

UN Human Rights Council 44: Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression

Thank you, Mr President

The United Kingdom would like to thank the Special Rapporteur for his work and his recent reports. The report on 'Disease pandemics and the freedom of opinion and expression' highlights a number of concerns that the UK shares during this time of COVID-19.

Like the Special Rapporteur, the UK believes that freedom of expression and a free media are essential qualities of any open society. People must be allowed to discuss and debate issues freely, to challenge their governments, and make informed decisions, including during this pandemic. We deplore attempts to restrict freedom of expression arbitrarily, including blocking access to the internet, through shutdowns and other means, the intimidation and abuse of journalists and interference in their ability to operate freely.

Mr President,

The UK calls upon States to ensure that all human rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled while combatting the pandemic. Any restrictions must be lawful, non-discriminatory, targeted, time-limited, and subject to regular review. Restrictions must remain strictly necessary as a response to COVID-19.

What steps does the Special Rapporteur believe that states can take to ensure their responses to COVID-19 do not arbitrarily infringe upon the right to freedom of expression?