

2021, we plan to build on these suggestions and seek to provide targeted UK expertise and assistance where it can make the most impact.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

There was no improvement in the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in 2020. Human rights violations remained widespread and systematic, and the perpetrators unaccountable. On paper, freedom of speech, religion or belief, the press, association, and demonstration were guaranteed by the North Korean Constitution. In reality, North Koreans enjoyed none of these freedoms. The DPRK remained top of Open Doors' annual ranking of the 50 countries where Christians experience extreme persecution^[82], and came bottom in the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index^[83].

The DPRK authorities continued to deny allegations of human rights violations. They continued to refuse to cooperate with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) or with the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights in North Korea, Tomás Ojea Quintana. The regime continued to refuse to act on the 2014 UN Commission of Inquiry report, which had concluded that the wide-ranging and continuing human rights violations taking place in the DPRK may amount to "crimes against humanity". Restrictions on internal movement introduced in response to COVID-19 at the beginning of 2020, including for members of UN agencies and NGOs, severely affected the distribution of aid and support throughout the year. The DPRK authorities also introduced a wider lockdown of entry into the country in response to the pandemic.

The UK continued to raise and challenge the DPRK's human rights record in multilateral fora. We

co-sponsored resolutions on the human rights situation in the DPRK adopted by the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) and UN General Assembly Third Committee, in March and November respectively. Both resolutions recalled the DPRK's responsibility to protect its population from human rights violations, and urged the DPRK to cooperate fully with the UN Special Rapporteur by giving him unrestricted access to the country. At the UN General Assembly in November, we reminded the DPRK that measures used to contain COVID-19 should be proportionate, and should not be used unnecessarily further to restrict the freedom of citizens. In December, the UN Security Council discussed human rights violations in the DPRK as a threat to international peace and security.

Reports by the UN Special Rapporteur to the HRC in May, and by the OHCHR in July, added to the growing body of information regarding human rights violations in places of detention. Women, including those who had escaped the DPRK and subsequently been repatriated, faced gender-based human rights violations, notably an increased risk of sexual violence.

The UK continued to use its bilateral relationship to engage with the DPRK Government on its human rights record. FCDO officials used meetings in London with DPRK embassy officials to raise human rights concerns. Officials encouraged incremental change where they saw opportunities. In May, the UK temporarily closed its Embassy in Pyongyang as restrictions on entry to the DPRK made it impossible to sustain its operation. Nonetheless, the UK Ambassador to the DPRK Colin Crooks continued to engage with DPRK officials and UN human rights actors on human rights issues.

In July, the UK imposed sanctions on two DPRK entities under the Global Human Rights sanctions regime. The Ministry of State Security

Bureau 7 was designated as a DPRK Government body with responsibility for running political prison camps, estimated to hold 80,000-120,000, with involvement in the murder, torture and forced labour of those incarcerated. The Ministry of People's Security Correctional Bureau was designated as a DPRK Government body with responsibility for running prison camps for 'ordinary' prisoners, with involvement in the serious human rights violations committed in those camps, estimated to hold over 70,000. Both entities are now subject to an asset freeze and a travel ban.

In October, the Korea Future Initiative released a report entitled 'Persecuting Faith: Documenting religious freedom violations in North Korea'. The report assessed the status of freedom of religion or belief in DPRK, and contained disturbing accounts of human rights violations against those who have attempted to practise their religion or belief.

In 2021, the UK will continue to raise the human rights situation in the DPRK and use multilateral fora to urge the regime to cooperate fully with relevant UN human rights mandate holders, and allow them immediate and unhindered access to the country. When conditions allow, we shall seek to return our Embassy staff to Pyongyang, and explore new opportunities for greater engagement between the international community and the DPRK authorities on human rights.

Democratic Republic of Congo

The human rights situation in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) deteriorated, reversing progress made in 2019. The UN Joint Human Rights Office (UNJHRO) documented 7,909 violations and abuses, a 21% increase from 2019, and more than the 6,814 recorded in the 2018 election year^[84]. Human rights violations and abuses included

[82] <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/world-watch-list>

[83] <https://rsf.org/en/north-korea>

[84] https://monusco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unjhro_-_analysis_of_the_human_rights_situation_in_the_drc_-_2020.pdf

sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), restrictions on freedom of expression, arbitrary arrests and detentions, and extrajudicial killings. UNJHRO reported that armed groups overtook state agents as the main perpetrators, committing 55% of documented violations and abuses^[85].

