

launched a business and peace strategy which gives companies advice on how they can actively contribute to building peace and protecting human rights.

In 2018, we will introduce modern slavery and girls' education as additional priorities for our human rights programme, which will include regional collaboration with the British Embassies in Venezuela and Brazil.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)

2017 saw no noticeable improvement in the dire human rights situation in DPRK, and a continued refusal from the DPRK to allow the independent investigation of human rights violations.

The DPRK's Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, religion, speech, the press, assembly, demonstration and association. In practice, none of these freedoms exists. The existence of LGBT people is simply denied. The Global Slavery Index estimates that more than a million North Koreans are victims of modern slavery, including forced labour. This amounts to over 4% of the population, the highest prevalence globally. Early 2017 saw the high-speed completion of numerous flagship construction projects. These required North Korean civilians and unpaid soldier-builders to labour manually for long hours, with few health and safety protections. Concerns were raised by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child about the use of child labour in such projects.

International incidents showed the regime's lack of respect for human rights and the rules-based international system. US citizen Otto Warmbier died in June following his sudden repatriation to the US in a coma, one year into a 15-year hard labour sentence following a show trial.

There was continued evidence of malnutrition countrywide. The poor state of health of a soldier from the Korean People's Army, who defected to South Korea over the Demilitarized Zone in November, showed the inadequate diet and healthcare received by civilians and military personnel alike.

The DPRK in May hosted the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Catalina Devandas Aguilar, the first visit by a UN human rights expert. The visit was tightly controlled, but it was a small sign of progress.

The DPRK's record was examined by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in September, and the DPRK's report on women's rights was examined by the UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in November. The CRC raised concerns about child labour, malnutrition, violence, political discrimination, and what it called "ideological indoctrination" in the DPRK education system. CEDAW expressed concerns about a broad range of violations affecting women, with stereotyping and discrimination starting at school and continuing throughout adulthood. Literacy in DPRK is universal, and the state provides for 12 years of free, compulsory education at primary and secondary levels. However, in practice, there are significant class, gender and urban-rural divides with farming and other mandatory services prioritised over school attendance, particularly for children over 14 years of age. While women account for 43.8% of people aged 16 or above who received a higher education, rates decrease sharply at university level, with vocational courses boosting female numbers recorded by official statistics. DPRK data from 2014 shows that only 1.9% of women aged 20-24 in rural areas are still in education.

DPRK authorities continued to deny allegations of human rights violations and refused to cooperate with the UN OHCHR and the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights in North Korea, Tomás Ojea Quintana. The DPRK maintained its rejection of the 2014 Commission of Inquiry report, which highlighted "wide ranging and ongoing crimes against humanity". DPRK authorities continued to restrict countrywide access and availability of data to the international community, including to NGO representatives.

The BBC World Service launched its Korean language service in September.

This is operationally and editorially independent of the UK Government. The Service transmits to both North and South Korea. It is unclear how accessible the Service is to the people of North Korea, who are forbidden from listening to non-state broadcasts.

During 2017, the UK continued to work through multilateral fora to challenge the DPRK's record on human rights. In March, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution to pursue the prosecution of North Korean leaders and officials responsible for crimes against humanity. In November, the UK supported a UN General Assembly Third Committee resolution, which called on the DPRK to respect the basic rights of its people. In December, the UN Security Council held formal discussions on DPRK human rights violations constituting a threat to international peace and security.

The UK played a prominent role in the UN Security Council decisions to impose tough new sanctions on the DPRK in 2017. These included a focus on the state-controlled employment of North Korean workers overseas who are sent abroad as commodities with the sole aim of generating funds for the DPRK Regime. Their working conditions, level of surveillance and restriction of movement are such that they are effectively victims of modern slavery. Through UNSCR 2397, adopted on 22 December 2017, all such workers will need to return to the DPRK within 24 months.

Bilateral FCO human rights and humanitarian aid projects in 2017 targeted the most vulnerable in DPRK society, and included support for the rights of the disabled, for girls' education, and for child nutrition.

The UK continued to use its bilateral relationship to press the DPRK government on its unacceptable human rights performance. Throughout 2017, the Ambassador and Embassy officials raised human rights in meetings with DPRK officials in Pyongyang. FCO Ministers also used their meetings in London with DPRK Embassy officials to make clear our concerns.

In 2018, the UK will continue to voice our concerns and call for the DPRK to cooperate fully with the relevant

international bodies, allowing them immediate and unhindered access in order to assess directly the human rights situation in the country.

