

routes for modern slavery victims, and develop recommendations for public policy to tackle modern slavery.

In May, Colombia underwent the Universal Periodic Review process at the UN Human Rights Council. The UK statement specifically highlighted continuing violence against human rights defenders, impunity in conflict-related sexual violence, and concerns related to modern slavery, while recognising the efforts of the Colombian government to tackle these challenges.

The UK has sought to address human rights risks in the Colombian mining industry by encouraging compliance with the OECD's Due Diligence Guidance and by fostering partnerships between the private sector and international organisations, local government, and civil society to support responsible mining practices.

The UK provided £71,000 to fund a project to support the engagement of the private sector with Colombia's Truth Commission in its work as part of Colombia's transitional justice process. Concluding in early 2018, the project developed methodologies, tools, and recommendations aimed at addressing and promoting the role of the private sector in the transitional justice process.

In 2019, we will continue promoting the creation of better collective and self-protection mechanisms for human rights defenders and will continue strengthening our work preventing sexual violence, with a special focus on justice access and health services improvement. In addition, we will start the implementation of recommendations to tackle modern slavery in the region.

On the policy side, we will be paying special attention to the recommendations made by Michel Forst on Human Rights Defenders and the advances made by the government one year after Colombia's UPR.

## Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Despite the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)'s diplomatic activity in 2018, there was no visible improvement in the human rights situation. The regime continued to deny its citizens freedom of expression, and of religion or belief, and sought to exercise total control over information and social life. The press were not free to report on the real situation inside the country, to ensure that media coverage did not contradict the regime's ideology and propaganda. Those who did not follow regime orthodoxy faced imprisonment or death.

The DPRK was once again top of the Global Slavery Index in 2018<sup>[47]</sup>, with an estimated 2.6 million North Koreans—one person in ten—a victim of modern slavery. People worked long hours for minimal or no payment. This included students and schoolchildren routinely taken out of school to take part in rice or tree planting, or other communal activity.

The DPRK authorities continued to deny allegations of human rights violations and to refuse human rights practitioners access to the country. They refused to cooperate with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights in North Korea, Tomás Ojea Quintana. They continued to reject the 2014 Commission of Inquiry report, which had highlighted wide-ranging and ongoing "crimes against humanity".<sup>[48]</sup>

In November, Human Rights Watch released a detailed and deeply troubling report 'You Cry at Night but Don't Know Why'<sup>[49]</sup> about sexual violence against women in the DPRK. The report detailed numerous accounts of acts of sexual violence committed by high-ranking party officials, prison guards, police officers, prosecutors, and soldiers.

2018 saw memorable steps forward in inter-Korean rapprochement, including the reunion of separated

families. Unfortunately, the DPRK regime continued to use family reunions as a political tool, with the welfare of the affected families a minor consideration. Approximately 600 Koreans from 169 families were reunited, but only for a matter of hours. The ageing participants will probably never see each other again.

The UK continued to raise and challenge the DPRK's human rights record in multilateral fora. We were particularly active at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), which in March adopted a resolution to pursue the prosecution of North Korean leaders and officials responsible for crimes against humanity. In June, the then Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, opened the 38th session of the HRC with a call on states to support twelve years of quality education for girls. Following this call, and engagement by our Embassy in Pyongyang, the DPRK decided to become one of the states which signed up to a joint declaration of commitment. This was a positive step which we welcomed. At the 39th session of the HRC in September, we called on the DPRK to engage constructively with the international community during its next Universal Periodic Review in 2019.

At the UN General Assembly in November, the UK was a main sponsor through the EU, and together with Japan, of a Third Committee resolution on the human rights situation in the DPRK. The General Assembly adopted the resolution by consensus for the third consecutive year. The resolution called on the DPRK to protect its population from crimes against humanity, and included strengthened language on gender equality.

We also played a prominent role in enforcing UN Security Council sanctions on the DPRK. That work will continue in 2019, when under UNSCR 2397 all UN member states will be required to repatriate North Korean overseas workers by the end of the year. Such workers are forced overseas to earn money for the regime and often work

[47] <https://www.globallslaveryindex.org/2018/data/country-data/north-korea/>

[48] <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/hrc/coidprk/pages/reportofthecommissionofinquirydprk.aspx>

[49] [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report\\_pdf/northkorea1118\\_web2.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/northkorea1118_web2.pdf)

in conditions tantamount to slavery in their host country. We urge all member states to take seriously their obligations under UNSCR 2397 to repatriate DPRK overseas workers. We are examining the implementation reports submitted to the UN as part of these obligations closely, and continue to engage with states that host DPRK workers in violation of sanctions.

