21 million

Currently, the scheme accepts only dormant bank and building society accounts. Dormant bank or building society accounts are those that have not been touched for at least 15 years, and where the bank or building society has been unable to reunite the customer with their money, despite a thorough reunification process. The sectors to be included in the expanded scheme and final definitions of dormancy for all assets are outlined in the UK Government response to the consultation.

Assets proposed to be within the scope of the expansion include:

- Proceeds of dormant life insurance and retirement income policies
- Proceeds of dormant shares or units in collective investments
- Dormant investment asset distributions and proceeds
- Proceeds of, or distributions from, dormant shares

- Unclaimed proceeds from corporate actions

Once the scheme has been expanded, participants must continue to first make efforts, based on industry best practice, to reunite assets with their owners.

Owners will always be able to reclaim the same amount they would have had if their assets were never transferred, as they do in the current scheme, and organisations will continue to participate on a voluntary basis.

There are over 30 firms participating in the current Scheme, including HSBC Bank plc, Lloyds Banking Group, Nationwide Building Society, Royal Bank of Scotland, and The Co-operative Bank plc. A full list can be found [here](#).

Under the current and expanded scheme, funds are held by Reclaim Fund Ltd (RFL). RFL holds sufficient money to cover any reclaims while distributing the surplus to The National Lottery Community Fund for social or environmental initiatives across the UK.

Owners can trace their dormant assets through a variety of means:

Banks and building societies	Customers should contact the firm that held their funds in the first instance, or they can trace their dormant bank accounts through My Lost Account
Insurance and pensions	Owners can visit the Association of British Insurers' (ABI) website for guidance on tracing lost assets and can also use this tool to search for a lost pension.
Investment and wealth management	Owners should contact firms directly to trace lost assets, using the Investment Association to access a searchable list of firms for the sector .
Securities	Owners should reach out to their individual issuer in the first instance, who can then direct them to the correct registrars to support tracing.

[Highways England funding resolves cycleway's missing link](#)

Since 2015 the company has invested more than £85 million towards the creation of 160 new and upgraded cycle ways across England, providing safe, attractive and accessible facilities for people to cycle for work, shopping and leisure.

In the latest initiative, Highways England is investing £630,000 into the A36 Southampton Road in Salisbury, between College Roundabout and Bourne Way Roundabout.

This stretch of the National Cycle Network serves an important and well used

connection, but the current route is not continuous.

The 800-metre cycle way will reduce the need for detours, dismounting or cycling within the carriageway. This is phase two of the scheme, with previous work introducing a route from Petersfinger Park and Ride to Bourne Way Roundabout.

It will see footpath widening, reconfiguration, new signs and lining, and high friction surfacing at entrances. Work on the cycleway began yesterday (4 Jan) and is expected to be completed by the end of March, with works carried out overnight under signalling and pedestrians being asked to use the southern side footway.

Highways England Route Manager Neil Winter said:

We're committed to significantly improving cycle efficiency and safety across our road network, and the new and improved cycle way will make it much easier and safer for cyclists and pedestrians.

At Highways England, our work goes beyond operating, maintaining and improving roads. We're investing in the environment and communities surrounding our network, as well as the people travelling and working on it.

We aim to address social and environmental issues and add real value to society.

We're delighted to be partnering with Wiltshire Council to realise this project – a glowing example of how this funding can make life better for communities living and working near our roads.

Cllr Bridget Wayman, Cabinet member for Highways at Wiltshire Council, said:

The council supports any measures that seek to encourage more people to use sustainable modes of travel and welcome the improvements proposed by Highways England.

Highways England manages four designated funds, allocated by the Government, to deliver benefits above and beyond building, maintaining and operating England's strategic roads.

From protecting the environment and enhancing the landscape around roads, to improving safety, reducing congestion, and supporting communities, the aim is to make a positive difference to people's lives.

Elsewhere in the South West, designated funding has already provided safer journeys for cyclists around M5 Junction 16 near Bristol and Cycle Route 45 around the A303 Solstice Park near Amesbury, while other ongoing schemes include:

- £17 million of funding invested to enable Cornwall Council to deliver four major cycle routes alongside the busy A30;
- £1.2 million towards a cycle path upgrade and £1m towards the design of several other cycle routes around the Avonmouth area of Bristol;
- £675,000 towards improved cycle and footpaths and upgraded crossings on both the A35 and Sea Road South around Bridport.

Cyclists, pedestrians and horse riders will see more benefits over the next five years, with £169 million set aside in Highways England's new Users and Communities fund.

The company is using the fund to improve services for users and neighbours of England's motorways and major A-roads, including increasing the options people have for sustainable travel.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.