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

The human rights situation in DRC continued to deteriorate in 2017. The UN Joint Human Rights Office (UNJHRO) recorded 6,495 abuses and violations in 2017, a 25% increase from 2016, which had itself seen a substantial increase from 2015. With President Kabila delaying elections until December 2018, there were a large number of reported human rights violations related to arbitrary arrests and imprisonments, extrajudicial executions by state agents, and attacks on freedom of speech and expression. State officials were identified as the main perpetrators, committing nearly two thirds of all human rights violations and abuses. The deterioration of the human rights situation in DRC has resulted from the increasingly unstable political crisis and violence in the Kasai provinces and eastern DRC.

The UK's work in DRC focused on protecting the political space, peacebuilding and preventing sexual and gender-based violence. Instances of human rights violations relating to the restriction of democratic space, including freedom of assembly and expression, significantly increased in 2017, with a reported 1,375 violations. Nearly half of these occurred from October to December, correlating with an increase in political protests in the latter part of the year. There were a number of restrictions on freedom of expression, including the violent suppression of protests and political rallies, and service providers being ordered to shut down internet services. There were also a significant number of arbitrary arrests and imprisonments. The UK Government lobbied the DRC government to open up the political space, including by releasing political prisoners and by respecting the right to peaceful assembly, and publicly condemned government forces' use of excessive violence.

2017 saw the emergence of a significant crisis in the three Kasai provinces with reports of disappearances, mass killings and torture. The UN found nearly 90 mass graves in the Kasais. The majority of the violations and abuses were carried out by government forces (FARDC) and pro-government groups. The UNJHRO reported that soldiers of the FARDC killed over 750 people. Local militia, including followers of the Kamwina Nsapu movement, also committed a number of human rights abuses. In February, footage emerged which seemed to show government forces shooting unarmed civilians. In March, two members of the UN Group of Experts investigating the situation in the Kasais were abducted and subsequently murdered: it is unclear who was responsible. The UK supported a resolution at the June session of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) calling for the creation of an international investigation into the allegations of human rights violations and abuses in the Kasai region. The appointed investigative team will provide an oral update at the HRC's session in March 2018, followed by a comprehensive report to the HRC's June 2018 session.

UNJHRO documented an increase of adult victims of conflict-related sexual violence in 2017, with at least 533 victims. The vast majority were victims of sexual violence perpetrated by combatants of armed groups and by armed militiamen. In 2017, the UK continued to support a more effective legal response to sexual violence in conflict in DRC. One significant success was the conviction in the Kavumu trial in December, when a group of militiamen received life sentences for sexual abuses against over 40 children in South Kivu. The UK is also working with international partners to complete a joint evaluation of the impact of sexual violence programming in DRC. This is designed to inform more effective interventions by both the DRC government and the international community in the future.

In 2017, armed groups in eastern DRC were responsible for human rights abuses such as mass killings,

sexual violence and torture. The UK focused on long-term stability and peacebuilding in eastern DRC through our contributions to MONUSCO (UN Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the DRC), the work of DFID, and programmes supported by the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF). Through the CSSF, we supported respected Non-governmental Organisations Avocats Sans Frontières and Search for Common Ground to educate human rights defenders and promote conflict resolution. In May, the UK supported EU sanctions against nine individuals responsible for human rights violations and abuses and for obstructing the political process.

The female illiteracy rate in DRC is 29%^[36]. DFID funded programmes on girls' education to improve access and quality of education for more than one million children, including reducing school-based violence.

In 2018, the UK will continue to focus on protecting the political space during the electoral period. We will monitor events closely and will raise any concerns over arrests, detentions and disappearances of opposition and civil society figures with the DRC government. The UK will also continue its work on the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative and deliver a second phase of the girls' education programme to support 75,000 girls. We will continue to encourage the DRC government, as an elected member of the HRC, to take active steps to improve respect for human rights. This includes encouraging active cooperation with the HRC investigation into the human rights violations and abuses in the Kasais.

Egypt

In 2017, the human rights situation in Egypt continued to deteriorate. There were restrictions on civil society and freedom of expression, discrimination against LGBT people, and widespread reports of torture, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions.

[36] https://www.education-inequalities.org/indicators/literacy_1524#?sort=sex%3AFemale&dimension=sex&group=all&page_group=literacy_1524&countries=all