



The Minister for the Americas and Caribbean, David Rutley MP, meeting survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, September 2022.

situation of human rights in North Korea, Elizabeth Salmón.

The DPRK was listed in last place out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index and top of Open Doors' annual ranking of the 50 countries in which Christians experience extreme persecution. In principle, freedoms of speech, religion or belief, the press, association, and peaceful assembly were guaranteed by the DPRK's constitution, but in reality, it was almost impossible for believers to gather or meet to worship, with the DPRK's "anti-reactionary thought" law bringing enormous personal risk to those who did dare to do so.

The DPRK government remained the subject of country specific human rights resolutions at the UN. It continued to deny allegations of human rights violations, and failed to address reports by the UN Secretary General and the UN Special Rapporteur during 2022 on the human rights situation in the country. The regime continued to refuse to recognise or 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".^[95] NGO reports added to the growing body of information and deep concern about human rights violations in the DPRK, including Korea Future's "North Korean Prison Database" launched in March.

The UK continued to raise and challenge the DPRK's human rights record in multilateral fora, calling on the DPRK to ensure its people's fundamental human rights, rather than diverting its resources to its illegal weapons programme. The UK pressed for a UN Security Council annual debate on human rights in the DPRK, on the basis that human rights there and international peace and security were inextricably linked. The UK co-sponsored resolutions on the human rights situation in the DPRK, adopted by the UN General

people^[94]. The report is a significant milestone in Colombia's reconciliation process, and the first of its kind to recognise sexual violence and reproductive violence, as well as political violence against women during the conflict. Through its CSSF support, the UK helped the Truth Commission's work to gather testimonies from Colombians both in Colombia and abroad, including in the UK.

In a further important step, Colombia's Special Jurisdiction for Peace, announced in July the opening of a macro case on sexual violence and other crimes related to gender, sexual orientation and identity. The UK supported the office of the judges who lead on the case, as well as victim and survivor organisations advocating for the recognition of sexual violence as a weapon during the armed conflict.

Under the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI), the UK continued to help Colombia address the impact of conflict-related sexual violence. At the PSVI conference in November, the UK welcomed a large delegation from Colombia that embodied its multi-level commitment to the prevention and prosecution of this heinous crime. Colombia is now an active member of the International Alliance on PSVI.

The Minister for the Americas and Caribbean, David Rutley MP, visited Colombia in November 2022, where he met victims and survivors and discussed UK support to survivors of sexual violence, including psychosocial and legal support, and access to justice. As well as support to female victims, UK programming included support to male and LGBT+ survivors to overcome the specific barriers they face in their pursuit of justice and accountability.

In 2023, a year in which the country will hold local and regional elections in October, the UK will continue to work closely with the Colombian government and civil society to promote human rights, peace and security across the country.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

There were no signs of any improvement in the dire human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in 2022. The country's borders remained closed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the DPRK authorities continued to refuse to co-operate with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) or with the newly appointed UN Special Rapporteur on the

[94] Hay futuro si hay verdad | Informe Final Comisión de la Verdad (comisiondelaverdad.co)r

[95] <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/co-idprk/reportofthe-commissionof-inquiry-dprk>

Assembly and the UN Human Rights Council. The resolutions recalled the DPRK's responsibility to protect its population from human rights violations, including gender-based violence, and urged the DPRK to cooperate fully with the UN Special Rapporteur by giving them unrestricted access to the country.

The DPRK's border closures and tight restrictions on internal movement introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic continued to severely affect the distribution of aid and support, with UN agencies and international NGOs unable to access the country to conduct an assessment of need. The UK reminded the DPRK that its restrictive COVID-19 measures should be proportionate and not used as a tool to further constrain the freedom of its citizens, or to restrict the ability of the international community to engage with authorities in Pyongyang.

The UK continued to use its bilateral relationship to engage with the DPRK government on its human rights record. With the continuing temporary closure of the British Embassy in Pyongyang due to COVID-19 border restrictions making it impossible to sustain its operations, the UK Ambassador to the DPRK raised concerns with the DPRK Embassy in London and with UN human rights actors on human rights issues.

In 2023, the UK will continue to raise the human rights situation in the DPRK, and use multilateral fora to urge the regime to co-operate fully with relevant UN human rights mandate holders and allow them unhindered access to the country. The UK will continue to support the new UN Special Rapporteur, Elizabeth Salmón, to shine a spotlight on the deeply concerning human rights situation in the DPRK, in order to effect improvements and permanent change for the people of North Korea.

The UK will also keep under review the use of UK autonomous global human rights sanctions. When conditions allow, the UK will 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 the Congo

The human rights situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) remained deeply concerning in 2022, particularly in the eastern provinces affected by conflict. The UN Joint Human Rights Office documented 5,969 human rights violations and abuses, a 15% decrease from 2021. Human rights violations and abuses continued to be concentrated to conflict-affected provinces in 2022 (85%), with a significant increase in the number of extrajudicial executions.

While the number of documented human rights violations and abuses declined, the overall security situation in DRC deteriorated in 2022. The re-emergence of armed group M23, resulted in increased violence and a large spike in humanitarian need. This jeopardised efforts to pursue peace and prosperity, and exacerbated the already severe humanitarian situation. DRC is home to one of the largest humanitarian crises in the world, with 26.4 million – a quarter of the population – in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. In 2022, the number of internally displaced people increased significantly to 5.9 million, with 600,000 from the on-going M23 conflict alone.

UK partners, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and SAFER, responded to humanitarian needs caused by M23 advances, where they had access. In October, the UK announced a further £2 million for ICRC, to support their vital work providing lifesaving assistance and promoting respect for international humanitarian law among the authorities and armed groups. Additional funding of £2.5 million to SAFER for rapid cash assistance was agreed, a proportion of which was

used for the M23 crisis. The UK's current £40 million humanitarian programme provided life-saving emergency relief, protection and access to health care, water and shelter to over a million people most affected by conflict, displacement and acute food insecurity.

The UK supported efforts to build stability in DRC, through diplomatic efforts and funding. In financial year 2021 to 2022, the UK contributed approximately £45 million and three staff officers to the UN Peacekeeping Mission (MONUSCO), including a senior gender and child protection officer. In December, the UK ensured that protection of civilians remained central to MONUSCO's mandate, and strengthened language on women, peace and security, including combatting sexual violence.

Over half of Congolese women have experienced physical violence in their lifetime, and those living in eastern DRC were vulnerable to alarming rates of conflict related sexual violence (CRSV). The UK is committed to preventing and responding to CRSV. In early 2022, the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) funded projects implemented by TRIAL, Panzi Foundation and World Vision, helped strengthen accountability for CRSV, and reduced stigma through community dialogues. Funding to the Global Survivors Fund supported their work to enhance access to redress for survivors, supporting over 1000 survivors in DRC. The UK, as a dedicated board member, proudly announced a further £5.15 million to the Global Survivors Fund. This funding is part of the UK's new 'ACT for Survivors Initiative'.

In October, HRH The Duchess of Edinburgh and the Minister for Human Rights, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, conducted a joint visit to the DRC, meeting with key government and civil society stakeholders, as well as survivors, to raise awareness and seek close collaboration on PSVI. In a welcome move, ahead of the PSVI International Conference in November, the DRC endorsed the Political Declaration on CRSV, outlining key national