Nearly 93% of documented violations and abuses took place in conflict-affected provinces; and armed groups continued to attack civilians indiscriminately^[86]. The UK supported efforts to build stability and reduce violence in DRC through diplomatic efforts and funding. In financial year 2020/21, we contributed £52 million in funding and three staff officers to the UN Organisation Stabilization Mission in DRC (MONUSCO). We also ensured that protection of civilians remained central to the mission's 2020 mandate renewal, alongside a renewed focus on stabilisation and strengthening state institutions. Through our £70 million UKAid programme (2014-21), we continued to fund UNJHRO activities and to contribute to the DRC Stabilisation Coherence Fund, which supported local-level mediation initiatives and recovery in communities affected by violence. The programme also worked to challenge impunity of security actors, through mobile courts, support to prosecution cells, and sensitisation campaigns.

SGBV perpetrated by state agents and armed groups continued, with at least 967 adult victims. The UK welcomed the conviction in November of former militia leader Ntabo Ntaberi Sheka, who was sentenced to life imprisonment for crimes including mass rape, recruitment of child soldiers and sexual slavery^[87]. The UK funded the NGO TRIAL International to secure greater accountability for SGBV cases and build local capacity to document, investigate and litigate effectively. TRIAL supported the

successful prosecution of two militiamen, ensuring justice for 150 victims of sexual violence. The UK provided funding to the PANZI Foundation, which enabled the NGO to deliver legal assistance to 24 victims of SGBV and close 146 cases through conflict resolution, arbitration and acts of conciliation. Education and health programmes funded by the UK supported schools in responding to SGBV incidents, and provided post-exposure prophylaxis kits to survivors of sexual violence. The UK also trained 145 teachers, social workers and points of contact in schools on child protection and preventing SGBV.

In October, the British Embassy in Kinshasa helped fund an event with local peacebuilders and women leaders, marking 20 years of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. At this event we encouraged international partners to sign up to the UK-funded International Civil Society Action Network's Protection Framework for women peacebuilders, and to endorse the UK-supported Declaration of Humanity, denouncing the stigmatisation of survivors of sexual violence. In December, the British Ambassador to DRC, Emily Maltman, hosted senior DRC Government officials, ambassadors and development partners to showcase 'Binti', a UK-sponsored documentary on gender-based violence.

Previous gains made on civil and political rights were reversed, with increased political tension accompanied by a reported reduction in democratic space and media freedom. Human Rights Watch reported government harassment of critics, journalists and protesters, suspension of broadcasting, and closure of radio stations^[88]. The UNJHRO noted violations concerning the exercise of public freedoms and political rights through arbitrary arrests,

illegal detentions, and the banning of at least 29 demonstrations by local authorities under the pretext of COVID-19 measures. UNJHRO reported numerous violations of the right to liberty and security by state agents, including extrajudicial killings in relation to crowd control, harsh punishment of non-compliance with COVID-19 measures, and the suppressing of protests. The UK worked with international partners to pressure the Government to protect political space and recognise individuals' right to protest peacefully. In October, we expressed our concern about the situation via Human Rights Council resolution A/HRC/RES/45/34.

Modern slavery remained a challenging issue, particularly in artisanal mining. The British Embassy together with the NGO Pact UK hosted a series of workshops and training sessions focussed on tackling modern slavery in mineral supply chains. More broadly, the UK maintained pressure on the Government to adhere to the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights Initiative, and supported programmes bringing together civil society and the private sector to improve human rights compliance and Government oversight of security provision in the mining sector. The Government has since committed to developing a plan to become a full member of the Initiative.

In 2021, the UK will continue to urge the Government of DRC to improve the human rights situation by ensuring respect for political and civil liberties, reforming the security sector, and tackling impunity. The UK will also sustain its support for efforts to build peace and stability in DRC.

[85] https://monusco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unjthro_-_analysis_of_the_human_rights_situation_in_the_drc_-_2020.pdf

[86] https://monusco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unjthro_-_analysis_of_the_human_rights_situation_in_the_drc_-_2020.pdf

[87] <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-55052520>

[88] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/07/22/dr-congo-authorities-foundering-rights>