Through DFID, the UK provided \$70,000 to the UNICEF Bangkok regional office in July to contribute to child protection and education campaigns in the DPRK. UNICEF successfully encouraged incremental but important changes in the DPRK system. But there was very little progress in the DPRK's implementation of the recommendations made by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child during their visit in September 2017.

The UK continued to use its bilateral relationship to engage with the DPRK government on its human rights record. Throughout 2018, the Ambassador and other embassy officials raised their concerns in meetings with DPRK officials in Pyongyang, while FCO officials used meetings in London with DPRK Embassy officials to do the same.

In 2019, the UK will continue to raise the human rights situation in the DPRK at every opportunity. We will urge the regime to cooperate fully with relevant UN human rights mandate holders, and allow them immediate and unhindered access to assess directly the human rights situation in the country. In coordination with our partners, we will also use the Universal Periodic Review as a means to engage the DPRK in meaningful dialogue on its human rights record, and seek specific areas for constructive engagement and improved performance.

## Democratic Republic of the Congo

The human rights situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) continued to deteriorate in 2018. The UN Joint Human Rights Office (UNJHRO) reported 6,831 human rights violations and abuses throughout DRC in 2018, a 5% increase compared to 2017. Human rights violations and

abuses included: sexual and gender-based violence, arbitrary arrest and detention, extrajudicial killings, inhumane and degrading treatment, and restrictions to democratic space. UNJHRO reported that 61% of the human rights violations and abuses recorded in 2018 were carried out by state agents. Armed groups continued to target civilians, carrying out serious human rights abuses including mass killings. Impunity for those committing human rights abuses and violations remained widespread.

Restrictions to democratic space, freedom of expression and the right to peaceful assembly remained a concern. On 21 January and 25 February, peaceful demonstrations by the Lay Coordination Committee of the Catholic Church were responded to violently by state officials, resulting in at least seven deaths. The authorities regularly suspended internet and SMS access across the country in response to demonstrations.

In the build up to elections on 30 December, UNJHRO reported that activists, journalists and members of political parties continued to suffer intimidation and arbitrary arrests, and several protests and political gatherings were repressed by state agents using excessive force. The electoral campaign itself included incidents of violence across the country, the suspension of campaigning in Kinshasa for several days, and a decision from the electoral commission to suspend elections in Beni, Butembo and Yumbi until March 2019, meaning that approximately 1.2 million people were not able to vote in presidential elections. International observers outlined that although election day itself passed with an atmosphere of relative calm, there were incidents of violence in several areas of the country, and there were a number of reported technical and procedural delays, incidents of assisted voting, and congested polling stations. Throughout the preparation for elections, during and after the vote, the UK pressed through the UN, EU and bilaterally for the DRC government to open up political space, release political prisoners, lift a block on internet communications, recognise peoples' right to peaceful

assembly, and refrain from using excessive force against protesters.

Armed groups continued to target civilians indiscriminately, including committing mass killings, abductions, torture and sexual violence. UNJHRO documented the continued recruitment and use of children by armed groups and militias, as well as grave human rights abuses including sexual violence, killings and maiming. The UK has focused on long-term stability and peacebuilding in eastern DRC through our contributions to the UN Stabilisation Mission in DRC (MONUSCO), the work of the Department for International Development (DFID), and programmes supported by the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF). In December, the UK supported the rollover of EU sanctions against 14 individuals responsible for human rights abuses and for obstructing the political process.

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) perpetrated by state officials and armed groups remained high. Rape, including mass rape, continued to be used as a weapon of war. The UK helped fund Trial International, who provided support for survivors, promoted accountability for sexual violence crimes, built local capacity to effectively document, investigate and litigate sexual violence cases, and provided non-financial assistance to sexual violence survivors. UK-funded education and health programmes set up 820 school-related gender-based violence monitoring committees in four provinces. The aim of the committees was to curb school-based gender violence, provide SGBV survivors with post-exposure prophylaxis kits, and establish a legal clinic for victims. In addition the UK established 47 micro-credit groups which have benefitted 556 women. Dr Dennis Mukwege was jointly awarded the Nobel Peace prize for his treatment of women who have been victims of violent rape and sexual assault and his efforts to raise awareness about rape as a weapon of war. The UK is supporting the scoping phase of a pilot project managed by the Mukwege Foundation to set up a survivors' assistance fund in DRC. This will assess how financial support for survivors of sexual violence can be implemented on a national basis.